

IU/They

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You as an address constitutes the addressee as a “they” but without necessarily having a we in that process.

Negative Identity

Being positioned as a they which is a they of otherness. Adorno and negative identity as a construct. E.g. Adorno discovers his Jewishness through being designated as a “they” (jewish) in the negative.

They as Pronoun

They as gender identity does not escape the binary.

Poetically clumsy. A singular that becomes a plural. Why not invent a new word?

To create a new term can increase the form of othering.

Loses some of the difficulties of the given identity (male).

Is there room for play or possibility in that identification of “they”?

RVT – Shon Faye / David Hoyle

Divisions between LGBTQ community. People othering each other within their communities. It is interesting how we expect alliances between minorities as if there would be no political disagreements.

Fluidity vs non-binary

They as gender pronoun adopts the very old logic of “divide and conquer”. Similar to set logic which consists of subsets. The positive aspects of “fluidity” get lost with identity logic.

In this sense “fluidity” and “non-binary” seem not to be oppositional ideas.

By saying that I’m not something (e.g. female) doesn’t really create something new.

The refusal to partake in binary logic seems to still uphold the binary. In the attempt to create a space for something new, the discourse remains on the same level of identity politics.

They & language

Grammar inevitably pushes us on the side of language.

Vocabulary is easy to subvert but grammar is almost impossible.

Creole – languages without conjugations or articles necessarily.

But “they” was and still is commonly used to designate someone’s partner or a person.

Race & Identity

When you read a text about “a guy walks into a room”, the assumption is that the narrator is white and that the sentence is actually read as “a white guy walks into a room”. How the protagonist appears in our consciousness makes us aware that these assumptions exist. A subtle verbal reminder. When using the term “they” it’s an attempt to break the assumption and to question the space of appearance or to trump the logic of appearance.

But this is not always the case when They is used as a pronoun, or simply as a marker of identity, of another category.

Identifying as non-binary could be lying. Are they withholding their real pronoun? Does that hint towards the removal of gender pronouns in general.

Even the word straight is “amusingly ambiguous,” as the way one looks does not always betray what one is. It also brings up the question of subjectivity as a given ontology. As if at any given moment one KNOWS what they are.

Even though we might disagree with the normativity, the term non-binary can become a new norm.

Gender discourse vs the logic of racial discourse vs class identity

Identification with a class can stay with you even though you move into another class. It's not necessarily something you choose in terms of subjectivity. Militants of working-class identity would say so even though their class may shift.

To claim identity as working class means that you are already in a position of privilege. Same with feminism. The battered woman doesn't have the same consciousness as the middle-class feminist. People from position of privilege using identifiers to claim position of repression. Their aim is not to be part of struggle but to access certain discussions, capital, cultural or otherwise. There are artists living in squats in London who grew up in mansions.

What are the differences between working class “culture” rather than working class “identity”?

Distinction between class vs class culture vs financial condition. British class is specifically about culture not money.

Essentialism vs identity

To purport that I am intrinsically something [e.g. I am a woman] turns gender into an essence regardless of whether one is biologically born into the gender that they identify with. Whilst class is the external force that shapes identity.

Identity vs Subjectivity

Identity to be understood as the external force which chooses what identifiers are of importance to mark a specific individual. Gender and class are required in British culture to understand who we are speaking of. The structure of society determines how one feels or how one should feel about their identity.

“As a foreigner I was always asked where I was from based on my accent.”

Someone once told me, “I thought you would live in a tiny flat because you are a single mother.”

Women & ageing

Socially ascribed roles of gender can be subverted.

As women age, they in a sense become more male.

“As a single mother I’ve operated in what would have been considered male roles and for this reason my female gender was “othered”.

It’s as if things haven’t moved on since the 50s in relation to gender.

Identity & Nationalism

When people insist on identity (national for instance), it is almost always a defensive reaction. Trying to brace oneself against something that is at stake. The insistence on it is quite interesting as it seems that in the 80s & 90s people insisted less on their background, while now people seem to claim that with some feistiness. [example of identifying as a white, working class artist]

What identity terms enable people to do in conversations about politics, is that they are upheld against oppressive systems or governmentality. They (the government) want to eliminate me (working class, women, queers, etc). Positionality comes to the fore when it seems that there is an identity under threat. It is interesting that it is during an external attack that the need to construct some sort of discourse around one’s identity becomes stronger.

E.g. We psychoanalysts ask not to be treated as other psychologists. We claim our patch through a defensive position against regulation.

What identities are useful for and what THEY can do. [Spivak – strategic essentialism]

Identify as a “they” in order to state my disagreement with the forced binary.

“It’s also important for me to claim myself as a female in order to claim also the feminist history that comes before me and what it did for females. I don’t want to throw away the identity of the historically oppressed female. At the same time, I’m in the same political space as They and as a number of other minorities.

Ontology/essence vs identity

You cannot claim your being as an analyst for instance. In this sense, what does the statement “I am a man/woman” mean?

I am a woman [biologically] is not the same as saying that “I feel like a woman.”

This is the interesting discussion about trans women stating “I feel like a woman” because it falls back into the logic of essentialism. Trans women are women becomes a statement that flirts with ontology.

“I would say that I grew up as a woman but I wouldn’t say that I am a woman because I feel like one.” Whether one is a man or woman would be less important if society was fairer.

Gender is a very oppressive structural thing that we don't need.

"I support anyone who has been oppressed by this structure. So, I am in alliance with everyone that perceives this structure as oppressive and problematic. Even with subjects that have different feelings than mine, ontologically, essentially or otherwise, I still accept and support them. The act of accepting someone in how they feel even if those feelings differ from mine is very important for me in these discussions about gender as oppression."

Instrumentalization of these discourses within institutions.

More neoliberal rather than capitalist discussion. Reading the spectrum of press releases, the number of identifiers in the first line now reveal racial or sexual background of artist or what makes them different from the norm. It could be the case that by being inclusive of queerness one can take away from the power of queer subversion.

Case of Talawa Theatre hiring the non-black director Anthony Ekundayo Lennon who is of Irish ancestry but identifies as black and was discriminated as a black person. Eventually heritage test proved that he had 1/3 African ancestry.

First people who peopled UK were black with blue eyes.

Either equal opportunities or "ponderation". Very difficult to offer ponderation in a free market society which does not actually offer equal opportunities.

We are laughing about identities here and that's what is missing in these public discussions.

But maybe the public space doesn't feel safe for humour.
Humour as a political tool missing from public discussions.

Would I want to identify as a white, british man if there was a job that called for it?

Battles of ambiguity and resistance are now around identity because class is no longer the thing in the neoliberal, middle class climate.