gender and language

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(personal) introduction

❏   colorado
   ❏   massachusetts
      ❏   middlebury college
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            ❏   fulbright

most recent project and current research

❏   aline motta (niterói, 1974—)
❏   time, memory, *touch, space*
❏   queer studies, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, etc.
  ❏   josé esteban muñoz, eve kosofsky sedgwick, maurice
       merleau-ponty, denise ferreira da silva, sylvia wynter, et al.

Máquina Kalunga, 2022
aline motta

Filha Natural #2, 2022
aline motta

gender and language*

*not comprehensive

gender in the english language

- I/you/<u>he</u>/<u>she</u>/it/we/they
- decline of a generic "he"
  - *"If a person wants to succeed in life, he must work hard."*
- generic use of "they," which first emerges as a feature within (middle) english during the 14th century
  - Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (~1476): *"And whoso fyndeth hym out of swich blame, / They wol come up and offre in Goddes name" ("And whoever finds themselves out of such blame, they will come up and offer in God's name.")*
- differences between american and british english

gender neutral (personal) pronouns (and language)

❏ usage of "they/them" (retaining subject-verb agreement), usually by nonbinary, genderqueer, or gender-nonconforming people

    ❏ neopronouns: "ze/hir," "xe/xem," etc.

❏ exchanging gendered terms in job titles: "firefighter" rather than "fireman," "actor" instead of "actress," etc.

"23. But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question and command? There are countless kinds; countless different kinds of use of all the things we call 'signs', 'words', 'sentences'. And this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new *language-games*, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a rough picture of this from the changes in mathematics.) The word 'language-game' is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (emphasis added).

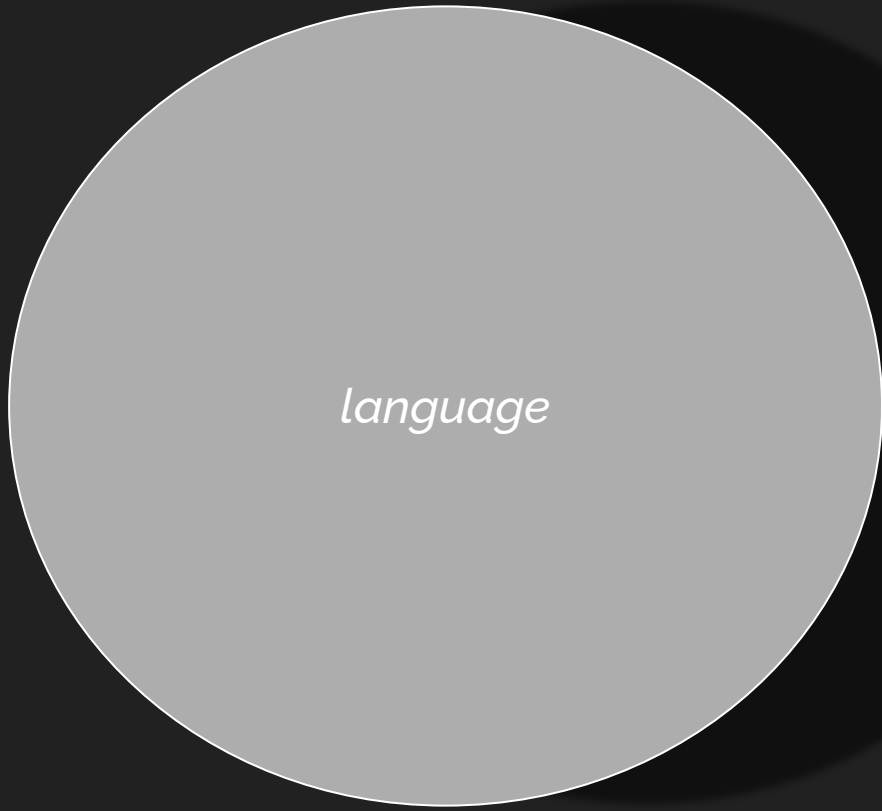ludwig wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953)

not *defining*,
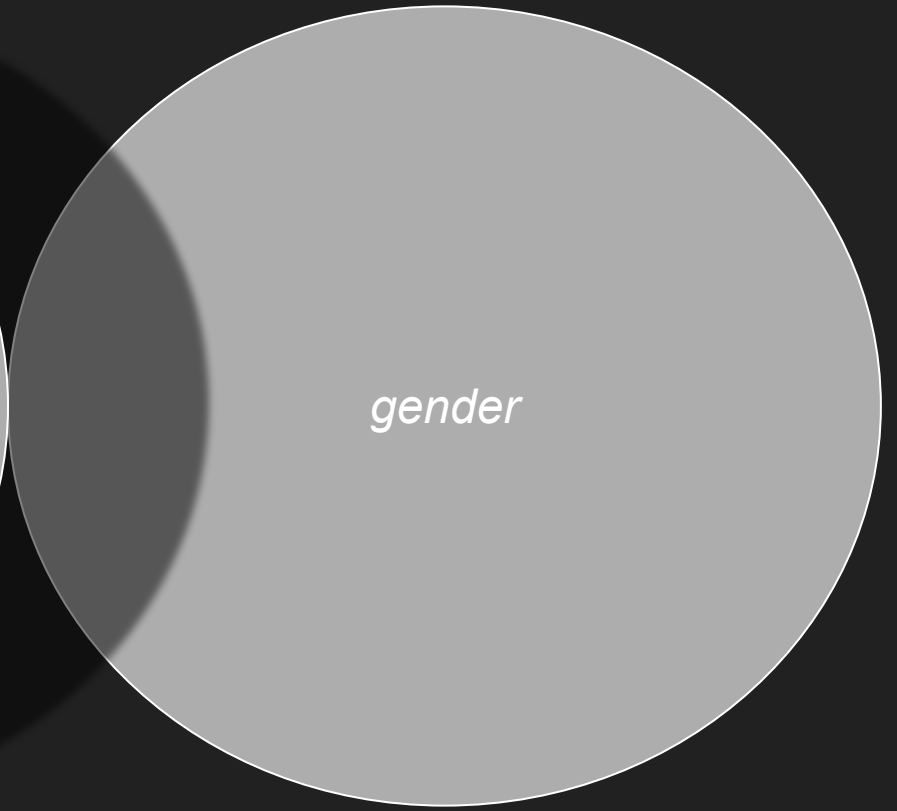but *describing* gender
and language*

*by way of their usage

"*Axiom 1: People are different from each other.* Everybody has learned this, I assume, and probably everybody who survives at all has reasonably rich, unsystematic resources of nonce taxonomy for mapping out the possibilities, dangers, and stimulations of their human landscape. It is probably people with the experience of oppression or subordination who have the most *need* to know it; and I take the precious, devalued arts of gossip, immemorially associated in European thought with servants, with effeminate and gay men, with all women, to have to do not even so much with transmission of of necessary info as with the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one's world."

eve kosofsky sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990)

general takeaways

❏ language has not become politicized—it always was and is*

    ❏ language is not an object

        ❏ "mind the gap"

language is as much listening as it is speaking

small groups:

❏ what is an early memory that you have of learning to read or write, and are there any feelings or sensations attached to this memory?

❏ what is a recent memory of a time when you felt misunderstood, or that you were not able to express how you were feeling?

❏ what is an early memory where you felt like a girl? like a boy?

questions?

feelings?

reactions?