

# Lecture Series on Contemporary Theories Feminist Criticism: Lecture 6

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# Feminist Criticism

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**French Feminists – Luce Irigaray (b. 1930)** “Women on the Market” from *This Sex which is Not One* (1977)

## **Main Ideas:**

Irigaray draws upon Karl Marx’s theory of capital and commodities to claim that women are exchanged between men in the same way as any other commodity is. She argues that our entire society is predicated on this exchange of women. Her exchange value is determined by society, while her use value is her natural qualities.

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Thus, a woman's self is divided between her use and exchange values, and she is only desired for the exchange value. This system creates three types of women: the mother, who is all use value; the virgin, who is all exchange value; and the prostitute, who embodies both use and exchange value.

She further uses additional Marxist foundations to argue that women are in demand due to their perceived shortage and as a result, males seek "to have them all," or seek a surplus like the excess of commodity buying power, capital, that capitalists seek constantly. Irigaray speculates thus that perhaps, "the way women are used matter less than their number."

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In this further analogy of women “on the market,” understood through Marxist terms, Irigaray points out that women, like commodities, are moved between men based on their exchange value rather than just their use value, and the desire will always be surplus – making women almost seem like capital, in this case, to be accumulated. “As commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value.”

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**French Feminists – Helen Cixous (b. 1937) “The Laugh of the Medusa”**  
(1975)

## **Main Ideas:**

In the essay, Cixous issues an ultimatum: that women can either read and choose to stay trapped in their own bodies by a language that does not allow them to express themselves, or they can use the body as a way to communicate. She describes a writing style, *écriture féminine*, that she says attempts to move outside of the conversational rules found in patriarchal systems.

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She argues that *Écriture féminine* allows women to address their needs by building strong self-narratives and identity. This text is situated in a history of feminist conversations that separated women in terms of their gender and women in terms of authorship. The “Laugh of the Medusa” addresses this rhetoric, writing on individuality and commanding women to use writing and the body as sources of power and inspiration.

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Cixous uses the term the “Logic of Antilove” to describe her understanding of the systematic oppression of women by patriarchal figures. She defines the Logic of Antilove as the self-hatred women have, “they have made for women an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved by what women haven't got,” this idea persecutes women by defining them by what misogynistic tradition believes makes the female sex inferior.

The women are always encouraged to match up to male standards.



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Cixous commands women to focus on individuality, particularly the individuality of the body and to write to redefine self-identity in the context of her history and narrative. The essay includes the argument that writing is a tool women must use to advocate for themselves in order to acquire the freedom women have historically been denied.

“The Laugh of the Medusa” is an exhortation and call for a "feminine mode" of writing which Cixous calls "white ink" and “écriture féminine.”

(Some of the content has been taken from open sources on Internet)