

Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen

Institut für Anglistik

S: Feminist Media Studies

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My Reading Journal

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1. Introduction

Am I a feminist? Do I see myself as one? This was one of the questions we were asked to ponder in the very first session, and admittedly, it struck me. My initial response was “Yes, of course! How could I not be a feminist? How could anyone not be?” But then I began to wonder – what exactly makes someone a feminist? What is feminism? And I found that I was hardly able to come to any satisfying answer. So, how could I agree to be something I could not even define?

There are various notions and ideas about feminism these days – and it seems to me that many of those ideas even appear to be somewhat opposed to each other. But then, maybe that is the whole point. After all, we are all different, we all have different ideas, ideals, goals. The second question we were asked to give some thought to was what we wanted to do with media studies, since the course was, after all, called “Feminist Media Studies”. I was not so sure about that, either. I use the media a lot, for gathering information as well as for entertainment. The idea of looking at modern media with a feminist gaze sounded very interesting to me. Does interpretation change when one uses a feminist approach, and if it does, how does it change? And, on the other hand, is feminism represented in the media, and if so, how? Is that picture accurate – or can it be, with all the different notions of what feminism actually is? I wondered what new things I might discover, things I probably had paid little to no thought to before.

2. Trying to Find a Position

The clarifications of the very first session were a great way for me to freshen up my memory and to clarify what we would be doing. It was interesting for me to see the different kinds of feminism that are out there – hardly surprising, then, that it feels so difficult for me to actually define feminism. I can agree with liberal feminism to a great extent, since, despite all the things women have achieved over the years, there is still so much left to do until we reach equality.

However, I also see a problem in the traditional binary system. While I agree that most of us probably fit into one or the other category concerning our sex (though I know that there are hermaphrodites), I do have a massive problem with a binary opposition regarding gender. The boundaries there are very fluid and there are many more possible positions than just straight women and straight men. I hate being pushed into the role of the typical cliché woman myself and I am certain that many women

and men feel the same way, no matter if they identify as straight, queer, trans or whatever feels right for them.

While I agree that change in society is in many aspects overdue, I am wary of radical feminism, however. Of course, when all other possibilities fail, a revolution may change the whole society – however, I am not sure if the conditions are ripe enough for enough people to go and join a cause in that manner, especially in a country like Germany, where people seem to be rather reluctant to go and protest openly and radically. Another possible problem is that revolutionary actions might backlash and not be taken seriously at all. Then again, it seems that sometimes force is the only way to make your voice heard.

First and second wave feminism were children of their time and place. In their respective time period and place, they both are movements that I tip my hat to. We all owe those developments a lot, and we certainly would not be where we are today without them. Regarding those “waves”, I mostly see myself as a child of third wave feminism – I like the inclusive approach the third wave takes to everything. The ever-recurring issue is choice, after all – I do not really see why, if someone likes being a “girly” girl, she cannot be a feminist, because being a cliché girl means that she conforms to a patriarchal society. This would mean that feminism actually cuts down on the choices we have – while at the same time, having choice over our bodies, our sexual life, our social life, our job, and also our appearances and free time are essential aspects of feminism for me.

I dye my hair because I like changing its colour, not because I want to conform to the norms of society. I use eyeliner because I like the way I look with it – not because I want to look pretty for some guy (or a girl, for that matter), but because I want to like what I see when I look into the mirror. Of course, society shapes us in so many ways – society teaches us what is pretty and what is not; to a large extent, at least, because there is also something like universal attractiveness that is, for instance, found in symmetry and is not a construct of society, but has been quite prevalent throughout history and cultures. But society does not necessarily dictate what I like, even if I am very aware that it does play a role.

This is certainly something where the media come in, in depicting what is in and what is out of fashion. Still, I do not see why being a feminist should mean that we must not pick up on some fashion trend if we like it. In the same vein, why can we

not be a feminist and a happy house wife if that is what we wish for our lives and our own personal fulfilment? After all, one of the points of criticism on second wave feminism was that working class women were being excluded, since the idea of the woman staying home never applied to them in the first place. We have come a long way, and still, there is so much left to do – so how could I not see myself as a feminist?

Another aspect I absolutely agree with is that it was mentioned that feminism should also include queer studies. Being not quite the cliché straight woman myself, I could not agree more. That, too, is an aspect of choice, after all – the choice of being true to who we are and want to be. Feminism takes a stand against hegemonic patriarchy, which does not only suppress women, but anybody who is not an “alpha male”. In this way, it is absolutely agreeable for me that feminism, especially queer feminism, does not pretend to be neutral – after all, hegemonic patriarchy is anything but neutral as well, and one can only fight fire with fire.

Feminism, for me, is about equality – and therefore, it has to be inclusive. So yes, subscribing to those ideals, I am a feminist, whichever kind of a feminist that may be. The first session seemed to have the effect on me that I found myself drawn to and agreeing to various kinds of feminism, each next one giving an additional layer to what I felt feminism to be for me. Maybe, I am a bit of everything.

What I really looked forward to in this course was the whole issue of the media and feminism – of how culture is contested, how it develops, how anxieties are negotiated or quieted, how we are looking at things and at ourselves, which perspective we use. The mass media have a popular appeal, and in a global world, one might wonder how dominant views are expressed or questioned all over the world, how people abroad react to certain views. The whole complexity of the matter, seen through the lens of feminism made me look forward to the course. I wondered how my own approach to the media might change over time. Of course, I inform myself via the internet, but I hardly saw myself as particularly critical when it comes to TV series or films, for instance. I guess that has changed a lot over the course of the seminar.

3. Texts and Videos that Struck Me the Most in the Course

As the first text in the seminar, Sue Thornham’s text¹ of course stuck in my head. My group dealt with the question of how we can learn to be a feminist. I was rather irritated

¹ Thornham, Sue (2007). “Introduction: Thinking Women/Media/Feminism.” *Women, Feminism and the Media*. Edinburgh UP: 1-22.

by the fact that Thornham does not seem to give a straightforward answer. However, what we did come up with were narratives: Narratives may stabilise and constrain our self-understanding, but they may also generate a feeling of unease, displacement, or difference when we are confronted with stories that do not quite fit in. Thus, being a feminist means, in this respect, to actively construct one's own identity. We agreed with Thornham that the agency any individual has exceeds the power by which the individual is enabled. The very first step for all of us is to be aware of our shared position, no matter our differences otherwise, in a situation of unequal power positions – the situation of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, we first need to recognise the conventional narratives of society, notice them, in order to contradict them.

This initial step into feminism and media studies already showed me things I was hardly aware of: Where are all the women in the media industry? Women are oppressed in several ways – as workers in the film industry and in the way that they are only being packaged as images, which might be the very reason for their absence in the male-centred film theory. Thinking about it, I realised that I do not know any great female film producer, while several men immediately come to mind. In films or texts, too, the subject position is usually occupied by a male – why is that?

The pictures we get to see are mostly male fantasies. Then, again, this does seem to shift lately. One series I have been watching is *Outlander* (since I had read a few of the books), and that series mostly focuses on the female lead rather than her love interest and clearly deals rather with female fantasies. Still, is this not merely subverting the male gaze in objectifying the man instead of the woman? But then again, is that a bad thing?

Often enough, stereotypes only become clear if they are subverted or displaced. Very recently, I have watched a sketch in *Tracey Ullman's Show*² which takes the sadly still prevailing victim-blaming in sexual assaults into another context. Here, a man in a suit files a complaint for having been mugged and robbed, and the lady blames him for having invited the assailant to mug and rob him by dressing in a way that makes him look rich. She bluntly tells the man that he is partly to blame because he did not scream or make it clear to the assailant that he did not “enjoy” handing over his possessions, while he protests, in vain, that the assailant threatened him with a knife

² Ullman, Tracey: “What Were You Wearing?” Season 2, Episode 6. BBC One. YouTube. Last Accessed 23 March 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51-hepLP8J4>

and that he was scared. She even goes further in the sketch, when the interview is interrupted by a colleague mentioning someone who has been assaulted via e-mail, and she suggests that the person in question probably caused the problem by using a “coquettish” font. Put into a different context, the true sadness and ridiculousness of victim-blaming in sexual assaults becomes more than obvious.

The question remains where all the women are in the mass media. The divide between “high” and “low” culture equalling the divide between “male” and “female” has been there for a very long time – something Thornham also mentions and something we began to discuss in the course. Our culture is gendered – it has been and still is. It is quite shocking to realise that when a man produces something it will be seen as something detached, but when a woman produces something, it is seen as rooted in her femininity. This is a fact I have only subconsciously been aware of.

Also, the problem of increasingly blurred boundaries between “male” and “female” genres is something I have not been aware of as a problem. Truth is that I have to agree with Thornham that this is a way of silencing feminism by giving the appearance that everything has been achieved. I had a short discussion with my grandma a little while ago, where she actually said something along those lines – that we, here in our society, do not really need feminism as much as it may be needed in other places of the world. I only had to remind her of the still existing pay gap to turn her around completely. She agreed with me immediately and, in fact, got really angry about this still existing issue.

A first step of being a feminist, therefore, is raising awareness – one’s own as well as that of other people around us – and of telling our own story, constructing our identity. Identity is always a construct – so, if we tell our story, do we tell it as a woman? As a feminist? We may re-write it and withstand conventionality if we can – and get others thinking by that. Which is something that leads me on to a point where I feel irritated by Thornham. I agree with her on the problem that women are mostly the consumers of media, not the producers, and that, therefore, it is men’s ideas of how women are that we get to see. I also agree that this still existing notion of high culture equalling male and low culture equalling female works is highly disturbing. I do not agree, however, with her complaint that women are overly represented as spectacles and excluded in genres pertaining to the real world: What came to my mind

immediately when I read that paragraph³ was the news – and I see a lot of female news reporters today on every channel. Another aspect we mentioned in the course was the increasing amount of women as producers, especially on DIY media like YouTube. However, one may ask what “kind” of women we get to see there: Undoubtedly, the majority is young, white, and pretty.

The major problem I had while reading the text, though, was Thornham’s criticism on the ambivalence towards feminism marked by the emergence of the “post-feminist heroine”. Thornham claims that the stances taken these days, embodied by such heroines, are rather ironic and playful with regard to feminism, putting feminism as something that belongs to the past, whereas the “post-feminist heroine” stands for individualism, sophistication, and choice. But are individualism and choice not precisely the central points of feminism? At least for me, they are.

The problem I do see, however, arises when such modern, individual “heroines” say that they want nothing to do with feminism. In my opinion, this is caused partly by the problem I faced myself: What is feminism? How can we define it? Depending on the definition, I myself would have doubts about calling myself a feminist. The claims that feminism is passé, superfluous, and old-fashioned are perhaps also caused by wrong notions about what feminism actually means and by societal shifts that make feminism seem unfavourable and unattractive to some – or perhaps even ridiculous. After all, if we have achieved everything already, why keep fighting? And if feminism is regarded as prudish, unaesthetical, and sex-negative, of course nobody wants to identify with it. But as I have noticed after reading only one single text, we are much further from having achieved everything than I thought.

A major problem in this respect is addressed by Rosalind Gil⁴ - namely the problem of a new kind of sexism that masks itself by irony and thus becomes acceptable. After all, who would be so prudish to not take a joke? This stance truly makes feminism appear passé, old-fashioned, prudish, and humour-less, while at the same time reinforcing just the same old sexist images we thought we had long left behind us. In this way, I see this new sexism as something very dangerous indeed. The problem is how to counter this development.

³ Thornham: p. 21

⁴ Gil, Rosalind (2011): „Sexism Reloaded, or, It’s Time to Get Angry Again!“ *Feminist Media Studies* 11. 1: 61-71.

What we are supposed to do if we want to be successful as women in our society, is also a question that remains. I am a visual creature, so, admittedly, pictures, videos, and things like that stay with me more than texts. And while Nicki Minaj is not necessarily the musician I listen to, her video “Anaconda”⁵ and the accompanying article by Carmen Rios ⁶ gave me food for thought. The discussion we had made me aware of a problem: Giving in to what (male) society desires – and exaggerating those expectations and desires – can make you very successful. Minaj’s video performance is very “in your face” – but she earns a tremendous amount of money with what she does. She is a successful woman, a survivor in a male-dominated domain – a female rapper – she displays her sexuality openly. But in doing that, she objectifies herself. Of course, she is very aware of the fact that she will be objectified anyway, so she goes ahead and does it herself – and earns a fortune with it. It struck me that her video features almost women only – all of them objectified, and Minaj taking centre stage in the whole thing – except for one very passive man towards the end who seems overwhelmed by Minaj. One could see this as a possible counter-measure to the new sort of ironic sexism, in some ways.

On the other hand, taking this stance poses a certain danger: Giving in to those societal desires also reaffirms them, just like it reaffirms the new, seemingly acceptable sexism. Of course, Minaj’s stance of presenting herself as a bitch and a sexual object makes sense just as well – since people will objectify her anyway, she may just as well do it herself and earn money with it. We discussed in the course, that she actually does not call herself a feminist, despite the fact that she takes a very dominant role in her video. Once again, I also see the problem of choice: Why should a woman not be allowed to actively objectify herself in this way if this is what she wants and chooses to do and is successful with it? It is her choice, after all, and feminism is about choice.

I think the new kind of sexism definitely plays a prominent role here in many ways. It is internalised – but it is not only oppressive. Minaj definitely uses society’s sexist attitudes as a way of empowering and expressing herself. As many other women, she actively participates in a rather self-ironic way, empowering herself. But at the same time she reinforces the stereotypes we wanted to eliminate. In this way, by

⁵ Minaj, Nicki: “Anaconda”. YouTube. Last Accessed 23 March 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDZX4ooRsWs>

⁶ Rios, Carmen (2014): “Nicki Minaj’s Feminism Isn’t About Your Comfort Zone: On ‘Anaconda’ and Respectability Politics.” *Autostraddle*. Autostraddle.com. Last Accessed 23 March 2017.

playing along and empowering themselves in this manner, women, it seems to me, somehow betray their sisters by objectifying us all once more. Thus, the true problem is the ambivalence: There are two sides of the same coin. I agree with Rios's statement that this is definitely not within any comfort zone, and thus, it gives us something to discuss.

Another visual spectacle that gave us some food for discussion was definitely *Thelma and Louise*⁷. I had not seen the film before and did not even really know what to expect, so I watched it before the session to be able to contribute to the discussions we were likely to have – and I must say that I really liked it. It is yet another example of blurred genres – something that has been problematized, but that, for some reason, I really like. After all, life itself seems to me to be full of blurred boundaries and mixed genres. Thus, we found aspects of the Road Movie, the Western, the Thriller, but also of a reinterpreted version of a “Bromance” using female instead of male protagonists.

It was interesting to “test” the film according to the Bechdal test and the problem of the masculine gaze that Laura Mulvey points out⁸. *Thelma and Louise* truly puts the two women in the centre: They interact with each other, they do not just talk about their love interests, and they are protagonists, not objects. Thus, the film passes the Bechdal test: Here, women clearly have agency instead of being annihilated. However, the subversion is only partly worked out, despite the fact that the film has an iconic status as a feminist film: The male gaze is still there – the two women are undeniably attractive, and there is such a thing as a “sexy female outlaw” – something the two women can be seen as. However, then again, which woman would not want to be attractive? Thelma and Louise are characters we might want and be able to relate to. There are no male heroes in the film, except perhaps the local cop (who actually fails). The one person who becomes objectified in the film is Brad Pitt, whereas the two women are clearly in the focus.

Of course, a central point here is our own viewing pleasure, and that may be especially true for women in this case, because Thelma and Louise might act over the top, but their actions echo of justly deserved revenge on misogynist males. Thus, especially the rape scene was dramatic – and tragic – but very understandable and, in a way, gratifying. Which woman would not like to teach some misogynist a lesson?

⁷ *Thelma and Louise* (1998). Dir. Ridley Scott. Twentieth Century Fox. DVD.

⁸ Mulvey, Laura (1999): “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP. 833-844.

Our discussion was very interesting for me, in that respect: We seemed to agree on this scene, but the other “revenge scene” with the truck driver left us with mixed feelings: It was comic, no doubt (contrary to the rape scene), and it gave us that pleasure of revenge, but it was also clear that that man obviously did not understand at all why Thelma and Louise reacted the way they did. In order to teach someone a lesson, that person has to understand what she or he has done wrong first.

An interesting aspect for me was that the two women basically still only react – they do take action, but in reaction to male actions. Even here, the men drive the action. There is a subversion going on, with the men ending up as the ones who get punished: Thelma and Louise react to violence against women by stopping the men, insisting on an apology, and – using violence. Does this mean that women have no choice and have to be violent themselves if mistreated this way? The ending left me with a somewhat sour feeling, even though I did understand why the two women had to die.

Suicide was their last chance at freedom, at making their own decision. Still, the morale of the ending seemed rather tragic to me – the two feminist women have to die, because they stood up against patriarchal society. My consolation, in a way, was that, for one thing, the ending was incredibly wonderfully done, and for another thing, that we discussed the original genres the film draws on: First of all, it is over the top, a fantasy, a utopia – and it has to be, in order to teach society a lesson. Second, in the original genres, the guys usually have to die in the end in order to remain true to themselves – they are outlaws and cannot possibly go to jail. This helped me to reconcile myself with the ending, in a way, because it explained to me why a happy ending, considering the genres, was simply not possible.

All those genres the film seems to echo are typically male – so, putting two women in the central role already changes a lot, despite the fact that the film is still only partly a subversion. But even though the male gaze is still present, we all noticed how the development especially of Thelma was mirrored in her appearance. She starts out with a very feminine style, but over the course of the film, both women adopt a more masculine style and finally end up with what we called a more “nude”, queer, essential appearance. We also noticed that, even though the main roles were occupied by women instead of men, there was no actual feminisation of the genres themselves. This is something I thoroughly enjoyed, because it seems to counteract the problem

pointed out by Sue Thornham that anything a woman does is seen as rooted in her femininity, whereas a man can produce something seen as detached and neutral. *Thelma and Louise* is, for me, a great counter-example for society in this respect.

The film got me thinking about where to draw the line when it comes to using violence: When is it an act of protest, a riot, a revolution, or when is it terrorism? And which perspective do we take on that matter? It is in situations like the rape scene in the film that we realise just how much the standards of our society are rooted in structures of power, violence, and fear. Thus, despite the fact that I personally would have wished for *Thelma and Louise* to take more initiative action instead of reacting to actions by men, maybe it is actually a good and logical thing that they rather react and, in some ways, serve poetic justice. All the more tragic then that they pay with their lives, even though this fact is given by the genre itself. The film truly touched me and taught me to look at films and series through another lens – which was, incidentally, one thing I hoped to see in this course.

A thing none of us could foresee was that, despite his more than questionable actions, Donald Trump would be elected as President of the United States. We discussed the matter at length, and of course, we all felt affected by the events. Sure, one could talk endlessly about this whole topic, and I really found the short “voices and responses”⁹ we got to read as well as the background information on feminism being blamed for economic changes of a post-Fordist America very insightful. Susan Faludi responds to the criticism of the second wave for being too one-sided and argues to pay more attention to ability, class, geography, and race and include all women instead of just a small portion. She addresses the gap between working class women and those of a higher education in a country pretending that class does not even exist. Trump made those working class people feel spoken to. Patricia Williams depicts the current emotional state that makes it possible for someone like Trump to gather supporters by evoking old tropes of a threatened America and frightened white women who need his protection – contrary to the “nasty women” who do not deserve such protection. Those explanations were very insightful for me, since I could not understand at all how anyone could support Trump in the first place.

⁹ Handout by Greta Olson: Class 7, November 28: Misogyny and the 2016 Presidential Elections. Voices by Susan Faludi, Patricia Williams, Robin Morgan, Patricia Hill Collins.

Robin Morgan clearly pinpoints it all down as a battle hegemonic patriarchy is fighting against women, all the more ferociously because the system as such just like the US themselves are at the end of empire and thus are likely to get “nasty” and self-defensive. Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, has been accused of not being emotional, which actually shows the paradox yet again that, whatever a woman does, it will always be linked to the fact that she is a woman. Clinton does not behave womanly enough, but on the other hand, would she behave in a more traditionally female way, she would be accused for that and be said to be unfit for the job. We discussed the fact that, in her feminist generation, one had to be sober to be heard at all, so she actually is simply a child of her time. Trump, on the other hand, is a media spectacle, as Morgan points out. Apart from that, he is a “big man”, an authoritarian patriarch – and somehow, those characters seem to come back recently. People seem to long for them in times when they feel lost, and Trump surely is an example for an alpha male within hegemonic masculinity. Obviously, the pejorative, classicist reactions of calling his supporters dumb hardly made things any better – of course, nobody wants to be called stupid.

The one good thing we saw in the whole affair was that the elections truly woke and politicised the public, and not just in the US. Patricia Hill Collins seems rather bitter and disappointed to me, and I understand her point of view. Still, she also says that she will keep on fighting. Which raises the question we discussed in the session of whether we need a revolution or a reform. I personally would opt for the latter whenever possible – destroying everything and starting from scratch may be the best solution at times, but it will always come at high costs for everyone. On the other hand, if we work on and with what we have, old structures may prevail and sneak in again after a while. Old habits die hard, and our society has been patriarchal for centuries.

The election campaign gave us an incredible amount of examples of misogyny to discuss, and we came up with a number of categories to hurt women. I had hardly thought about categorising these things before – and I was only dimly aware of the fact that, indeed, there seem to be many more ways to insult a woman than to insult a man. In the latter case, insulting a man is quite often done by emasculation, thus again related to femininity. It was shocking and yet fascinating to look at the various forms of misogyny Trump and others employ and make a category-list of them. It seems to me that all the motifs are interrelated: “Leaky women” and “ugly” women are

disgusting because a woman's sole purpose is to be viable as a sex object. This is also connected to the notion that women are lower on the hierarchy than men and closer to animals – thus, women also are uncivilised in their (emotional) reactions and are hysterical and stupid compared to the rational male. They are unable to control their sexual behaviour, they need to be dominated – and ultimately, the double standard is reinforced in slut-shaming on the one hand and total dominance over women on the other. It seems incredible to me that these tropes, ancient as they are, are still in such effective use. And they hurt. The realisation comes with a certain bitterness that, as a fellow student once pointed out in another seminar, as a woman, you are a slut, no matter what you do. If you agree to go home with some guy at the bar and have a one night stand, you are a slut. If you refuse him, he will also call you a slut. This problem is something men never seem to have to face. And now, a man who objectifies his own daughter has become President of the United States.

The reactions to Trump were truly stunning, in my opinion: I loved Michelle Obama's speech¹⁰, I loved how she combines passion with stating the facts, how she personalises the whole matter and seems to speak to everyone, empowering women *and* men. This speech was truly inspiring. The video by Pussy Riot¹¹ was very visual, very graphic – and shocking in its imagery. The pseudo-documentary-news report style makes it all the more real. Where Michelle Obama is calling us to action with an appeal to morality, decency, good common sense, Pussy Riot goes for graphic.

Michelle Obama is passionate, yet in control – a woman I can certainly look up to – she deconstructs Trump's nostalgia of making America great again and puts it against a very different picture of a sexist past, and she also categorically dismisses his excuse of locker room talk. She uses affective argumentation, while Pussy Riot gives a rather scary outlook into what Trump's ideology could actually look like if taken to an extreme. The associations with Nazism/Fascism on the one hand and BDSM on the other paint a grim picture. Humans, especially women, are treated worse than animals, being branded, imprisoned, raped, and subjected to pain of all kinds, they have no right, not even over their own body, and they are oppressed in manifold ways: Trump's ideals have been thought through in the video, the consequences being misogyny,

¹⁰ "Michelle Obama's Speech on Donald Trump's Alleged Treatment of Women." *NPR.org*, 13 Oct. 2016. Last Accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

¹¹ Pussy Riot: "Make America Great Again." YouTube. 27 Oct. 2016. Last Accessed 04 April 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-bkFo30o2o>

xenophobia, fat-shaming, racism, pro-life, and anti-LGBTQ-actions. “Make America Great Again” is repeated over and over, and one wonders what this “great” is supposed to be and for who, since it obviously tortures and kills women – and anyone who might not fit into the system. A truly shocking vision of the future, where people do not even have the chance to flee, because they are imprisoned in the system itself. Trump’s slogan becomes a very sarcastic and unsettling idea indeed.

Another thing that unsettled me just as much as the video, though in a somewhat different way, was the session we had on the Alt-Right. I must admit that I had never heard of that or Breitbart before. They seem to fit perfectly into the category of the new kind of sexism, using a seemingly humorous and ironic approach, thus justifying the very questionable things they say. Of course, they also claim that they are merely sticking to the 2nd Amendment and have every right to use radical free speech. What scared me, however, is the ideology they obviously sell in this seemingly ironic, “free” speech – and the power they have. In trolling Hillary Clinton like they did, they definitely helped Trump a good deal. It really unsettled me that the misogynist alpha male behaviour actually seems to work – looking at myself, I wondered what kind of woman would actually want to be with a man behaving like that. I could never understand women who fall for that kind of man, and I guess I never will understand them. The idea of looking into the Alt-Right and finding alternative sources for or contradictions in their “facts” is something a part of me would love to do – however, another part warns me that this would probably not be very good for my health and nerves.

The body art¹² in protest to Trump was also very visual and thus spoke to me at once, though it was not as gory as the video by Pussy Riot. But it struck me as a very personalising response. His words – words he dismisses as locker room talk, as jokes – are used in a literal sense, on the very “object” he is referring to in them, thus making this a very powerful visual reaction. Another major reaction that amazed me personally was how many people actually went on protest marches, not just in the US, but all over the world. I am used to the German people being very, very reluctant to go and protest on the streets (except perhaps in Berlin), so this was all the more impressive, and while I followed the movement on Twitter, I feel almost ashamed that I did not find the time to actively join one of those marches.

¹² Longingforus. “SignedByTrump” *Longingforus.tumblr.com*. 8 Dec. 2016. Last Accessed 12 Dec 2016.

Instead, I liked and shared a lot of contributions on Twitter, but it feels somewhat hollow. The social media have tremendous impact today, but I began to ask myself the question we also raised in the course: Where do we want to place our activism? I have not come to a straightforward answer to that, since, yes, of course, actually being *there* is a whole different matter from sitting comfortably at home in front of your computer and sharing things you would not be able to share if others were not out there actively doing something. On the other hand, the internet spreads ideas on a worldwide scale and makes it easy to share thoughts and reach people, especially when you are on a tight schedule and cannot really go to the places you would need and want to be.

The inherent anonymity of the internet also poses dangers, though. While, if being out there in person, we may also face dangers, the dangers we face in the internet are something many in the course were familiar with on a personal level. The behaviour people display online would be outrageous in real life, and yet, it seems people feel sheltered by their anonymity, sheltered enough to go to extremes instead of keeping some decency. Or, due to written statements and no voice, intonation, or explanation to go with them, people may misunderstand each other and things escalate much quicker than they normally would. Cyberbullying is nothing new – and here, too, the attacks are gendered. The scariest scenario is certainly if a troll threatens you and actually finds out where you live, so that you truly begin to fear for your safety. But trolling and cyberbullying can also affect you psychologically. The categories of e-bile that Emma A. Jane digs into¹³ seem quite familiar to me already: Men are emasculated by being feminised or depicted as sexually incapable, while women are ugly, hysterical, stupid, or need to be subjected to violent sexual acts as a corrective – similar notions to the categories we had found for Trump’s misogyny.

It seems to be a natural reaction for most women to feel more threatened by such attacks, and I must admit that I see myself as lucky for not having been subject to much of trolling. There was only one instance that really stuck in my head in that respect, and that was something that happened to me on YouTube in the comments-section to a video that dealt with the question whether or not women should shave their private zones. Sadly, I cannot find the video anymore, because the whole thing

¹³ Jane, Emma A. (2012): “You’re a Ugly, Whorish, Slut.” *Feminist Media Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2012.741073. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.741073>

happened quite some time ago, but it seems that I am not the only woman who has been assaulted in the way I was. Oddly enough, the assaults always seem to come from men.

All I did was write a comment in which I agreed with the general stance of the video, that it is up to personal taste and completely okay if a woman does not want to shave. A guy commented on my comment and began to complain that that was very unfair, since women want men to shave their beards, but they themselves do not want to shave their privates for their men, and that he would insist that any woman he was with should shave if she wanted to go to bed with him.

Things escalated rather quickly, when I asked if he was seriously comparing a beard to one's private zone. Despite the fact that I had never actually stated what I personally do with my private parts, he was quick to accuse me of not shaving at all and thus being dirty, disgusting, ugly, and not attractive for any man whatsoever, until another man jumped into the comments and actually defended me. It still makes me angry that it took another guy to shut this man up – as if my voice, being a woman, did not count – and yet, I was also grateful for the fact that it was a man who contradicted the ridiculous statement that *all* men want women to be shaved. It was pretty ridiculous and did not make me feel threatened – it was rather an annoyance. This is yet another instance that reminded me that there are still enough patriarchy out there who seem to regard women as their possession instead of allowing us the freedom of choice over our own bodies. That is something that will probably never cease to upset me – and it is just one more reason why I call myself a feminist.

4. Conclusion

Over the course of the seminar, my view on media has certainly changed. If I want to, I feel I can now look at series and films through a lens I did not have to this extent before the seminar. I also think that yes, I am a feminist, and that I am now more confident in defining what I truly mean by that – and what I do not mean. Furthermore, I can now name a good number of reasons for calling myself a feminist. I would definitely call myself a queer feminist – I would probably also subscribe to third wave feminism. I guess the topics that stuck most in my head were the whole issue concerning Trump, with our discussions on the systematic misogyny of hegemonic patriarchy, Pussy Riot, and Michelle Obama's speech, and as another thing the film *Thelma and Louise*.

One thing I had expected to see in the course that we did not really address was the depiction of feminism in the media. It was hinted at occasionally, but somehow, I would have liked to see a bit more of that. But since Trump happened, of course, our focus was naturally drawn to that matter, where there was so much to discuss. Still, I wonder to what extent and where feminism is portrayed in the media – and, especially, if that portrayal is truthful. The course encouraged me to engage more with the problems we discussed, and while I can relate to the bitterness Patricia Hill Collins seems to feel over Trump’s election, I can absolutely agree with her stance to keep on fighting. After all, we are far from done.

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