FEMINIST RETHINKINGS OF THE CONCEPT OF 'DISCOURSE'
2 credits

Erzsébet Barát
zsazsa@lit.u-szeged.hu

Monday, 17:20-19:00

Course Description:
The participants in the course will become familiar with the main shifts in the conceptualizations of 'discourse' since its emergence in the 1960s and their feminist contestations. The discussions of the weekly readings will be concerned with the key social theories of how meaning comes to be articulated in and through institutionally regulated intersubjective encounters of sign usage. The central category of analysis, the (linguistic) semiotic concept of these models, 'discourse' is defined – albeit in different ways – as a form of social practice. In short, the course is designed to make students see (1) for what reasons 'discourse' is not a category of language or any other sign system only and (2) the ways in which any naming of a particular discourse could be justified/substantiated in our research. The first half of the course is meant to cover the major social models by Foucault and Habermas and the second half is designed to focus on the changes of the conceptualizations when addressed from a feminist perspective. The last two topics of the course will introduce students to the recent achievements of critical studies of discourse in linguistics and their relevance for feminist research. The central question that guides these feminist encounters is: What can a given theory of discourse offer for feminism when exploring the representation of 'woman'? How does the very concept of representation change within the particular discursive models of meaning making?

Learning Outcome:
The students will identify the development of the key aspects of a discoursal approach to meaning (semiosis) in relation to power – i.e. the institutions to which a particular discourse is related, the positions it marks out for the participants, the potential relations it constructs between them, and the presuppositions its logic takes for granted. They will be able articulate the arguments as developed by feminist critical rethinking in favor of the changes they propose. Students will also learn to work with others in the exploration of the difference a discoursal approach to signification has for the understanding of what may count as 'knowledge' of women’s lived experiences once the meaning of 'woman' is not reduced either to a sign or is taken as obvious reflections of a pre-given social reality. They will also learn to rearticulate (some of) the questions they are planning to investigate in their own projects.

Assessment:
Participation in discussions: 40%
In class paper (2 hour long): 60%

Readings for the 13 weeks of instruction: