

# COMS 633: Feminist Media Studies

Fall 2011

Fridays 2:35-5:25pm

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**Course Description:** Defined by its inter-disciplinary reach into Cultural Studies, film and television studies, political economy, literary studies and public sphere studies (among other fields), Feminist Media Studies is a broad ranging and deeply politicized intellectual field of inquiry. This course explores the political and epistemological dimensions of feminist scholarship as two of its defining features; it does not espouse a particular feminist politics. In feminist media studies, it is the political focus and engaged investments in feminist visions of change that make this area of inquiry *feminist*. Its particular objects of study (e.g. women, embodiment) and conceptual tools (such as gender and sexuality) do not, on the other hand. Several of our course readings plumb the meaning and practice of this distinction within feminist theory and media studies.

This semester, the course pays particular attention to current developments in feminist theory around feminist histories, new materialisms, issues of affect and emotional resonance in cultural and political life, and what scholars call “the identity problem” in women’s and gender studies. Alongside current developments in feminist theory, our readings draw from a deep well of scholarship in feminist media and communication studies to contextualize and historically situate more recent research. Our discussions of new materialisms will be placed in dialogue with earlier feminist approaches to issues of materialism and socialist feminist theory on historical materialism; our readings on current sexuality studies will be placed in dialogue with debate-defining texts from the early 1980s “sex wars.” Among other things, the pairing of new and older readings in feminist scholarship signals the deep and rich histories of a number of debates in the field and beyond.

**Course Readings:** Required articles and single book chapters for the course are available on WebCT. Required articles are also available on course reserve via the library’s website, and books and books chapters for the course are also on reserve at McLennan Library. You can purchase the books for the course at McGill University Bookstore. Full bibliographic information on each course text in the reading schedule for the course is included on the reading schedule below.

Seminar participants **MUST** bring printed copies of the day’s readings with them to seminar.

Required books for the course are:

Linda Martin Alcoff (2006). *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self*. Oxford UP.  
Clare Hemmings (2011). *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Duke UP.  
Angela McRobbie (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press.

**Course Assignments:** In addition to the readings for the course, the following writing and presentation assignments constitute the work that is required over the seminar.

**Discussion Facilitation (20 % of final grade):** Student-facilitated discussion will comprise a portion of our seminar time over the semester. Discussion facilitation consists of two main presentation tasks:

- 1) The provision of 3 significant passages from text(s) we have read for that day (or from different chapters of a book under discussion), and
- 2) The offering of 3 well-crafted discussion questions that ask seminar participants to debate the argumentation and interpretation of the text(s) at hand.

The goal of presentations is to cultivate directed and serious discussion that meaningfully grapples with the texts at hand. Presenters should identify significant and/or particularly difficult passages in the reading, and discussion questions should help facilitate the discussion of their details through a line of directed questioning. Questions can probe the meaning of particular textual passages, offer interpretations of the concepts and objects of study our readings address, and/or ask us to consider the relationship between previous readings and the current ones under discussion, among other things. The more grounded in the texts your questions are, the better they will foster discussion. Questions that can be answered by “Yes” or “No” are not permitted.

Presenters must provide printed copies of their questions for each seminar participant on the day of presentation. While it is the discussion facilitator’s job to open up and direct discussion from the outset, it is everyone’s shared responsibility to engage in conversation about the texts and issues at hand, and to insure that those discussions are engaged and respectful.

Due to the large size of our seminar, there will likely be more than one presentation per seminar meeting. In this case, presenters do not need to work together, but at the least, you should discuss with each other the decision of which readings you want to focus on for your presentation. Sign up for presentations will be held at the first seminar meeting. Please note that if you run into a scheduling problem around a presentation date, it is your responsibility to find another seminar participant with whom to switch presentation dates.

**Midterm Seminar Paper Proposal (20% of final grade):** On **Friday October 21, 2011**, seminar participants will turn in a 5-page seminar paper proposal (via email to: [carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca](mailto:carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca), with the subject heading “COMS 633 paper proposal”). The proposal should indicate which of the three seminar paper options you have chosen (see below). You must clearly describe the subject of your paper, the research and/or theoretical question(s) you seek to answer, and why they are significant or interesting. Include a bibliography of work that you have consulted in order to write the proposal – it should accurately reflect your preliminary research/analysis and additional reading you have done.

**Seminar Paper Presentation (10% of final grade):** The last day of seminar will be devoted to short presentations based on students seminar papers-in-progress. Presentations will be 5-7 minutes in length. They should be prepared in advanced and practiced before being delivered in seminar.

**Seminar Paper (50% of final grade):** The course will culminate with a 20-25 page seminar paper. Seminar papers should not greatly exceed this page limit. The seminar paper will be due on **Monday December 12, 2011** in hard copy. I will provide written comments upon your essay that can be picked up in your departmental mailbox if you are a student in the Department of Art History and Communication Studies– at a date by which I will notify you they are available. If you are a student from another department or another university in Montreal, I will mail my comments to you by post (please provide me with your mailing address at the time of paper submission).

There are three options for the seminar paper.

Option #1: Literature review of an area of feminist media studies. In this option, your task is to familiarize yourself with the published scholarship in an area of feminist media studies. Literature reviews require significant library research and reading, so only choose this option if you are committed to doing a lot of extra reading. Part of the task of doing a literature review is defining an area of scholarly study, and determining which texts are significant to it. The review should include a description of the research area in feminist media studies that you have chosen, a discussion of several exemplary texts and how they construct and analyze their object of study (with citations for additional texts in the area which you have chosen not to discuss in much detail), blind spots or limitations of the existing literature, and ways that scholars can expand on and/or open up analysis in this area. Be critical but also recognize what researchers' methods and object construction has accomplished in the area of study. Literature reviews should not consist of only negative critique – consider how this area of scholarship could be useful to current scholarship. Examples of areas of research could include: feminist audience studies, gender and youth culture, feminist popular music studies, feminist television studies, feminist public sphere studies, lesbian and queer media studies, the relation of feminist disability theory to feminist media study, etc.

Option #2: Application paper. In this option, your task is to choose a set of media representations, media practices, or other set of objects and “apply” a set of concepts we have addressed over the seminar. Unlike a literature review, you will not be expected to do a full work-up on an area of feminist media studies scholarship, but you will be expected to: 1) do some additional outside reading, 2) analyze your chosen set of representations/practices/other objects, and 3) reflect and comment upon the course readings you use as a result of your application and analysis of their concepts. Papers must draw substantially from the course readings.

Option #3: Propose an alternative that engages substantially with course material.

**Expectations and Policies:** There are several expectations that I have of you as participants in a graduate seminar. I expect that you will: attend every seminar meeting and come prepared to discuss each of our readings, do all of the readings and have something to say about them, bring your readings with you to every seminar, turn in your seminar work on time and in completed fashion, and openly communicate with me about anything of concern to you in the course (e.g. if you know you will have trouble meeting a deadline or if there is anything that will prevent you from fully participating in the seminar).

**Discussion Etiquette:** Discussion makes up a great percentage of our time in class. Following a few basic discussion guidelines will help insure that this time is productive, enlightening and above all, fun.

1. Work to create a shared climate of friendly and engaged discussion. Avoid personal attacks and insults, jabs, and grandstanding behaviors.
2. Disagreements are natural and welcome in scholarly discussion. So are arguments. But arguments are not contests. Please grant your fellow seminar participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not.
3. Avoid purely negative critique in your comments. Our goal in discussion is to understand the texts we read and how they might be useful to us -- in addition to sharpening and honing our skills in critique.
4. Wait your turn – try not to interrupt others.

5. You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject; if you do, expect that others may want to disagree with you. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time. Change and respectful contestation are encouraged.
6. You each bring interesting experiences to the classroom, and you may wish to bring up your experience when it is relevant to class discussion (and when you feel comfortable doing so). Everyone's personal experience deserves respect. But if you bring up your own experience in class, please recognize that it becomes a public topic for discussion. Others may interpret your experience differently than you do, and they are free to respectfully disagree with your interpretation. Also recognize that anecdotal experience is not the same thing as evidence or an argument.

**Grading:** You have the right to turn in work that is written in French. If you plan on writing in French over the semester, please notify me in advance. All lectures, seminar discussions, presentations and demonstrations will be conducted in English.

Your final grade for the semester will be based on the quality and clarity of your performance in presentations, demonstrations, and your written work. If you turn in work late, you may not receive written comments from me and your grade could be reduced. If I deem your work unsatisfactory, I may ask you to do it again. Taking an incomplete or "K" grade for this course is greatly discouraged, unless you have a truly exceptional reason that can be supported by documentation.

#### **How to Interpret Graduate-Level Grades:**

A:	Good work
A-:	Satisfactory
B+:	There is a problem with what you submitted
B:	There is a substantial problem with what you submitted
B-:	Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
C+ or lower:	Officially considered a "fail" by the Graduate Studies Office.

**Auditors:** If you would like to audit this class, I will hold you to the following conditions: that you will follow all the policies and etiquette explained here, that you actively participate in class discussion and attend as many class sessions as you can.

**Statement on Academic Integrity:** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

## **Semester Schedule of Readings**

(Bring printed copies of readings with you to seminar)

### **What's the Problem Here?**

#### **Friday September 2, 2011: Diagnosis 1---Feminism has (almost) been Killed**

Angela McRobbie (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage).

For Some Further Reading:

- Wendy Brown (1999). "Resisting Left Melancholia" *boundary 2* 26(3): 19-27.  
 Susan Douglas (2010). *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work is Done*. New York: Times Books.  
 Andi Zeisler (2008). *Feminism and Pop Culture*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

**Friday September 9, 2011: Diagnosis 2---Who Really Speaks for Whom?**

- Gayatri Spivak (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 271-316.  
 Chandra Mohanty (1984). "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" *boundary 2* 13(1): 333-358.  
 Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003). "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anti-Capitalist Struggles" *Signs* 28(2): 499-535.  
 Linda Martín Alcoff (1991-1992). "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique* 20, 5-32.

Recommended

- Lauren Berlant (2009). "Introduction" to *The Female Complaint*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.  
 Keya Ganguly (1992) "Accounting for Others: Feminism and Representation" In *Women Making Meaning: New Feminist Directions in Communication*. New York: Routledge, 60-82.

**Friday September 16, 2011: Diagnosis 3---Desiring a Feminist Subject**

- Clare Hemmings (2011). "Introduction," "Return" and "Affective Subjects" in *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.  
 Judith Butler (1997) "Merely Cultural" *Social Text* 52/53: 265-277.  
 Nancy Fraser (1997) "Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler" *Social Text* 52/53: 279-289.

## Identity Trouble

**Friday September 23, 2011: The Identity Crisis in Feminism**

- Linda Martin Alcoff (2006). "The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" and "The Metaphysics of Gender and Sexual Difference" in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self*. Oxford UP, 133-178.  
 Robyn Wiegman (2002). "The Progress of Gender: Whither 'Women'?" In Robyn Wiegman (ed.) *Women's Studies on its Own*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 106-140.  
 Joan W. Scott (1992). "Experience" in Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political*. Routledge, 22-40.

Recommended

- Wendy Brown (1997). "The Impossibility of Women's Studies" *differences* 9(3): 79-101.

**Friday September 30, 2011: Processes of Racialization**

- Kumi Silva (2010). "Brown: From Identity to Identification" *Cultural Studies* 24(2): 167-182.  
 Sherene Razack (2009). "Race Thinking and the Camp" and "Modern Women as Imperialists: Geopolitics, Culture Clash and Gender Post-9/11" in *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.  
 Vron Ware (1996). "Island Racism: Gender, Place and White Power" *Feminist Review* 54: 65-86.

Yasmin Jiwani (2010). "Doubling Discourses and the Veiled Other: Mediations of Race and Gender in Canadian Media" in *States of Race: Critical Race Feminism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 59-86.

For Some Further Reading:

Adrienne Rich (1979). "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia" in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*.

Ruth Frankenberg (1993). *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Ruth Frankenberg, ed. (1997) *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

**Friday October 7, 2011: Studying Whiteness and White Femininities**

Linda Martin Alcoff (2006). "The Whiteness Question," in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self*. Oxford UP.

Gada Mahrouse (2008). "Race Conscious Transnational Activists with Cameras: Mediators of Compassion" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11(1): 87-105.

Vicki Mayer (2006). "Beyond the Pale: Whiteness in Audience Studies and Media Ethnography" *Communication Theory* 15(2): 148-167.

Charlotte Brunson (1997). "Pedagogies of the Feminine" in *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes*. New York: Routledge, 172-188.

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2011). "Branding the Post-Feminist Self: Girls' Video Production and Youtube," in Mary Celeste Kearney, ed. *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls' Media Culture*. Peter Lang.

Recommended

Aida Hurtado and Abigail J. Stewart (2004). "Through the Looking Glass: Implications of Studying Whiteness for Feminist Methods" in Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Linda Powell, L. Mun Wong, eds. *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, Society*. Routledge.

Lynn Spigel (1995) "From the Dark Ages to the Golden Age: Women's Memories and Television Reruns" *Screen* 36:1, 16-33.

Jane Elliott (2008). "Stepford U.S.A.: Second Wave Feminism, Domestic Labor, and the Representation of National Time" *Cultural Critique* 70: 32-62.

**Tuesday, October 11, 2011: Heather Love talk "Underdogs: Queer Theory and the Politics of the Outside," 5pm. Details forthcoming**

**Friday October 14, 2011: Transnational Feminist Positions**

Lisa McLaughlin (2004) "Feminism and the Political Economy of Transnational Public Space" *The Sociological Review*, 156-175.

Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1994). "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides." *positions* 2(2): 430-445.

Radha Hegde (1998). "A View from Elsewhere: Locating Difference and the Politics of Representation from a Transnational Feminist Perspective." *Communication Theory* 8(3): 271-297.

Uma Narayan (1997), "Through the Looking-Glass Darkly: Emissaries, Mirrors, and Authentic Insiders as Preoccupations" in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*. London & New York: Routledge, 121-157.

For Some Further Reading:

Gargi Bhattacharyya (2010). "Will These Emergencies Never End? Some First Thoughts about the Impact of Economic and Security Crises on Everyday Life" in Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (eds.) *New Femininities: Postfeminism, neoliberalism and subjectivity*. (pp. 306-320). Palgrave MacMillan.

**Friday October 21, 2011: NO CLASS. Seminar Paper Proposals Due via email to: [carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca](mailto:carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca), subject line: COMS 633 Paper Proposal**

**Thursday October 27, 2011: Judy Norsigian, Executive Director of Our Bodies Ourselves "Preventing Violence in Women's Lives: Curbing Sex Trafficking and Other Attacks on Women's Health and Wellbeing," IGSF organized, 232 Leacock, 7:30pm**

## **New Materialism: Rethinking Embodiment from Butler to Biomedia and Feminist Technology Studies**

**Friday October 28, 2011: Judith Butler---Bodies, Performativity and Sexual Difference**

The first hour of seminar will be devoted to in-class discussion of proposed seminar paper topics.

Irene Costera Meijer and Baukje Prins (1998). "How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler" *Signs* 23(2): 275-286.

Judith Butler (1988). "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Gender Theory" *Theatre Journal* 40(4): 519-531.

Judith Butler (1993). "Imitation and Gender Subordination" in Abelove et. al. (eds.). *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 307-320.

### For Some Further Reading:

Judith Butler (1993), *Bodies that Matter*: "Preface" and "Introduction"

Saba Mahmood (2001), "Feminist Theory, Embodiment and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16:2, 202-236. See also her book *Politics of Piety* (a use of Butler to theorize women's religious piety rather than a politics of freedom)

**Thursday November 3, 2011: "The Body: New Paradigms, Perspectives and Practices": IGSF graduate conference at Thomson House, 9am-5pm**

**Friday November 4, 2011: Rethinking Sex**

Judith Butler (1994). "Against Proper Objects" *differences* 6(2/3): 1-26.

Gayle Rubin (1984) "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sex" in Carole S. Vance, ed. *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Routledge and Kegan Paul Books.

Gayle Rubin with Judith Butler (1994). "Sexual Traffic" *differences* 6(2/3): 62-99.

Gayle Salamon (2010). "Transfeminism and the Future of Gender" in *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*. Columbia University Press.

Clarissa Smith (2010). "Pornographication: A Discourse for All Seasons" *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 6(1): 103-108.

For Some Further Reading:

Special issue of *GLQ* on 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex," edited by Heather Love  
Stella Sandford (2011) "Sex: A Transdisciplinary Concept" *Radical Philosophy* 165.

**Friday November 11, 2011: Feminist Matter(s)**

- Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2011). "Introducing the New Materialisms" in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*. Duke UP.
- Myrd Hird (2004). "Feminist Matters: New Materialist Considerations of Sexual Difference." *Feminist Theory* 5(2): 222-232.
- Elizabeth Grosz (2005). "The Force of Sexual Difference" in *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 171-183.
- Patricia Clough (2010). "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine, and Bodies" in Melissa Gregg and Greg Siegfworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader* (pp. 206-228). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sara Ahmed (2008). "Open Forum---Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the 'New Materialism'" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15(1): 23-39.

**Friday November 18, 2011: Feminist Technics**

- Jane Bennett (2004) "The Force of Things: Toward an Ecology of Matter" *Political Theory* 32: 347-372.
- Sarah Ahmed (2007). "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology" *GLQ* 12(4): 543-574.
- Anna Feigenbaum (2010) "Concrete Needs no Metaphor: Globalized Fences as Sites of Political Struggle" *ephemera* 10(2): 119-133.
- Zoe Sofia (2000). "Container Technologies" *Hypatia* 15(2): 181-201.
- Donna Haraway (1991) "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 149-182.
- David Henkin (2008). "On Forms and Media" *Representations* 104: 34-36.
- Leslie Regan Shade and Barbara Crow (2006). "Canadian Feminist Perspectives on Digital Technology" *Topia* 11:161-176.

## **The New "Old" Feminist Materialisms**

**Friday November 25, 2011: Feminist Socialist Materialisms after Post-Structuralism**

- Nancy Holstrom (2009) "Introduction" in Holmstrom, ed. *The Socialist Feminist Project: A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics*. New York; Monthly Review Press,
- Martha Gimenez (2000). What's Material about Materialist Feminism? A Marxist Feminist Critique. *Radical Philosophy* 101. <http://www.colorado.edu/Sociology/gimenez/work/rphil.html>
- Rosemary Hennessy (1993). "The Materiality of Discourse: Feminism and Post-Marxism" *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*. New York: Routledge.
- Vicki Mayer (2008). "Studying Up and Fucking Up: Ethnographic Interviewing in Production Studies" *Cinema Journal* 47(2): 141-148.
- Eileen Meehan (2001). "Gendering the Commodity Audience: Critical Media Research, Feminism and Political Economy" in Eileen Meehan and Ellen Riordan (eds.). *Sex & Money*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 209-222.

For Background/Additional Reading:

Toril Moi and Janice Radway (1994). "Editor's Note" *South Atlantic Quarterly* special issue on feminist materialism.

Jennifer Wicke (1994) "Celebrity Material: Material Feminism and the Culture of Celebrity" *South Atlantic Quarterly*.

Martha Gimenez (1998). "Marxist Feminism/Materialist Feminism"  
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/mar.html>

Lydia Sargent (1981). *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

**Friday December 2, 2011: Students Presentations on final seminar papers**

**Monday December 12, 2011: SEMINAR PAPERS DUE, in my mailbox, Department of Art History and Communication Studies, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor West Arts Building**