WS 822-5: Graduate Seminar in French Feminist Theories

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This seminar will analyze and critique French feminist theories from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, through the three feminists whose ideas were “adapted” by Anglo-Saxon feminists in the 1980s (Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Helene Cixous), materialist and lesbian theorists often overlooked by Anglo-Saxon feminists (Christine Delphy and Monique Wittig), and conclude with current debates about political parity and multiculturalism (notably the heated debate among French Muslim feminists over the scarf). Major issues to be considered include distinctions between French and Anglo-Saxon feminisms, equality versus difference positions, psychoanalytic versus materialist feminisms, and universalism versus multiculturalism.

The instructor will provide contextual information in the form of one-hour lectures about individual theorists and their intellectual formation, notably their intellectual debts to existentialism, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the sociologist Pierre Bordeaux. The remainder of each session will consist of seminar discussion of theorists and theories generated by students or if important issues are not being covered, by instructor intervention. Students should bring the assigned reading(s) to seminars and be prepared to identify and analyze important passages. Each student will give two fifteen-minute oral presentations on key concepts like transcendence, equality, etc..

Required books: (available at the bookstore and on reserve in the library):

Recommended book (also on reserve at the library)

Assignments and Grading:

- Participation in weekly seminar discussions: 20% of final grade
- Two oral reports, together worth*: 30% of final grade
- Short paper (five to seven page) paper on a French feminist theorist*: 20% of final grade
- Term paper (15-20 pages) on French feminist issue or debate*: 30% of final grade

* Students may use an oral report as as starting point for their short paper, term paper, or may build upon an oral report and short paper for their term paper.

The Department of Women’s Studies encourages clarity of thought and expression and good writing. Students will be evaluated on these skills in all courses given by the Department.