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Geertz, Clifford (1923–) Geertz, an American-born cultural anthropologist and currently Professor of Social Science at Princeton University (USA), describes his approach to understanding culture as being semiotic but not structuralist. That is, culture is grasped through the interpretation of signs and signifying practices but does not depend on a structure or universal system of signification. Geertz explores culture as quite specific meaningful practices and interpretations situated in particular ordinary and everyday contexts. For Geertz, an understanding of lived culture requires in-depth ethnographic fieldwork that generates 'thick descriptions' of cultural life. As such, his influence within cultural studies has been most directly felt by those thinkers associated with ethnography and the exploration of lived culture.

- **Associated concepts** Constructionism, culture, difference, experience, practice, realism, signs.
- **Tradition(s)** Ethnography, hermeneutics, semiotics.
- **Reading** Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gender The notion of gender can be understood to be referring to the cultural assumptions and practices that govern the social construction of men, women and their social relations. The concept gains much of its force through a contrast with a conception of sex as the biological formation of the body. Thus, femininity and masculinity as forms of gender are the outcome of the cultural regulation of behaviours that are regarded as socially appropriate to a given sex. Given that gender is held to be a matter of culture rather than 'nature', so it is always a matter of how men and women are represented.

A good deal of feminist writing has sought to challenge what they take to be essentialism and biological determinism through the conceptual division between a biological sex and a culturally formed gender. Subsequently, it is argued that no fundamental sex differences exist and that those that are apparent are insignificant in relation to arguments for social equality. Rather, it is the social, cultural and political discourses and practices of gender that are held to lie at the root of women's subordination.

However, the sex-gender distinction upon which this argument is based has itself become the subject of criticism. The differentiation between sex as biology and gender as a cultural construction is broken down on the grounds that there is in principle no access to biological 'truths' that lie outside of cultural discourses and therefore no 'sex' which is not already cultural. In this view, sexed bodies are always already represented as the production of regulatory discourses. Judith **Butler** has

been at the cutting edge of this argument by suggesting that the category of 'sex' is a normative and regulatory discourse that produces the bodies it governs. Thus, discourses of sex are ones that, through repetition of the acts they guide, bring sex into view as a necessary norm. Here, while sex is held to be a social construction, it is an indispensable one that forms subjects and governs the materialization of bodies.

Butler's work is emblematic of a wider body of thought produced by feminists who have been influenced by poststructuralism and postmodernism. These writers have argued that not only are sex and gender social and cultural constructions, but also that there are multiple modes of femininity (and masculinity). Here, rather than a conflict between two opposing male–female groups, sexual identity concerns the balance of masculinity and femininity within specific men and women. This argument stresses the singularity and multiplicity of persons as well as the relativity of symbolic and biological existence.

Links Body, culture, discourse, femininity, feminism, performativity, sex, women's movement

Genealogy In general terms the notion of genealogy is concerned with the derivation and lineage of persons, ideas or phenomena. Within cultural studies the concept has meanings associated with **Foucault**, who deploys the idea of genealogy in order to examine power and the historical continuities and discontinuities of discourses as they are brought into play under specific and irreducible historical conditions.

Foucault is said to have produced a genealogy of the modern subject. That is, he traced the derivation and lineage of subjects in and through history. Here, the subject is radically historicized, that is, the subject is understood to be wholly and only the product of history. Indeed, for Foucault genealogy's task is to explore the ways in which the body is imprinted by history as the site of disciplinary practices that bring subjects into being. These practices are the manifestation of specific historical discourses of crime, punishment, medicine, science, sexuality and so forth. Hence, power is generative; that is to say, it is productive of subjectivity.

Discourses of disciplinary and bio-power, which arise in a variety of sites including schools, prisons, hospitals and asylums, produced what Foucault called 'docile bodies' that could be subjected, used, transformed and improved. Genealogy traces these discourses and practices historically and locates particular kinds of 'regimes of the self' in specific historical and cultural conjunctures. That is, different types of subject are the outcome of particular historical and social formations.

Links Archaeology, discourse, power, practice, subjectivity

Genre A genre is a classification of type or kind that when applied to literature, television or film gives rise to such groups as the romance novel, the western, the gangster movie, film noir and so forth. As such, genre regulates the narrative process producing coherence and credibility through patterns of similarity and difference. Genres structure the narrative process and contain it; they regulate it in particular ways using specific elements and combinations of elements to produce unity and plausibility. Genre involves the systematic and structured repetition of problems and solutions in narratives. However, genres must also involve sufficient levels of