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Narrative and Female Selfhood
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Judith Butler as Troublemaker

I. Making Trouble

On critiquing power: "...trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it" (Preface 1989, *Gender Trouble* vii).

On identity politics: "I'm permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble. In fact, if the category were to offer no trouble, it would cease to be interesting to me..." ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination," *Second Wave Reader* 301).

On queer activism: "I think we need to pursue the moments of degrounding, when we're standing in two different places at once; or we don't know exactly where we're standing..." ("Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy* 38).

On feminist politics: "This is not to say that there iQs no foundation, but rather, that wherever there is one, there will also be a foundering, a contestation. That such foundations exist only to be put into question is, as it were, the permanent risk of the process of democratization" ("Contingent Foundations," *Feminist Contentions* 51).

On *Gender Trouble* and feminism: "I was writing in the tradition of immanent critique that seeks to provoke a critical examination of the basic vocabulary of the movement of thought to which it belongs" (Preface 1999, *Gender Trouble* vii).

On intellectual development: "But I clearly turned away from pursuing Jewish studies formally for fear, no doubt, that somewhere in those texts the crushing force of the unappeasable law would be upon me again. And I was drawn toward those kinds of readings that suspended the law, exposed its illegibility, its internal limÓits and contradictions..." ("Ethical Ambivalence," *The Turn to Ethics* 17).

II. Getting in Trouble

On the trouble with contradictions: "...so an initial problem in reading Butler is that one is bewildered to find her arguments buttressed by appeal to so many contradictory concepts and doctrines, usually without any account of how the apparent contradictions will be resolved" (Nussbaum, Martha. "The Politics of Parody" 38).

On the "hip defeatism" of Butler: "Deprived of the hope of larger or more lasting changes, we can still perform our resistance by the reworking of verbal categories, and

thus, at the margins, of the selves who are constituted by them. ...[This] looks very much like quietism and retreat” (Nussbaum, Martha. “The Politics of Parody” 38).

On the trouble with trouble: “...Butler never quite tells the reader whether she approves of the view described. Mystification as well as hierarchy are the tools of her practice, a mystification that eludes criticism because it makes few definite claims” (Nussbaum, Martha. “The Politics of Parody” 38).

On being troublemaker of the year: [In 1998 Judith Butler won the annual bad writing contest sponsored by the journal *Philosophy and Literature*] “scholars are obliged to question common sense, interrogate its tacit presumptions and provoke new ways of looking at a familiar world” (“A ‘Bad Writer’ Bites Back” *New York Times*).

Major Works

Butler, Judith. *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987 (rereleased in 1999).

———. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990 (rereleased in 1999).

———. *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

———. “Contingent Foundations.” In *Feminist Contentions*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

———. “For a Careful Reading.” In *Feminist Contentions*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

———. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

———. *excitable speech*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

———. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. London: Verso, 2000 (with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek).

———. *Antigone’s Claim*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.