

Judith Butler on "Why Bodies Matter": A Lecture

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Originally published in 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, by Judith Butler, is a seminal work not only in the fields of Gender Studies and contemporary feminism, but also in Performance Studies, Political Theory and even Political Philosophy.¹ Since Butler began to examine the notion of 'gender performativity', one of the more central concepts discussed in the book, her growing body of work consistently rests at the centre of those discourses questioning the established norms of sexuality, public appearance, sex and gender.²

Twenty-five years after the publication of *Gender Trouble*, the Maria Matos Theater in Lisbon was proposed as a space to debate, observe and experience the performativity of gender with debates, shows, artistic interventions and workshops, all over the course of a month and a half. On June 2nd 2015, Judith Butler attended the conference to present a lecture entitled 'Why Bodies Matter', in which Butler examined the legacy of *Gender Trouble*, its thesis, and the rich tapestry of ideas that constitute her body of work since. Alongside this, Butler both concretely and lucidly ties together many of her thoughts concerning gender constitution, precarity, political action, the public sphere and the bio-political. In this vein, it remains one of Butler's greatest recorded moments of thought-provoking speech and appearance. The following is a transcript of that very same lecture.³

"Why Bodies Matter"

A Lecture by Prof. Judith Butler ⁴

Well thank you all for coming and I am most honoured and pleased to be here today, at the Teatro Maria Matos, and I thank you for celebrating the anniversary of *Gender Trouble*, the twenty-fifth anniversary with all of these interesting performances and conferences. I am particularly grateful to my generous hosts, who made it possible for me to come here quite easily. Now I am of course the author of that book [laughter], but I have changed in the last twenty-five years and the book has taken on a life of its own. I certainly do not disavow the book, I continue to take pleasure in it, and to defend it when it gets in trouble, as it sometimes does. It was written at the same time as many other important books and helped to instigate queer theory at the time. That wasn't my intention. I was surprised by

the outcome. So, from the start, this book that I made was doing something on its own, producing effects without me, and yet I am somehow still its author.

I love this – right! [points to backdrop on stage, laughter]. People have told me the book changed their lives or that they found it exhilarating, or that it was just too difficult to read and they could not finish. And some of those who found it too difficult said that they kept on reading anyway and then finally over time it made sense to them. I did not intend for the book to be so difficult, I did not think the book would be read at all. So, I should start with that apology. At the same time, I continue to think that if we only stay with thoughts that are already familiar to us, none of us would change - none of us would have the chance to regard the world we live in through another lens.

I hope its true that for those of you who read this book, and who were perhaps changed by it, that they came to question, that you came to question, taken for granted assumptions about what gender is and how to think about sexuality. I tried to make room for the complexity of what we are, mainly, because I think that life is more liveable when we are not confined to categories that do not work for us, or categories that are imposed on us and take away our freedom. The task of feminism, the task of queer theory and activism, the task of trans-theory and activism is surely to make it easier to breathe, easier to move down the street without harassment; easier to find a liveable life, a life we can affirm with pleasure and joy, where our sense of a liveable future is stronger than our experience of suffering.

In the twenty-five years since I wrote 'Gender Trouble', I have had to encounter many critical questions of course, even from those who work very closely with me, sometimes my closest people are my harshest critics, as you can imagine. To this day, many people worry that '*Gender Trouble*' established 'Sex as culturally constructed', and so refused or even repudiated the materiality of the body. I mean I have dreams where people say this to me [laughter]. How do we answer this criticism? First, it is necessary to consider that to say that a body is constructed is not to say that it is fully constructed, or that it is nothing but a construction. We have to understand in what sense, and to what extent, a body is shaped and endowed with significance by virtue of the historical framework in which it is understood, and the historical discourses through which it is formed.

So how do we think about the materiality of the body? Of course, we know that when we seek to understand the materiality of sex there are various ways of doing so. Some people refer to what are called 'primary sexual characteristics'. Others claim that sex characterises both anatomical parts and something more elusive, even essential about who a person is. Others insist that sex is a complex composite of anatomy - hormones, chromosomes - and yet others tend to think that all these scientific dimensions of sex are gathered together and defined by different reproductive functions. So, you're female if you have *that* reproductive function, you're male if you have *that* reproductive function, and that which sex you are can be established by virtue of your relative place in heterosexual reproductive life.

For such a position, which is obviously not my own, the reproductive functions of men make sense of all those different elements, and the same for women. Now as you know, some people base their views on 'the materiality of sex' on religious doctrine, others seek recourse to science, and as you probably know, religions do not hold the same views, even people within the same religion do not hold the same views, and of course scientists are also involved in disputing their paradigms. They have conflicting paradigms, so we can't find an absolute consensus among scientists on this issue either. So, I would suggest that there are two major challenges to this way of thinking that assumes the materiality of sex is linked to reproductive function. First of all, not all sexed bodies are reproductive – which is to say that some people are not yet of an age where reproduction is possible, some people are past the age when reproduction is possible, some people were never capable of reproduction, and others never wanted to reproduce and have led lives without reproducing, and are very happy. Are we to say that that whole population of everyone I just named is not sexed?

Given this multiplicity of embodied positions in relation to the cultural mandate of reproduction, can we say that it is necessary, even ethically obligatory, to conceive of the sexed body outside the framework of reproduction. After all, sexual reproduction is only one way of organising and understanding the sexuality of the body. If reproduction becomes the only framework within which we think the sexed body, and its materiality, defining all its possible constituent elements in light of their possible or actual reproductive function, then what have we done? We have ruled out the

possibility of a sexed body and a sexual life which has no relationship to reproduction, and if we enlarge the paradigm of sexuality within which we think the sexed body, does that sexed body appear differently? In other words, which organs are now sexed? And how do we think of both sexuality and the sexed body outside the framework in which its very materiality is conceptually constrained by the reproductive function? And what are we talking about when we say its very materiality is conceptually constrained by the reproductive function? We are saying, its matter is defined by what matters about it.

We have only to look to the history of science to see that the very definitions of sex have changed throughout the centuries and that even now historians of science have spirited arguments about how to identify sex determining genes, to what extent the genes are determinative of sex, whether they're only determinative in interaction with other kinds for physiological or hormonal elements. International athletic associations argue about testosterone levels that establish someone as capable of competing in women's sports, and they have big debates. We could think about the case of Caster Semenya from a few years ago.⁵ Those hormonal levels vary quite significantly among women, sometimes they raise the question of whether someone identified socially as a woman can compete in women's sports. There are chromosomal variations as well that affect up to 10% of the population. So that's hardly a clear criterion for sex determination.

We surely do say, or at least most of us say, that there are material differences between the sexes, but at the moment at which we talk like that we're always implicitly referring to one historical version of materialism or another. In other words, we do not deny the generality of the material differences, even though given the variations and exceptions, and the importance of intersex, it would be a mistake, even a form of cruelty, to call that difference between the sexes 'universal'.

Even at this most obvious moment, the one in which we declare the reality of the materiality of two sexes (and everybody feels much better, because we've just made it obvious) we're already in a discursive field disputing what we mean, and which meaning ought to prevail; because we could all agree that there are two sexes and those differences are material, and we could end the conversation there – but the minute I start to ask you 'and by the way, where do you locate that materiality, how do

you describe it?', the minute we start that we tend to be not on common ground. Maybe some common ground, maybe not. Actually, what we are in those moments, we're in history. In other words, we're working with historical discourses that are available to us and seem very obvious.

Finally, I think the empirical sciences that seek to establish the body as a discrete empirical phenomenon, one that can be studied as an isolated entity, sometimes fail to understand the body as a living being; or to distinguish adequately between ways of living, even ways of dying. And if the body is living, as I suggest, its living in some way already embedded in cultural relations, in historical discourses, indeed can we know the life of the body without understanding in what way its living?

If the body is only treated as a positive and discrete entity, measurable, verifiable, we can gain certainty about its existence, we can even do a medical diagnosis if we're trained to do that. But what we've done with the body is reduced it to a materiality that conforms with a positivist way of seeing. Have we at that moment lost sight of the relationship in which the body exists, in which allow the body to exist, the relations without which no body can exist? What is the body is a dynamic field of relations, always dependent and interdependent? What if the body is aging, living, falling in love, falling ill, dying, or dead? What if it's recovering or flourishing? Does it matter which modality that living being is in when we talk about the life of the body? How do we understand that temporal dimension of embodied life if we remain restricted by the positivist account of the body as a material *fact*?

It's true that we name the body differently depending on what discourse we use, depending on what language we speak, what purpose we want that body to serve, or what social significance it may have; and indeed reproductive functions are part of the dominant ways in which we order bodies, at least in relationship to sex. Perhaps what we call the body's materiality is what constantly escapes whatever name we might give it. There is no one name for 'the body'. So whatever the body is, it is never captured by any particular name. Is it there, elusive, persistent, and yet finally, what may be most uncapturable by discourse.

This is not a way of denying the body exists, on the contrary, it's a way of saying that no matter how adamant we are in our claims to know, to seize and verify and produce the material body, we are

bound up in a discourse that cannot claim to be the only way to understand what a body is, what a sexed body is, and how it means. Bodies live on, sometimes as a living being, sometimes not. And we seek to give a name to that which can never be fully or finally named. 'The body' perhaps is the name for our conceptual humility, the limit of our conceptual schemes. Perhaps it is the site of our linguistic feeling.

Oh why do we concern ourselves with such theoretical questions? What brought you out of a beautiful sunny day into this dark cavern to listen to this? One reason is that we are concerned with how women, gender non-conforming people, sexual minorities who hurt no one, are regularly misrecognised or unrecognised. When one lives as a body that suffers misrecognition, perhaps insult or harassment, cultural prejudice, economic discrimination, police violence, psychiatric pathologisation, that leads to a de-realised way of living in the world, a way of living in the shadows not as a human subject but as a phantasm, someone else's phantasm, but you are living it. And yet, we see through social movements that seek recognition and enfranchisement, communities of LGBTQI people have emerged from the shadows, making visible and audible their lives, lives that have the same rights as any other to love and lose, to celebrate and to mourn.

Of course, we seek recognition in this world in order to exist as social subjects participating in a common world. At the same time we know that there is no perfect recognition in this world. That does not mean that we stop struggling for recognition, but only that we must understand that recognition is precisely an ongoing struggle. We ask for recognition, not only for who we are, but for our very capacity for self-determination, our claim to equality and to freedom. How do bodies that have been living in the shadow zones emerge into a brighter light? Maybe not full illumination, but still, a brighter light. They do this, I would suggest, in solidarity with one another, not as heroic individuals. But still, if we live in a world where bodies are understood in conventional norms of gender, when those who are excluded from society are understood as the 'non-civilised', then how do such lives become visible and audible under such conditions? How can bodies be recognised when they do not fit the social norm of what bodies should be? What acts of agency are necessary to counter the forces of exclusion, and demonization, but also violence? How do bodies gather together to signify

their common existence, their intelligibility and their persistence? Sometimes it's in the very act of standing forth, of walking together, of gathering that asserts a social existence, signifies a political demand and promises a different political future.

Although much of my own thinking has been concerned with Feminism, Gender politics, and sexual rights, I think it is important to see how the question of 'who can be recognised?' extends to many populations. Indeed, it extends to ever greater numbers of people who now live 'precarious lives'. Such questions come alive when precarious populations gather to protest austerity measures, to protest unjust and racist immigration laws, to protest the increasing conditions of temporary and dispensable labour and exploitation, the profound sense of there being no future, the burden of unpayable debt, the fear of authoritarian regimes, social and police violence.

People assemble together, not only to voice their opposition to policies that make their lives unliveable, but also sometimes simply, and emphatically, to stand together in public, more illuminated than before, to draw attention to those specific bodily lives that suffer when shelter is not available, when food sources are unequally distributed, and when basic sustenance and health care is non-accessible and not affordable. They do time and again stand together when their presence on the street sends a certain shockwave through society, as if to say: 'We, the invisible ones, we exist!'. This happens in several countries, most countries, when people stand and move in public who are transgendered, queer women, who are undocumented citizens, members of unprotected religious minorities, racial minorities, the precarious.

Although there is always a risk of being harassed, or hurt, or killed when they assemble, as we have seen in the demonstrations in Europe, in Turkey, in Russia, and recently in Iguala, Mexico, I am mindful particularly of those forty-three students from Ayotzinapa in Mexico who have disappeared or are presumed dead all because 'what did they do again?', they assembled to protest austerity measures at their university, and they sought to commemorate those who stood bravely before them protesting austerity measures and were killed, and they were killed for that.⁶

So when we think about those students, to mourn their loss and to demand justice in their name, we are aware that they disappeared, why?, because they assembled, because they invoked and exercised in a bodily way the right of association, the right to assembly, the right to speak their views. In English we say 'they put their bodies on the line'. They exercised the most basic rights of democracy and yet they were treated as criminals, enemies of the state. Those losses deserve to be recognised and the circumstances of their disappearance need to be publicly known. We can probably all agree on that, but why is this? Well, because they were lives that mattered and matter still and they deserved to live those lives and know they deserve to be mourned.

I began my remarks this evening by suggesting that the debates about how to understand the body and how to understand the category of sex very often challenge our ideas of common sense. They contest our ideas of the body which has been shaped by the dominant norms of society. I suggested that it can be difficult to revise our ideas about what is natural and what is necessary to revise our ideas about gender and sexuality. I suggested as well that these theoretical debates become important when so many people who live outside the norm, or in precarious situations, struggle for recognition and support for their very lives. Indeed I have spoken about three different groups, although they are sometimes overlapping – women, gender and sexual minorities, precarious populations, as well as those who gather openly to exercise their democratic rights, even when that means taking the risk that they will suffer violence and that they will die.

So, on one level, we are asking about the implicit idea of the body at work and certain kinds of political demands and mobilisations; and another level, we are trying to find out how mobilisations presuppose a body that requires support, popular and political support, but also infrastructural support, including economic and media support. In many of the public assemblies that draw people who understand themselves to be in precarious positions, they are asking for the food they need, the shelter they require, the ongoing employment that would make their life liveable, the cultural, social and political recognition that would allow them to participate in a common public world. These bodies, in showing their precarity, are also resisting the very powers that seek to minimise their powers and to minimise their participation in public life.

Of course, if we make the matter individual we can say that every single body has a certain right to food, shelter, freedom to move and breathe protected from violence. Although we universalise in such a statement 'everybody has this right', we also particularise, understanding the body as this body, as an individual matter, and that individual body is significantly shaped by a norm of what the body is, and how it ought to be conceptualised. Of course, that seems quite obviously right, but consider that this idea of the individual body, a body subject of right, it may fail to capture a sense of vulnerability, exposure, even dependence that's presupposed by the right itself, and which corresponds, I want to suggest, with an alternative view of the body that I suggested earlier – a relational view; a view of the body as living and relational.

In other words, if we accept that part of what a body is, and this is for me an ontological claim, part of 'what a body is' is its dependence on other bodies and networks of support. Then we are suggesting that it is not altogether right to conceive of individual bodies as completely distinct from one another. Of course, neither are they blended into some amorphous social body, but we, if we cannot readily conceptualise the political meaning of the human body without understanding those relations in which it lives and thrives, we fail to make the best possible case for the various political ends we seek to achieve.

So what I am suggesting is that it is not just that this or that body is bound up in a network of relations, but that the body, despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps precisely by virtue of those boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible. Right? We think about the boundary of the body. We might understand it to contain us. 'This is the boundary of my body', you know, 'don't smoke near me!' or 'don't stand near me!', or whatever it is we do when we privatise our body as a contained kind of element. But actually, the boundary of the body is also the skin that exposes us to touch, it exposes us to visibility, to audibility, it articulates us as a social creature, not just as an individual.

Well, what difference does it make if we understand the body in the terms that I propose? Well, I want to suggest that if we understand bodies as defined for instance by their sociality, their interdependency, that means that this body - 'this one' [Gestures towards self] - cannot really exist

without another body, without another world of bodies. The 'I' - 'This I' [Gestures towards self] - requires a 'You' in order to survive and even to flourish. We are bound to one another socially in important ways. I cannot live without living together with some set of people, and the most individual struggles with survival are always also social struggles - what kind of infrastructure, what kind of services are available. But what kind of world is it in which disenfranchisement is accepted a necessary way of life? I want to suggest that we cannot let such ordinary ways of thinking limit our own political imaginations.

So let me say a few words on how my work on gender performativity has led to my most recent work on precarity. Was precarity always there in *'Gender Trouble'*? Or did I take a 'new turn'? [Smiling] 'Butler took a 'new turn''. I want to say yes to both of those questions. To say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment. The appearance of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth. Gender is prompted by obligatory norms that we materialise in our daily life, or we fail to materialise in our daily life, or we materialise in ways we weren't exactly supposed to do. But those obligatory norms demand that we become one gender or another, usually within a strictly binary frame. The reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with this norm, this obligation, this exercise of power.

There is no gender without the reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines. The political aspiration of this analysis is found in the call to let the lives of gender and sexual minorities become more possible and more liveable, for bodies that are gender non-conforming as well as those who conform to well and at a high cost, to be able, as I have said, to breathe and move more freely in public and private spaces, as well as all the sights that cross those two.

The theory of gender performativity never prescribed which gender performances were right. It never said which performances would be more subversive than other performances, and it never said which gender performances were 'wrong' and 'reactionary'. In fact, it's an a-moral theory. Ok, gender performativity is an a-moral theory. The point -not immoral, ok- a-moral (laughter). The point was precisely to relax the coercive hold of norms on gendered life, which is not the same as transcending

all those norms, for the purposes of living a more liveable life. I want to suggest to you that precarity has always been in this picture, since gender performativity was a theory and practice that opposed the unliveable conditions in which gender minorities live, and sometimes also those gender majorities who passed as normative at a very high psychic and somatic cost.

Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support more than others and become differentially exposed to injury violence and death. Precarity is the differential distribution of precariousness. Populations that are differentially exposed suffer heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and vulnerability to violence without adequate protection or redress. Precarity also characterises that politically induced condition of maximised vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence, to street or domestic violence, or other forms not exacted by states, but which judicial instruments of states fail to provide sufficient protection or redress for. So, by precarity we may be talking about populations who lack sufficient food, or whose food sources arrive one day but not the next, or are carefully rationed. Or we may be talking about populations where housing is suddenly lost or utterly lost. We witness now the important anti-eviction movement in Spain.⁷ Let it spread!

We may also be talking about trans-gendered sex-workers who have to defend themselves against street violence and police arrest, or we might be talking about the gay, lesbian or queer people in Moscow who were just recently beaten up quite brutally by the police for doing what, for assembling and trying to celebrate gay pride. Sometimes these are the same groups, sometimes they are overlapping, but when they are part of the same population they can be linked by their sudden or protracted subjection to precarity and their resolve to resist that condition and the question for us, and maybe the question for a radical democratic left, is 'how can they be linked?', 'how can these various populations be linked over time?', 'what brings them together?', 'what allows them to arrive together, to assemble together?'

In this way, I want to suggest that precarity is directly linked to gender norms, since we know that those who do not live those genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk of harassment,

pathologisation and violence. Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space, how and in what way the public and the private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalised in the service of sexual politics. Who will be criminalised on the basis of their public appearance? By which, I mean who will be treated as a criminal and produced as a criminal, which is not always the same as being named criminal by a code of law that discriminates against manifestations of certain gender norms or certain sexual practices.

So, criminalisation can happen both in codified ways within law, but also in non-judicial ways that can have equally violent effects. Who will fail to be protected by the law, or more specifically the police, on the job or in the home, or in the legal codes, or religious institutions? Who will be stigmatised and disenfranchised at the same time that they become the object of fascination and consumer pleasure? Who will have medical benefits before the law? Whose intimate and kinship relations will be recognised before the law, or criminalised by the law? Or indeed, may shift quite radically depending on which legal code is in operation, religious or secular, or whether or not the tension between legal codes happens to be resolved.

The question of recognition is, for me, an important one for if we say that we believe all human subjects deserve equal recognition, we presume that all human subjects are equally recognisable. But what if the field of appearance does not admit everyone? What is that? How is it that field is regulated in such a way that only certain kinds of beings can appear as recognisable subjects, and other not? This is surely one question posed by the animal rights movements. Since why is it that only human subjects are recognised rather than non-human living beings? That question is linked with, and confounded by, another, namely, which humans count as the human? Which humans are eligible for recognition within the sphere of appearance? Which are not? And what do we call those who do not and cannot appear as subjects within hegemonic discourse? We know this question in one way from the theory of gender. There are sexual and gender norms that condition what and who will be legible, and what and who will not, and that expose those fail to register within intelligibility to differential forms of social violence.

So, in order to understand those forms of living gender in its full complexity, we have to understand the ways in which gender is misrecognised, or remains unrecognised, precisely because those who live on the margins or in non-conforming ways are testing the limits of established norms for thinking embodiment and even personhood. Are there forms of sexuality for which there is no good vocabulary precisely because the powerful logics that determine how we think about desire orientation, sexual acts and pleasures, do not admit certain modes of sexual pleasure, practice, or orientation?

The performativity of gender is bound up with the differential ways in which subjects become eligible for recognition. Recognition depends fundamentally on whether there is a media, a form of presentation in which the body can appear. This is another reason why the aesthetic domain and the theatrical domain is so important for contesting the arbitrary limits that are imposed on the field of appearance. Even though something called 'full recognition' is a fantasy, and one that locks us into a certain phantasm of who we might be or should be, certain ways of being deprived of recognition surely also threaten the very possibility of persisting.

To be a subject at all requires first finding ones way with certain norms that govern recognitions, norms we never chose, and so if we cannot find our way within available norms of gender or sexuality, or we only find our way with great difficulty, we are exposed to what it means to live at the limits of recognisability. To exist at such a limit means that the very legibility, the very viability, of one's life is called into question – what we might call the 'social ontology' of our persistence.

In some standard liberal discourses, subjects are thought to be the kinds of beings that come before an existing law and ask for recognition within its terms. But we have to ask a prior question, what makes it possible to even come before the law, to appear before the law, to have the status of one who can appear before the law? Kafka asked this question by the way, in some rather good formulations. One has to have access or status. One has to be able to enter into a space to appear in some form. And here we can think about this situation of undocumented workers, or those whose status is criminalised from the start, but who require both rights and obligations, protections and the powers of citizenship.

So what is at stake when seek to understand performative politics and its struggle from, and against, precarity? As we know, not everyone can take for granted the power to walk on the street, or into a bar, or even a restaurant. To walk on the street alone without police harassment is precisely not to walk with the company of others, and whatever non-police forms of protection that supplies. And yet, when a transgendered person walks on the street in Ankara or in McDonalds in Baltimore, there is a question of whether that right can be exercised by the individual walking in alone. If the person is extraordinarily good at self-defence, perhaps it can. If it is a cultural space where that is accepted, it surely can. But if it and when it does become possible to walk unprotected and still be safe, for daily life itself to become possible without fear of violence, then it is surely because there are many who support that right, even when it is exercised by one person alone. So, I may exercise it, but I can only exercise it effectively if I have the support of many.

If the right is exercised and honoured, it is because there are many there, even if they are not there, exercising it as well, whether or not anyone else is on the scene. Each 'I' brings the 'we' along as he or she enters or exists that door, finding one's self in an unprotected enclosure or exposed out there on the street. We might say there is a group, if not an alliance, walking there too, whether or not they are anywhere to be seen. It is of course a singular person who walks there, who takes the risk of walking there, but it is also the social category that traverses that particular gate and walk, that singular movement in the world. And if there is an attack, it targets the individual and it targets the social category at the same time.

Perhaps we can still call 'performative' both the exercise of gender and the embodied political claim to equality, and the protection from violence, and to be able to move with and within this social category in public space. To walk is to say that 'this is a public space in which transgendered people walk', that 'this is a public space where people with various forms of clothing, no matter how they are gendered, or what religion they signify, are free to move without threat of violence or threat of arrest'.

So when we say that 'bodies matter', as I think we do say, we are asserting the value that bodies have. We're also pointing to the lived modality of these bodies, understood not only as their pure matter but as their way of living matter, we might say if there is pure matter it is always organised and

through a way of living. We cannot easily separate the conditions and needs we call material from the cultural and economic organisation of those realities. The body never appears to us outside of a framework, a mode of perception, a field of appearance, a historical and cultural world. So when bodies are deprived of food and shelter, health care, mobility and sexuality, and we become aware of it such that basic tasks, such fundamental rights, depend on a just and equitable organisation of the social and political world, our bodies only come to matter within a just and equitable polity. So when we struggle for such a polity, we struggle for the conditions that will secure and safeguard our own survival and flourishing, and when we struggle for bodily rights and bodied freedoms, including gender freedom, we affirm a political future based on fundamental principles of what I would call 'Radical Democracy'.

We might do well to remind ourselves that we are all potentially precarious, and that is why we join the struggles against austerity, we appose the decimation of public life, its privatisation; we seek to support new movements that oppose accelerating inequalities. Precarity does not fully define any of us and yet it is a possibility that can effect all of us under certain conditions. If I am to survive and to flourish even, to attempt to lead a good life, it will be a life lived with others, a life that is no life without those others. I will not lose this 'I' who I am, rather whoever 'I' am will be transformed by my connections with others, since my dependency on another, even my dependability, are necessary in order to live and to live well. Our shared exposure to precarity is but one ground of our potential equality and of our reciprocal obligations to produce together conditions of liveable life. In avowing this need we have for one another we avow as well basic principles that inform social democratic conditions of a liveable life. These are critical conditions for democratic life in the sense that they are part of an ongoing crisis, critical in the sense of relating to a crisis. But also because they belong to a form of thinking and acting that responds to the urgencies of our time.

I guess my final suggestion is this. Let us continue to be responsive, even when it seems we may become overwhelmed, even when it seems that there is no hope. For in responding to what we see, responding to what happens to others, responding to the conditions in which precarity becomes more and more the norm, we stand the chance to remain animated creatures - animated and thinking, with

desire, hope, rage and sorrow - we keep the senses alive, and so we live on as the embodied lives that we are, and that we deserve to be.

Thank you very much!

NOTES

¹ Judith Butler (2011) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*, 2nd Edition, London: Routledge.

² For more information on the concept of 'Gender Performativity' see: Judith Butler (1988) 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), pp. 519-531.

³ Many of the ideas discussed in this lecture can be found in three of Butler's other works, see: Judith Butler (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, London: Routledge; (2006) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London: Verso; (2015) *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁴ The audio of this lecture has been transcribed from the source: 'Judith Butler on "Why Bodies Matter" in Lisbon', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGnhibktnLQ>, transcription begins at 07:49 minutes and finishes at 53:20 minutes.

⁵ For more information see: Jeré Longman, August 18th 2016, 'Understanding the Controversy over Caster Semenya', *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/20/sports/caster-semenya-800-meters.html>, (accessed 15th July 2019).

⁶ For more information see: Katy Watson, 26th September 2016, 'Mexico Missing Students: Unanswered Questions Two Years On', *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-37460455>, (accessed 15th July).

⁷ For more information see Carlos Delcós, 17th December 2013, 'Victims no longer: Spain's anti-eviction movement', *Open Democracy*, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/victims-no-longer-spains-anti-eviction-movement/>, (accessed 14th July 2019).