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Kenyon College
Wooster, OHIO

MLL 21
Fall 1992
Tuesday Evening-Sunset Cottage

Guiney Ascension 327 Hours: MWF 10:00-12:00 PBX 5803
Moore Ascension 103 Hours: MW 11:30-12:30; WF 9:30-10:30
PBX 5275

Imaging Women: European Crosscurrents

Course Work:

- 1 Short Paper (5-6 pages) 25%
- 1 Longer Paper (10 pages) 35%
- Seminar Participation 40%

Students will be responsible for preparing answers to selected questions for the seminar in small groups (2-4 students per group). At times students will also prepare questions. Your discussion of these questions (normally distributed one week in advance) will constitute the focus of the seminar.

September 1: Introduction; film: *A Day in the Country* (Jean Renoir)

September 8: Freud, Dora: *An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*

September 15: Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*; FFT Beauvoir "Women and Creativity"

September 22: Beauvoir (continued); FFT Leclerc "Parole de femme"; Delphy "Protofeminism and Antifeminism"

September 29: Kleist, *Penthesilea* (on reserve); Günderrode Poems (Handout)

October 6: Wolf, *No Place on Earth*; FFT Kristeva "Talking About Polylogue"

October 13 (Break) Movie: *Hiroshima mon amour* (Resnais/Duras)

October 20: Colette, *Vagabond*; FFT Irigaray "Sexual Difference"

October 27: FFT Kofman "The Narcissistic Woman: Freud and Girard"; FFT Montrelay "Inquiry into Femininity"

November 3: Movie: *Die bleierne Zeit (Marianne and Juliane)* (von Trotta); Weigel "Double Focus" (on reserve)

November 10: Duras, *Destroy, she said*; Duras, Interview

November 17: Jelinek, *The Piano Player*

November 24 (Thanksgiving break)

December 1: Bachmann, *Malina*

December 8: Wittig, *Les Guérillères*

December 15: Selected French and German poems

PREAMBLE

One of the purposes of "Imaging Women" is to present a selection of works by and/or about women as a means of posing certain questions. Is there a phenomenon which can be called "women's writing" as distinct from "men's writing"? If so, then what is it? What happens when women writers embrace or reject the notion of gender applied to their work? How do we understand the term "female" outside the male-female dichotomy? Is there a way of looking at the issue of gender which is itself gender-determined? To put it differently: do women see the world, including gender, in a way that can be identified and described?

In the process, do they create a new or different language?

The title of our course is mysterious and, some might say, even mystifying. The word "to image" does not exist, except perhaps as a variant of "to imagine." When we read or watch movies, we indeed participate in a world that belongs more in the mind than in the realm of the senses. It consists of images that exist by virtue of having been imagined. Yet these images are not in a hermetically sealed world of their own. They are produced and consumed in a world that is itself understood only by means of words. Our dependence on images for the most basic understanding of reality is what gives the issue of gender such force; when we read works that center around women, questions of the political power of women, their status in society as well as in art, necessarily emerge. Or do they?

Most (but by no means all) of the works we will study take for granted that words and other images can be controlled by men or by women, and that it matters. For that reason, much of what we will read and see has a challenging, provocative tenor which it is incumbent upon us, as consumers of images, to challenge and provoke in turn.

Where is she?
Activity/passivity,
Sun/Moon,
Culture/Nature,
Day/Night,

Father/Mother,
Head/heart,
Intelligible/sensitive,
Logos/Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, seed, progress.

Matter, concave, ground--which supports the step, receptacle.

Man

Woman

- Hélène Cixous (translated by Ann Liddle)

For at least a century, the literary avant-garde (from Mallarmé and Lautréamont to Joyce and Artaud) has been introducing ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into language. It is what Mallarmé called "the music in letters": Maldoror's explosive Chants or the multiplied condensation of myths, philosophy, history, and verbal experience in Finnegans Wake.

All of these modifications in the linguistic fabric are the sign of a force that has not been grasped by the linguistic or ideological system. This signification renewed, "infinite" by the rhythm in a text, this precisely is (sexual) pleasure (la jouissance).

- Julia Kristeva (translated by Marilyn A. August)

I think "feminine literature" is an organic, translated writing...translated from blackness, from darkness. Women have been in darkness for centuries. They don't know themselves. Or only poorly. And when women write, they translate this darkness....Men don't translate. They begin from a theoretical platform that is already in place, already elaborated. The writing of women is really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating rather than an already formed language. But to achieve that, we must turn away from plagiarism. There are many women who write as they think they should write to imitate men and make a place for themselves in literature. Colette wrote like a little girl, a turbulent and terrible and delightful little girl. So she wrote "feminine literature" as men wanted it. (...) I think feminine literature is a violent, direct literature and that, to judge it, we must not--and this is the main point I want to make--start all over again, take off from a theoretical platform.

- Marguerite Duras (translated by Susan Husserl-Kapit)