

Syllabus for CMS 275: Perspectives on Visual Culture: Race Sex and Power
Winter 2020: **Feminist Approaches to Media**

MW 10:30 AM – 12:20 PM, Thompson Hall Room 101

Professor Mal Ahern, malahern@uw.edu, Padelford C-502

Teaching Assistants

Yandong Li, yandong@uw.edu (Group A leader)

Xin Peng, pengxin@uw.edu (Group B leader)

Course Description

This course will introduce students to the critical analysis of film, television, and other media through the lens of feminist theory. The first part of the course will introduce some of the canonical texts of feminist film theory, covering three major areas: feminist psychoanalysis, queer reading practices, and black feminist theory. This section will culminate in students producing their own critical review of the depiction of gender in a contemporary film (due 2/7).

The second and third parts of the course will focus on a range of alternative and oppositional media practices that center artists and viewers who are female, queer, women of color, and trans. Content will focus primarily on feminism and media in the United States, with occasional excursions into international and transnational topics. Students will have the opportunity to produce their own alternative media in the form of a zine (due 2/21) and a media manifesto (due 3/13).

Class sessions will focus on the close analysis of images and other media objects. Lectures will also introduce key concepts not addressed by the readings. Five quizzes over the course of the semester (given on dates selected at random) will cover concepts drawn from both readings and lectures. Students will also complete weekly writing assignments that respond to readings and films.

A note on required readings and viewings

To prepare for class, please complete the reading and viewing listed immediately under “Complete Before Class.” This, and completing your weekly writing response, will be your regular homework for the course.

The texts listed under “*Supplemental materials*” are not required readings, but they are texts that your instructor may reference in lecture. They will be uploaded to Canvas in case you find yourself interested or intrigued (before or after lecture) and want to explore them more.

Reading and viewing assignments are subject to change. Any changes to the reading and viewing assignments will be made **at least one week** in advance.

Course Assignments

1. **Weekly Writing Responses** (20%): Students will submit one written response on the assigned readings and viewings per week. The class will be randomly sorted into groups A and B, which will respond to Monday and Wednesday readings respectively.

Group A: Monday readings/viewings; submit response by 6:00 PM Sundays

** Group A will **also** submit a response for Wednesday, 1/22

Group B Wednesday readings/viewings; submit response by 6:00 PM Tuesdays

** Group B will **not** submit a response for Wednesday, 1/22

The written response should be **between 150 and 200 words**, and should reference **all** of the readings and viewings assigned for that date.

Responses will be given 95% if they meet the length requirements, focus on the assigned readings, and are submitted on time. Responses that are especially thorough or insightful may receive up to 100%.

Responses that fail to meet the minimum length requirement or which do not respond to the readings and viewings will receive partial credit.

On the final week of class, students from both A and B group will submit their responses on Tuesday, 3/10 (see details on syllabus below).

2. **Quizzes** (20%): Five quizzes will be given in class on dates **randomly** distributed through the semester. The lowest quiz grade will be dropped. Quizzes may cover material from readings, viewings, and/or lectures.

Note that lecture may cover topics and concepts not covered by readings, so students who attend class regularly will do better on these quizzes. Power points for each lecture will be uploaded within 24 hours of class meetings.

3. **Film Review** (20%): Due Friday, 2/7, by 6:00 PM on Canvas. Write a review of 1500-2000 words (3-5 double-spaced, 12-point pages) that analyzes the gender dynamics of one of the following mainstream Hollywood films:

Little Women (Gerwig, 2019)

Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker (Abrams, 2019)

Hustlers (Scafaria, 2019)

Always Be My Maybe (Khan, 2019)

Blade Runner (Scott, 1982)

Mildred Pierce (Curtiz, 1945)

Make reference to one or more of the critical modes we have discussed in class, such as feminist psychoanalytic theory (Mulvey), black feminist “oppositional” reading (hooks), or queer reparative reading (Sedgwick/Doty). In addition to the review, you will complete an accompanying self-assessment checklist.

4. **Zine** (20%): Due Friday, 2/21 by 6:00 PM at Padelford C-502. Create a zine that explores some aspect of gender and media. This could be a fanzine, an autobiographical zine, an avant-garde cut-up piece. Your zine must include the following:
- at least one quotation from an object (a text, an image, a film, etc) that you have encountered in this class (in the syllabus or the power points)
 - at least one quotation from an object (a text, an image, a film, song lyrics) not from this class (that is, not included in the syllabus or the power points)
 - at least 500 words of your own writing.

In addition to the zine, you will complete an accompanying self-assessment checklist, which includes a 200-word reflection on your own process of creating the zine.

5. **Media Manifesto** (20%): Due 3/13 on Canvas. Complete a manifesto of at least 500 words total that articulates your own ideas about feminism and media. What would a feminist media “utopia” look like? What kinds of media making, viewing, and distribution do you want to support? Which do you want to refuse?

In addition to the manifesto, you will complete the accompanying self-assessment checklist, which includes a 200-word reflection on your own process of writing the manifesto, and lists which manifestos and media objects (from both inside and outside the syllabus) served as your inspiration.

Self-Assessment Checklists

Each of the three major assignments will also include a self-assessment checklist. This is a grading rubric that is shared with you, the student, before you complete the assignment. This is so that you can figure out which tasks you’ll need to accomplish to achieve your desired grade. It will also give you a space to reflect on what it was like to complete the assignment, why you completed it the way you did, and what you got out of it.

Communications about Assignments

If you have a question about an assignment or the course, please send it in a **single** email addressed to **both** the professor **and** your assigned teaching assistant.

Late and Missed Assignment Policy

Major assignments (the review, zine, and manifesto) submitted more than 12 hours late will incur a late penalty of **-5%**, with an additional **-5% per day**. For **one** of these assignments you may elect take a no-questions-asked 48-hour extension, but you **must** email both the professor and your TA **before** the assignment’s deadline and state that you are taking your one-time extension.

Weekly Writing Responses can be submitted up to one week late for up to 75% credit.

No makeup quizzes will be allowed; the lowest quiz grade will be dropped. Alternative assignments may be given in the event of a medical emergency (doctor’s note required).

Electronic Devices

Unless you have established accommodations with DRS that require the use of electronic devices for note-taking purposes, or unless otherwise directed by your instructors, **you are not permitted to use phones in class.**

You are also **strongly encouraged** to leave laptops closed during class. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that we retain information much more effectively when taking notes by hand.

Academic Integrity

Unless otherwise directed by your instructors, you must complete all assigned work on your own. You are expected to be familiar with the University's policies concerning academic misconduct as outlined in the Student Conduct Code.

Evidence of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in an automatic failure of the assignment, and may result in further disciplinary action.

UW Statement on Access and Disability Resources

If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to your professor at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or uwdrs@uw.edu or disability.uw.edu. DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions.

Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructors, and DRS. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

Religious Accommodations

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Religious Accommodations Policy (<https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religiousaccommodations-policy/>). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form (<https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/>).

Schedule of Classes

Part 1: Feminist Critical Tools

M (1/6): Introduction to the Course

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

“The 100 Greatest Films Made by Women,” BBC Culture (26 November 2019)

A Herstory of Women Filmmakers (Kelly Gallagher, 2009), 15 min

Su Friedrich, *Edited By* website

W (1/8): Responding to Mainstream Representations

Complete before class:

Reading: Safiya Noble, “What Search Engines Say about Women”
The Feminist Data Manifest-No

In class: Pre-lecture on Mulvey and second-wave feminism
Clips from *The Women’s Film* (California Newsreel)

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Janet McCabe, Introduction to *Feminist Film Studies*

M (1/13): The Male Gaze

Complete before class:

Reading: Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

Viewing: *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), 2 hours

In class: *What Happened to Her* (Kristy Guevara Flanagan, 2016), 15 mins

W (1/15): The Female Gaze?

Complete before class:

Viewing: *Cléo from 5 to 7* (Agnes Varda, 1962), 1 hr 30 mins

In class: Clips from *One Sings, the Other Doesn’t* (Varda, 1977)

[M (1/20): No class for MLK Day]

W (1/22): Queer Reading Strategies

Complete before class:

Reading: Alison Butler, “Girls’ Own Stories”

Viewing: *Dance, Girl, Dance* (Dorothy Arzner, 1940), 1 hr 30 min

In class: clips from *Queen Christina* (1933) and *The Favourite* (2019)

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading”

Alexander Doty, *Flaming Classics*

Judith Mayne, “Lesbian Looks”

M (1/27): The Oppositional Gaze

Complete before class:

Reading: bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze”

Viewing: *Illusions* (Julie Dash, 1983), 30 mins

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Jannell Hobson, “Viewing in the Dark”

W (1/29): *Lemonade*

Complete before class:

Reading: “A Black Feminist Roundtable on bell hooks and Beyoncé,” *feministing*

Viewing: *Lemonade* (Beyoncé and Khalil Joseph, 2016), 1 hr 5 mins

In class: Clips from *Daughters of the Dust* (Dash, 1992)

Clips from *Riddles of the Sphinx* (Mulvey, 1977)

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Jacqueline Bobo, selections from *Black Women as Cultural Readers*

ASSIGNMENT #1 (Film review) DUE FRIDAY, 2/7. Write a review of 1500-2000 words (3-5 double-spaced, 12-point pages) that analyzes the gender dynamics of a major Hollywood film from a limited list. Use one or more of the three critical modes we have discussed in class: feminist psychoanalytic theory (Mulvey), black feminist “oppositional” reading (hooks), or queer reparative reading (Sedgwick/Doty). Students will also submit a self-assessment checklist.

Part II: Remix/Remodel: Feminist Interventions in Mass Media

M (2/3): Parody I: Gender as Medium

Complete before class:

Reading: Ashley Clark, “Burning Down the House,” *The Guardian*

Viewing: *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990), 80 mins

In class: *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* (Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel, 2018), 15 mins

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning”

bell hooks, “Is Paris Burning?”

Andrea Long Chu, excerpts from *Females: A Concern*

W (2/5): Parody II: Oppositional Readings

Complete before class:

Reading: Michelle Ruiz, “Why Feminists are Obsessed with *The Bachelor*,” *Vogue*

Viewing: Episode 1 of *Unreal* (Hulu, 2015), 45 mins

In class: Clips from *Joan Does Dynasty* (Joan Braderman, 1986)

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Stuart Hall, “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse”

Jane Feuer, “Reading Dynasty”

Annette Kuhn, “Women’s Genres”

Tania Modleski, “The Search for Tomorrow in Today’s Soap Operas”

M (2/10): Zines, Punk, and DIY Aesthetics

Complete before class:

Reading: Janice Radway, “Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives”

Exploration: Spend 1 hour browsing QZAP (Queer Zines Archive Project)
(Recommended: Vaginal Davis, “Yes, Ms. Davis,” 1994)

In class: “Riot Grrrl Activism through Art and Zines,” Alien She at YCBA, 5 min
Guest lecture by Alwyn Mouton

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Jose Muñoz, “The White to Be Angry: Vaginal Davis’s Terrorist Drag”

W (2/12): “Make Your Own History”

Complete before class:

Viewing: Barbara Hammer: *Dyketactics* (1972), *Women I Love* (1976), *Audience* (1983)
The Watermelon Woman (Cheryl Dunye, 1991)

In class: Clips from *History Lessons* (Barbara Hammer, 2000)

M (2/17): No class due to presidents’ day

Extra reading: Zoe Leonard, “I want a president who...”

W (2/19): Hacking, Games, and Gender

Complete before class:

Reading: Lisa Nakamura, “Race and Gender in the Gaming World”

Exploration: Spend 1 hour playing the following indie games:

Merritt Kopas, “Lim”

Brianna Liu, “Butterfly Soup”

micha cárdenas, “Redshift and Portmetal”

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Jaime Lee Kirtz, “Beyond the Blackbox”

Jennifer Light, “When Computers Were Women”

ASSIGNMENT #2 (Zine project) DUE FRIDAY 2/21. Create a zine that explores some aspect of your experience of gender and media. Use a cut-and-paste method to put images and words together. Your zine must include the following:

1) at least one quotation from an object (a text, an image, a film, etc) that you have encountered in this class (in the syllabus or the power points)

2) at least one quotation from an object (a text, an image, a film, song lyrics, etc) NOT from this class (in the syllabus or the power points)

3) at least 500 words of your own writing.

In addition to the zine, you will complete the accompanying checklist, which includes a 200-word reflection on your own process of creating the zine, and lists which zines and media objects (from both inside and outside the syllabus) served as your inspiration.

You will need to deliver a paper copy of the zine to my mailbox in Padelford by 5:00 PM on the due date.

Part III: Utopias, Dystopias, and Manifestos

M (2/24): Cyborg Feminisms

Complete before class:

Reading: Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”

Viewing: *The Phantom of the Operator* (Caroline Martel, 2004), 1 hour

In class: Clips from *The Motherhood Archives* (Irene Lustzig, 2014)

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Lisa Nakamura, “Indigenous Circuits”

W (2/26): Manifestos

Complete before class:

Reading: Mierle Landemann Ukeles, “M A N I F E S T O for Maintenance 1969!”
Silvia Federici, “Wages Against Housework” and “Why Sexuality is Work”

Viewing: *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983), 1 hr 30 min

M (3/2): TBA

Complete before class:

TBA

In class: *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (Martha Rosler, 1975, 6 min), clips from *Jeanne Dielman*

W (3/4): Towards a Nonbinary Aesthetic

Complete before class:

Viewing: *Flat is Beautiful* (Sadie Benning, 1998), 1 hour

The Time Eaters (Harry Dodge, 2014), 45 minutes

M (3/9): Feminist Porn Studies and Sex Work Media

Complete before class:

Reading: Laura Helen Marks, “Porn Studies,” *Feminist Media Histories*
Lorelei Lee, “Cash/Consent,” *n+1*

Watch: Four episodes of *Mercy Mistress* (Yin Q), 20 mins total

Supplemental materials (lecture bibliography):

Linda Williams, *Hard Core*

Red Canary Song website

FINAL READING RESPONSE (Student media curation) DUE TUESDAY, 3/10. All students will complete this assignment instead of their weekly reading response. Choose one media object—an image, a film clip, a game—that you would like to share with the class. Write 200 words about why you think this object is relevant to the issues discussed over the course of this class. The instructor and teaching assistants will choose 5 of these clips share with the class during our final session.

W (3/11): TBA

Complete before class:

Reading: TBA

In class: screenings of selected student-curated media clips.

ASSIGNMENT #3 (Manifesto) DUE FRIDAY, 3/13. Complete a manifesto of at least 500 words total that articulates your own ideas about feminism and media. What would a feminist media “utopia” look like? What kinds of media making/viewing/distribution do you want to support? Which do you want to refuse? In addition to the manifesto, you will complete the accompanying checklist, which includes a 200-word reflection on your own process of writing the manifesto, and lists which manifestos and media objects (from both inside and outside the syllabus) served as your inspiration.