JUDITH BAXTER MEMORIAL AWARD TALK

Britain's vulnerable 'heterosexual population': Radical contingency, historicity and the spread of 'homosexualism'

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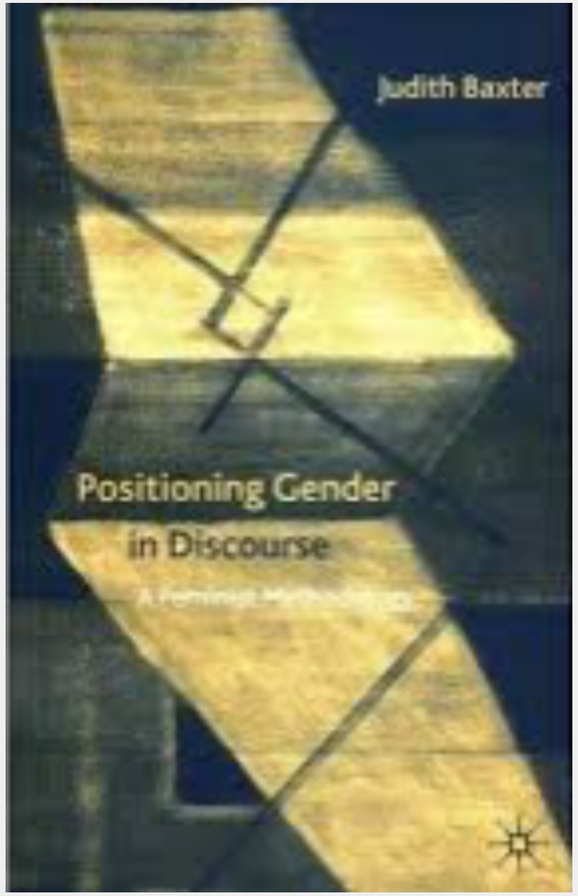
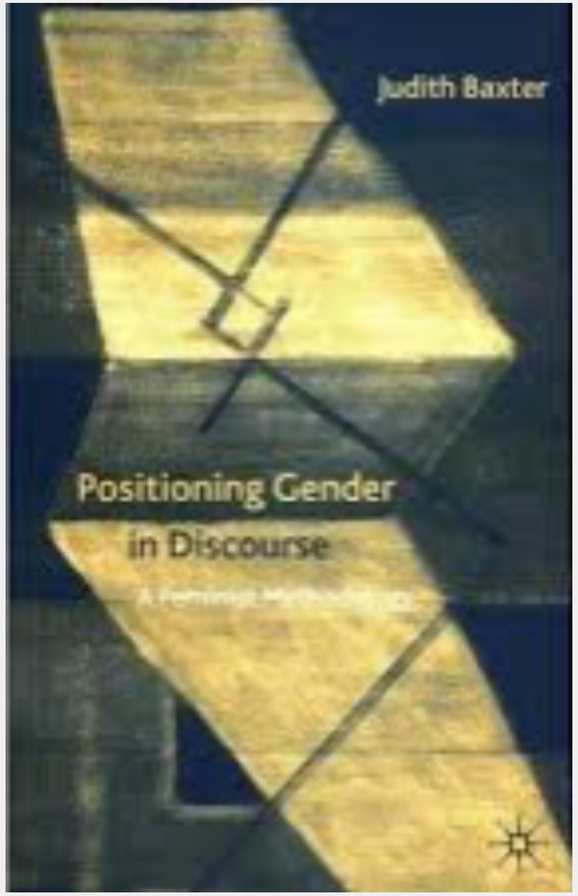
Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis

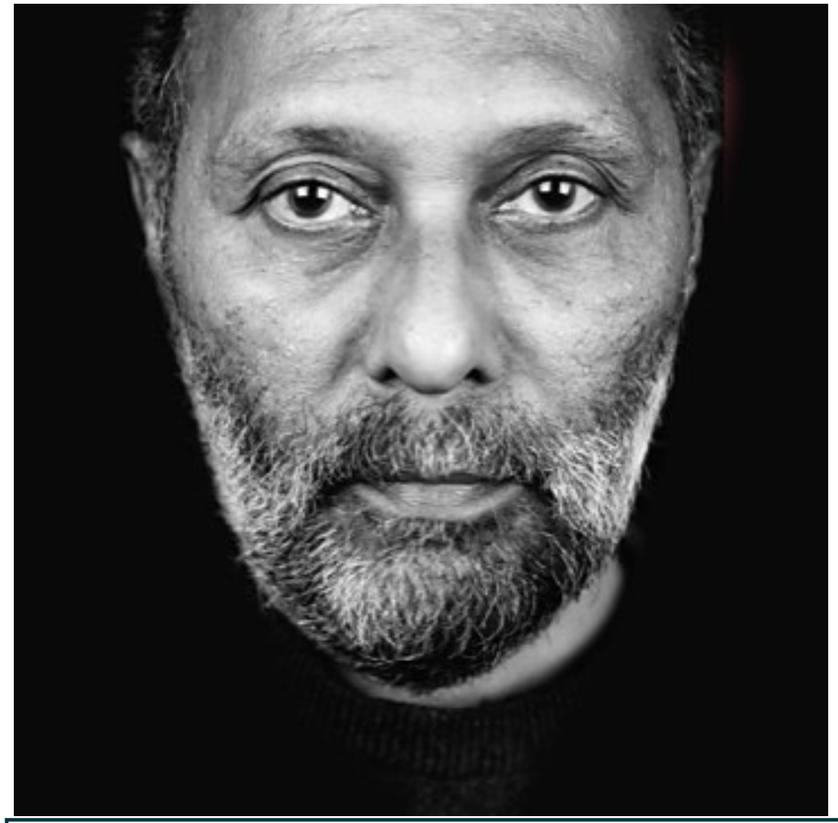


'(F)PDA follows Foucault's thesis (1980) that the self is not fixed in a set of socialized, transferable roles, but is constantly positioned and repositioned through discourse. **Individuals both negotiate and are shaped by their subject positions within a range of different and often conflicting discourses, which vary according to historical, cultural or social context**' (2002:829).

Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis



‘PDA does not attempt to offer a superior, but a *supplementary* form of discourse analysis to those of CA and CDA’ (Baxter 2002:854).



DISCOURSE THEORY:

Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, and Stuart Hall

Outline

LACLAU AND MOUFFE'S DISCOURSE THEORY:

- Radical contingency / Radical historicity

DATA:

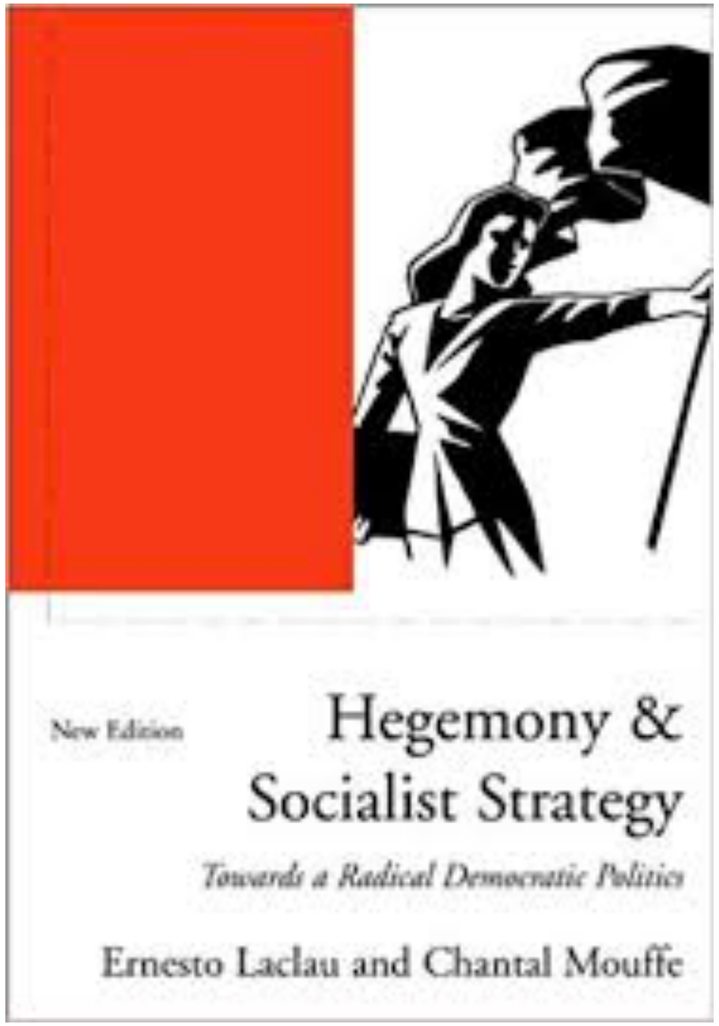
- The Times:
  1957-1967
  1979-1990

KEY PHRASES THAT COLLOCATE WITH SPREAD:

- 'Society' and 'population(s)' are necessarily heterosexual
- 'Society' is vulnerable

Discourse Theory and Subject Positions

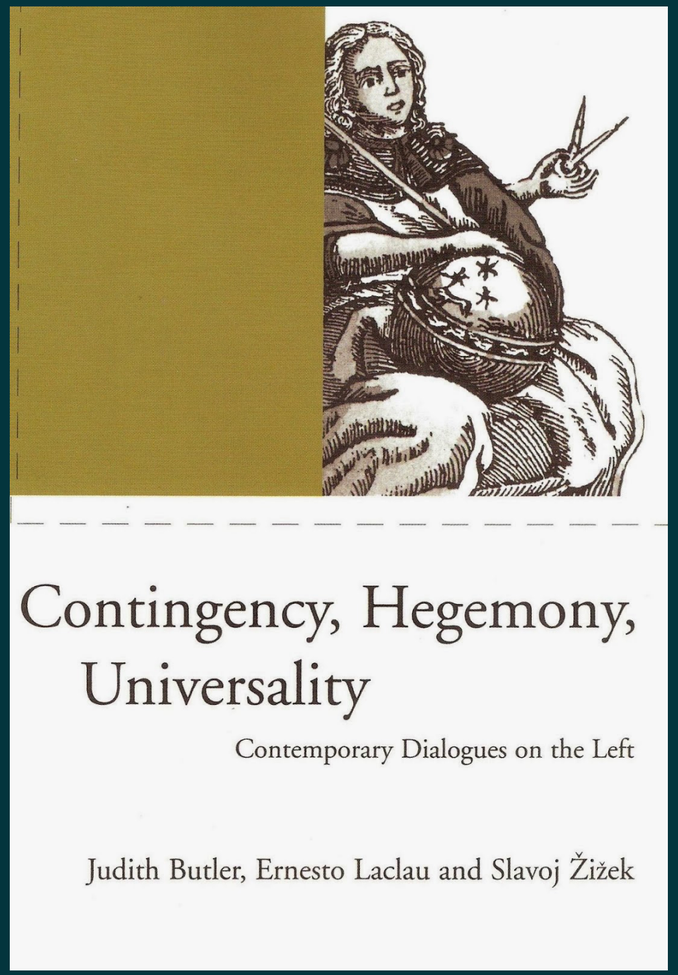
- Radical Contingency
- Radical historicity



Discourse Theory and Subject Positions

RADICAL CONTINGENCY

- All subject positions are:
  - Necessarily contingent upon what they are not
  - Constituted by their relationship to other discursive formations
  - Never fully fixed
- ‘There is no final, absolute ground, foundation or essence to identity, *except* for contingency itself’ (Phelan and Dahlberg 2011:16)



Discourse Theory and Subject Positions

RADICAL HISTORICITY:

- All subject positions are:
  - Necessarily a result of historical processes and conditions that led to the present moment
  - The result of political processes in the past
  - Hegemonic and mask the alternative possibilities that could have been

- ‘All meaning is fluid and all discourses are contingent; it is objectivity that masks contingency and, in so doing, hides the alternative possibilities that otherwise could have presented themselves’ (Jørgensen and Philips 2002:37).

From ‘homosexual practice’ to ‘LGBT community’: A diachronic corpus-based critical discourse analysis of LGBTQI representation in *The Times* between 1957-2017

YEAR	HISTORICAL CONTEXT	SEARCH TERMS	TOKENS
1957-1967	• The Wolfenden Report • The Sexual Offences Act 1967	**10 search terms**, e.g. bugger, homosexual, lesbian, sodomy, transvestite, etc.	910,120
1979-1990	• Margaret Thatcher’s premiership • The rise of the HIV/AIDS crisis • Section 28	**18 search terms**, e.g. gay, homophobia, sexual preference, sexual orientation, etc.	2,527,525
2003-2017	• Repeal of Section 28 • Gender Recognition Act 2004 • Civil Partnership Act 2004 • (Same-sex) Marriage Act 2013 • Adoption and immigration rights for same-sex couples	**73 search terms**, e.g. transgender, non-binary, transphobia, civil partnership, intersex, etc.	15,086,855

Key phrases – top 10

1957-1967	1979-1990	2003-2017
homosexual conduct	sexual orientation	gay marriage
homosexual behaviour	computer genius	civil partnership
second reading	conservative mp	sexual orientation
present law	intravenous drug	same-sex marriage
common prostitute	homosexual community	gay man
homosexual law	homosexual activity	anglican communion
law reform	homosexual behaviour	voluntary service
gross indecency	deficiency syndrome	gay sex
homosexual law reform	homosexual relationship	gay community
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DIACHRONIC VARIATION:
From practice, to identity, to community

Discourses	1957-1967	1979-1990	2003-2017
Practice:	• **Homosexual conduct** • **Homosexual behavior** • **Homosexual acts**	• **Homosexual activity** • **Homosexual behavior** • **Homosexual practice**	
Community/ Collectivisation		• Homosexual community • Gay community • Heterosexual population	• Gay community • Gay pride • Gay life • Gay scene • Gay bar • Gay culture
Identity		• Sexual orientation	• Sexual orientation • Gay man • Gender identity

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Cross-section
Fast
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Collocates of CONDUCT (noun) in the BNC

Modifiers of CONDUCT	Verbs with CONDUCT as object
Disorderly	Regulate
Improper	Govern
Professional	Supervise
Violent	Guide
Offensive	Intend
Homosexual	Monitor
Criminal	Direct
Oppressive	Justify
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The SPREAD of ‘homosexual conduct’

The second line of inquiry was **a study not of individual homosexuality but of groups**, with particular reference to **the means by which and the extent to which homosexual conduct *spread* within society.**

June 30th, 1960

The SPREAD of ‘homosexual conduct’

Would the removal of legal sanctions make it more difficult, or less, for the bi-sexual and young to resist temptation, and would homosexuals be more ready, or less, to break their associations and to seek medical treatment? **Would homosexual conduct *spread*, or losing the glamour of rebellion would it decline?**

July 3rd, 1961

The SPREAD of ‘homosexuality’, ‘homosexualism’, and ‘the infection’

- ‘One objection to the committee's recommendations was that making legal what consenting male adults did in private would **encourage the *spread* of homosexuality’** (November 27th, 1958).
- ‘The majority of homosexuals are incapable of withstanding the temptation so to act; that prison is the wrong place for them; and **that their presence there *spreads* the vice among other prisoners’** (April 2nd, 1958).
- ‘Homosexualism between consenting adults could not be regarded as their affair alone; they were not just corrupting each other; but were liable to ***spread* the infection far and wide’** (December 5th, 1957).

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1979-1990: Spread into the heterosexual population

- ‘The new scheme would help to test how far **Aids has *spread* into the heterosexual population**. (May 20th , 1988)
- ‘Are there, for instance, 50,000 carriers of the virus in this country, or twice that number? What is the real extent of the ***spread* into the heterosexual population**? Just how fast is the disease progressing?’ (November 3rd, 1988)
- ‘Senior officials at the Public Health Laboratory Service have detected a slowing down of the rate of increase among homosexual and bisexual men, but say that **a slow *spread* continues within the heterosexual population**. (November 28th, 1988)

Summary

- Vulnerability
  - 1960s: ‘Society’ is vulnerable to the *spread* of homosexual conduct
  - 1980s: The ‘heterosexual population’ is vulnerable to the *spread* of HIV/AIDS
- Measurement
  - 1960s: Ascertaining the spread of ‘homosexual conduct’
  - 1980s: Ascertaining the spread of HIV/AIDS
- Radical Contingency
  - 1960s: ‘Society’ is heterosexual ≠ homosexual
  - 1960s: ‘Youth’ are heterosexual ≠ homosexual
  - 1980s: Heterosexual people are a ‘population’ – gay men are a ‘community’

Historical conditions for “Britain’s” vulnerability

- Post-war moral panic
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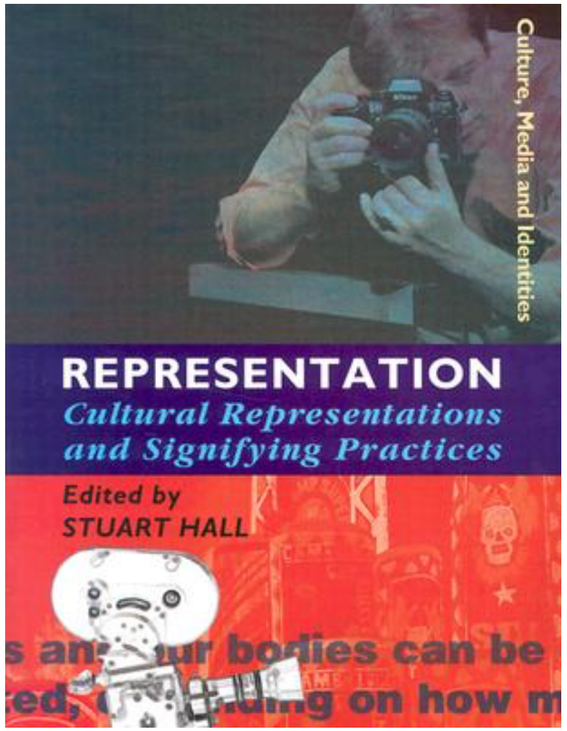
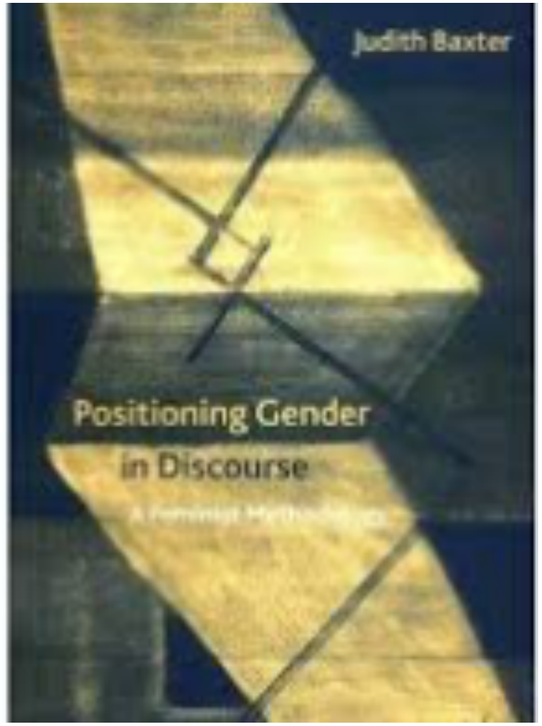
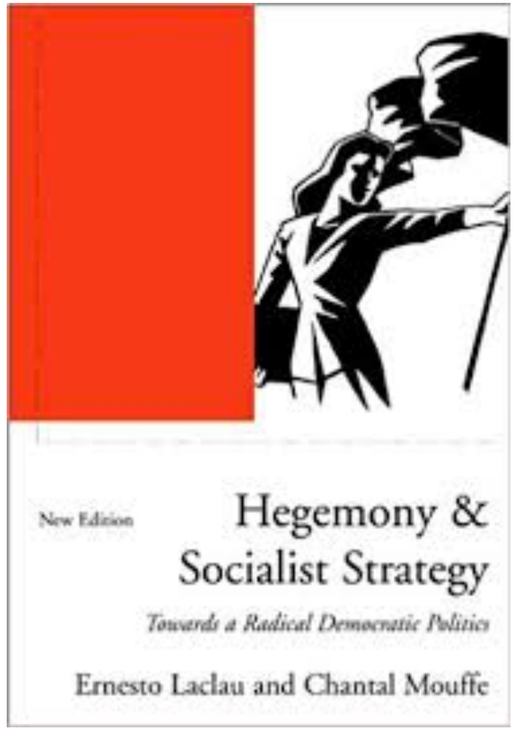
- Thatcherism (Hall 2011; Jessop 2015; Mouffe 2018;)







Corpus-based CDA
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Post-structuralist discourse theory

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