

Transforming the Terms of Reading



Ideologies of Argument and the Trope of the Angry Feminist

Contemporary U.S. political and academic discourse abounds with a recurring set of formulaic claims that feminist scholars (and feminists in general) are angry, unreasoning, shrill, humorless, ugly, man-hating, perverse, and peculiar. This “trope of the angry feminist” is designed to delegitimize feminist argument even before the argument begins, to undermine feminist politics by making its costs personal, and to foreclose feminist futures by making feminism seem repulsive to young women.¹ The trope is a convention, a plot trick, a setup, a narrative structure, a character type.² Its incessant repetition constitutes part of a *cultural training program* that makes antifeminism and misogyny a routine element in everyday speech and written argument. Instigated by expressly *political* opposition to feminism, deploying affectively charged strategies that float free of evidence, clichés like the angry feminist put animosity—not argument—at the center of political discussions, interpellating readers as *always already antifeminist*. The repetition and circulation of such tropes produces a cumulative overdetermined quality that makes them seem already true before the moment of argument. One never encounters the feminist’s argument for the first time because it comes already discredited. Because the trope of the angry feminist encourages unacknowledged ways of interpreting feminist affect, its inveterate irruption is consequential in journalism, entertainment, political, and quasi-intellectual arenas, as I describe in this introductory chapter. It is perhaps even more consequential in its influence on academic discourses, the subject of the remainder of the book: affect in academic discourses on social

justice is often policed through “ideologies of style” that purport to be neutral but operate to entrench current conditions of power.

In this book I argue that we have failed to theorize adequately the role of such pervasive affective and ideologically encapsulated arguments in academic and political discourses. In consequence, we do not recognize that our conventional reading practices mislead us about ways to comprehend and counter them. I argue that *transforming the terms of reading* can reframe the problem, and propose for that purpose a critical toolkit that I call “feminist socioforensic discursive analysis.”

My argument here constitutes a provocation to transform the terms of reading, to reframe interpretation of affect in both feminist and antifeminist writing. The trope of the angry feminist is a familiar conceit, like many similar phrases deployed to delegitimize social criticism, one that draws on a deep well of related clichés, affective rhetorical strategies, and familiar tropes. These discursive moves circulate as instantiations of power. The trope of the angry feminist presents itself as fresh each time it is uttered, its repetitious banality framed as mere reflection of the repetitious banality of the feminist’s argument. This leads to the absurd but politically efficacious situation where readers are weary of arguments they have never heard. These argumentative tactics often succeed in part because our normal reading and writing practices lead us to object or counterargue in ways that fail to come to grips with the specific nature of the rhetorical situation that the tropes instantiate. Our conventional reading practices reinscribe ways of thinking that seem “logical” or “fair” because they are so familiar; they lead us to treat the tropes as surface features of discourse that serve to “skew” debate from its direct and proper form. These conventional practices, permeated by unacknowledged power relations, encourage us to respond to the tropes “normatively,” with reproaches about textual etiquette, textual responsibility, or textual appropriateness, to complain about inadequate evidence, to provide counterexamples, or to condemn the person proffering the trope, as though its use violates an agreement about the proper nature of civic discussion, and as if there is a mechanism of accountability. None of this is the case. Responses that might chastise, correct, or even complain about the trope of the angry feminist are inadequate in part because they rest, ultimately, on an imaginary ideal: a discursive arena regulated by impartial principles in which utterances are adjudicated by unbiased observers.

Framing political and even academic discussion in this commonsense way treats rhetoric as a neutral technology to be deployed or evaluated in isolation from its conditions of production, the situations of speakers, or the general societal power relations that give utterances friendly to prevailing

power relations an overdetermined “reasonableness” while rendering most oppositional arguments automatically suspect. Our reading practices *already* rest on uninterrogated and deeply gendered and racialized models of textuality, argument, authorship, politeness, and emotion. Under such conditions, affect is a potent tool of dominance, infusing the reading situation to teach us what power is, who has it, how to get it, how to be rewarded, and how to avoid the punishments power can deliver. Louis Althusser (1971) argues that concrete individuals become constituted as “subjects” through ideology, but the most powerful ideological influences do not come to us in the form of ideological pronouncements. That would make them visible, controversial, and refutable. Instead, he argues, the most powerful ideologies exist in “apparatuses,” in practices, and these practices are always material. Reading, writing, and argument are social practices sedimented with ideologies of legitimacy, propriety and fairness so powerful and pervasive that we presuppose their value rather than examining their effects.

I have proposed a way of reading—feminist socioforensic discursive analysis—to reshape how we construe, critique, and transcend the always already gendered nature of public and scholarly texts, to call into question their interpretation, their disaggregation, and the consequences of their framing texts as “objective” or “subjective,” as “scientific” or “political.” As Karen Newman argues, “. . . it is not a question of seeing the woman, of putting ‘woman’ into discursive circulation, but of transforming the terms of reading by mobilizing a variety of texts and stories . . . We need a different kind of textual intercourse, a promiscuous conversation of many texts . . .” (1991, 146). Examining “a promiscuous conversation of many texts” with an eye toward the operations of affect and power allows us to talk about discursive patterns, about systemic ways of shaping arguments, about discursive technologies of power. It allows us to see how particular rhetorical strategies and discursive contexts are used and reused to create hierarchy and reestablish racialized and gendered authority. It helps us distinguish between the power of particular individuals and groups and the power of larger discursive arenas. Transforming the terms of reading focuses our attention on how the terms of the larger discursive arena can disable us, but also on how we can develop countermoves to negotiate these effects. It requires acknowledging that our arguments are always situated within fields of power.³

Feminist socioforensic discursive analysis provides a critique of the ideologies of argument that permeate both academic and political argumentation about issues of social justice. It is a form of descriptive theory that examines the contours of feminist and antifeminist controversies, treating them symptomatically and diagnostically to reveal how everyday and scholarly deployments

of affect function as technologies of power.⁴ It connects discursive arenas generally disaggregated by the disciplines to demonstrate the significant costs of our boundary practices: the promiscuous conversation of texts in social life compels any one utterance to function as a node in a broader discursive network. Feminist socioforensic discursive analysis seeks to enhance the work of the disciplines by challenging unacknowledged racialized and gendered ideologies of argument that frame and exclude certain kinds of claims and evidence in specific disciplines. The more fervently conventional practices shut down debate by defending themselves as neutral, the more their political nature is revealed.

The trope of the angry feminist draws from a deep well of related clichés, affective rhetorical strategies, and familiar tropes that are deployed routinely in our society to denigrate a broad range of political claims by people of color, antiracists, lesbians and gays, liberals, and even Democrats. In fact, conflating the claims of such disparate groups of social critics, as such tropes do, renders diverse political actors as united, multitudinous and powerful in a starkly Manichean worldview of good and bad people. The countless irruptions of the trope of the angry feminist and its equivalents do not simply emerge spontaneously from a simmering core of misogyny and racism. They are deployed deliberately as part of a set of productive tools carefully calculated for use on behalf of conservative social movements that have devoted enormous resources to reinforcing their own interests and to suppressing social movements that do not align with them.⁵ To mask their defense of sedimented privileges, these discourses prime publics to see difference through a lens of antipathy. As a result, feminists and other social critics must make arguments about power and social inequities in a political arena animated by animus.

As a frankly “political” tool—a tool to shape social relationships involving authority and power—the trope is ready for deployment on any occasion when the term *feminist* is used, whether there is “provocation” or not. For example, in late September 2008, the University of California announced it had approved a graduate program at UC Santa Barbara that would offer master’s and doctoral degrees in Feminist Studies.⁶ The brief announcement soon came to the attention of talk radio host and syndicated columnist “Dr. Laura” Schlessinger. In a series of comments on her blog and in the *Santa Barbara News-Press*, Schlessinger presents herself as disheartened by the new program because it would be “sending graduates off into their lives as angry, bitter, paranoid harridans who cannot imagine being in any way dependent on or respectful of men and masculinity” (“Save Us from Feminist Studies,” October 9, 2008).⁷ Returning to this point on October 12, Schlessinger claims

that a feminist studies degree only promotes “teaching more women to be angry and cynical” (“More on Feminist Studies,” October 12, 2008).⁸ Dr. Laura’s use of the trope asserts that feminists are just angry, unhappy people who keep bringing up things like “oppression.”⁹ She directs feminists to what Schlessinger deems more appropriate targets for their anger: in this case, the Taliban; she would like us “locked and loaded” in Afghanistan allegedly to protect Afghan women from Afghan men.¹⁰ Schlessinger does not disapprove of “anger” expressed *at* feminists, nor does she disapprove of feminist “anger”—or even killing—as long as it would be congruent with the aims of U.S. foreign policy. Affect is central to her means of persuasion: she uses “angry” rhetoric herself; she encourages readers’ “anger” at feminist ideas and also at young women who do not adopt the most traditional of gender roles.¹¹ She does so to pinpoint which kinds of people are suitable for censure and which claims can be dismissed out of hand.

Schlessinger claims that feminist professors make their students “harridans”—women who are constantly finding fault, scolding, even vicious—while *enacting* such a role herself. The public shaming of women as harridans, shrews, and scolds has a long and dishonorable history. Karen Newman’s research traces the practice to early modern England, where it served to warn women against acting freely or asserting their own ideas instead of knuckling under to the whims of their husbands. Identifying women as harridans and shrews went hand in hand with deeply misogynist fears about women’s bodies. Newman notes that public rituals punished harridans similarly to adulteresses: “an open mouth and immodest speech are tantamount to open genitals and immodest acts” (Newman 1991, 11). The Dr. Lauras of the early modern era prescribed chastity, obedience, and silence as the traits appropriate for women, even advising those already silenced to repress facial expressions or gestures that might signal opposition to their spouses (Newman 1991, 9). Without reference to this exact history, our Dr. Laura knows enough to parrot its major premises, to warn women against behavior that might not please men. She contributes to a climate where young men are authorized to berate young women who assert themselves as feminists: “Oh, do you hate men? Do you shave your legs? Are you a lesbian?”

Schlessinger’s adoption of the moniker “Dr. Laura” for her professional work as a talk-show host and commentator flags the distinction between a person, “Laura Schlessinger,” and a public persona, “Dr. Laura.” Distinguishing the two entities allows us to make more precise and productive claims about the kinds of evidence we have access to in examining a text. Schlessinger’s writings provide considerable evidence to substantiate claims about

“Dr. Laura” the persona, but almost none to substantiate claims about Schlessinger the person. “Dr. Laura” is a *package* of rhetorical devices and arguments set in certain kinds of texts presented in certain kinds of venues within a larger cultural set of discourses. “Dr. Laura” stands for the production or enactment of a specific authorial position. Since I argue that *all* authors are enactments of rhetorical packages, emphasizing this distinction does not disparage either “Dr. Laura” or Schlessinger. What it does is redirect our analytic attention to the *nature of the package* itself instead of using that package as transparent evidence about a person. I use the term *persona* (from referring to a stylized mask worn by an actor), to describe the impression of the author that we infer from a textual package. The term *persona*, however, does not solve the problem I am addressing here, because it continues to imply that the purpose of our reading is to infer truths about an individual: the “real” person behind the mask. Our inordinate attention to inferring truths about the person leads us to pass too quickly over the argument itself, the claims that should be supported by reasons or evidence. We tend to treat the inferred merit of the person as if it can stand in for the merit of the argument. But it cannot.

Distinguishing between a person Schlessinger and the textual package of “Dr. Laura” is a useful move in analysis. First, it eliminates the notion that the qualities of an individual can stand in for the qualities of an argument. This is not to say that claims about the individual are not interesting (yes, Dr. Laura may have had something of a sordid past, a divorce, racy photos, etc.), but if we discard their arguments whenever individuals evince failings, we can go nowhere. In any case, valorizing or dismissing individuals does not solve social problems. It is not productive argument. Second, the distinction positions us to eschew claims about what the persona “cannot conceive,” “fails to understand,” “believes.” Such claims cripple argument analysis because they make undue inferences about the thinking person who wrote the text. Argument is a social tool for thinking precisely because it articulates claims that may be clearer and less contradictory than could be said of what people “believe.” Arguments are articulated at a specific point in time (although subject to revision). The “beliefs” of the person who wrote the text may be subsequently swayed by counterargument and evidence. Therefore claims about what someone “believes” are far less useful than claims about the characteristics and consequences of the argument being made. Finally, bracketing the truths of Schlessinger the person allows us to examine more carefully the strategies and arguments of the package presented as “Dr. Laura” to determine exactly how it projects the *impression* of a certain kind of person.¹²

Rather than dismissing a source such as “Dr. Laura” as nonserious discourse, we need to acknowledge newspapers, talk radio, and popular books as important points of circulation for antifeminist tropes.¹³ These sites have all been infused with the discourse of contempt about academic feminism as part of a broader political and public relations campaign designed to counter the rise of antiracist and antisexist egalitarian social change in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. There is no primary point of origin for the trope of the angry feminist. It migrates back and forth across various social domains, acquiring its aura of truth because it is immediately recognizable as something we have heard before. The shared features of the trope instantiate and demonstrate its truthfulness. It is a layered claim that references previous claims in order to intimidate. It is not substantiated by its connection to evidence but through its echo of previous claims. It is not an argument but merely a “citation,” a “repetition,” a discursive circulation of power based on previous uses of the trope (consider Butler 1990, 1997 *Excitable* and Derrida 1991). That is the nature of a trope as a “common or overused theme or device.” Dr. Laura’s column does not need actual evidence about feminist studies graduate programs, because the anger and unreasonableness of feminists have already been stipulated for her readers in innumerable nightclub acts, television shows, and talk radio programs. Schlessinger’s deployment of the trope of the angry feminist illustrates a number of the trope’s main features. Its purposes are openly political; it is available for immediate use; it is timeless and contextless; it requires no research; it is unfettered from evidence; it ignores inconsistency or contradiction; it makes no attempt to be “fair”; it is impossible to refute; it allows no mechanism for rebuttal. Part of the power of the trope is exactly that it is insulated from what we might think of as correction and counterargument. It “thumbs its nose” at such attempts and uses them to reemphasize the original claims of the trope. None of this undermines the impact of the trope of the angry feminist, because its purpose is repetition. The discourse of feminism and the counterdiscourse of Dr. Laura are closely linked; the latter is designed to hide the former. Schlessinger’s use of the trope of the angry feminist is part of a political and economic apparatus designed to train everyday publics to distrust feminists, to position feminists as inappropriate citizens, “outside the economy of reason.”

Using the trope as Schlessinger does functions as part of the cumulative political work of “pounding the base,” solidifying group identity, and passing on conservative and antifeminist attitudes across generations.¹⁴ It reinforces prejudices, using contempt and exasperation to affirm already-known

“truths,” taunting current feminists and threatening potential ones. It “poisons the well” for argumentative exchange about social justice. The issue is not whether the Angry Troper or the base it pounds “believes” such claims; rather, the claims themselves (whether made by men or women) *perform, enact, and instantiate* gendered power.

The trope of the angry feminist functions forcefully to constrain and even foreclose discussions of feminist arguments in both everyday and academic arenas. As with many successful methods of misdirection, we cannot reply to it without framing our claims according to the logic of the original trope. If a question is illegitimate, all answers are going to be shaped and shaded by its illegitimacy. Whether we claim that feminists are not angry or are legitimately angry, or that some feminists have a right be angry (though, perhaps, not all), *we are responding to the logic of the trope rather than challenging it*. Whether we claim that the Angry Troper does not have evidence, or that he does not have the right evidence, or that our evidence counters his, *we are treating his claim as worthy of consideration*. We are agreeing to consider whether the value of feminism can be linked to the proper behavior and rhetoric of feminists. We are agreeing that feminists must argue their relation to reason and emotion *before* they can be conceded the right to exist and have a political stake in their society. We are treating the commonplace product of a discourse saturated with power as though it were equivalent to a thoughtful academic argument, rather than a patently illegitimate claim functioning in a discourse that asserts rather than demonstrates truth or responsibility. We are allowing antifeminists to set the terms of feminist discussion, to substitute their claims for ours, to shape the economy of our attention, to play on our emotions, to steal our intellectual efforts. In Wahneema Lubiano’s terms, we’ve been “mugged by a metaphor” (1996).

Popular discourse, the site of Dr. Laura’s arguments, is a node in a network of communications that are structured in dominance. The trope of the angry feminist may appear convincing in journalism because it is echoed constantly in advertising, entertainment, public relations, political discourse, and scholarship. Whether we notice them or not, whether we accept them or not, these displays of dominant power are meant for all of us. They “hail” us as if we are certain kinds of people—or at least ought to be. They encourage us to find certain kinds of positions “coherent” and recognize their dominance.¹⁵ While readers may adopt or resist the text’s interpellation, they nonetheless “overhear” its argument and are affected by it.

This introductory chapter examines the migrations of the trope of the angry feminist from popular to quasi-intellectual discourses, but this book

primarily focuses on its relevance for interpreting feminists' original discovery scholarship. I provide analytical tools to understand and counter the trope, but, more importantly, to reframe interpretation of both antifeminist and feminist textual affect. Feminist scholars and other women are constantly asked to defend our right to exist, our reasonableness, our emotional makeup. Accepting our assigned roles in these debates diverts scholars from more important tasks: from exploring how gender functions as a social force, revealing the mechanisms of denial and disavowal that protect unequal power, and producing ways of knowing and ways of being capable of moving us all to more just, decent, and honorable lives.

Antifeminist Affect and the Discourse of Dominance

Claims about untoward feminist emotion and irrationality are a nexus and a knot where various lines of argument are tied together. They form one of the most repeated elements inside contemporary antifeminist discourse. The trope of the angry feminist is not so much a "turn" in the use of words as a way to "turn" the argument: claims for social justice are "turned into" proof of bad character. The trope is always open to modification. Indeed, any unpleasant emotion can fit the slot of "angry," *since it is the turn that is important, not the charge itself*. The trope of the narcissistic feminist, for example, works to condemn contemporary feminists for their narcissism in comparison to the virtues of past feminists; yet those past feminists, in their own time, were argued to be narcissists in comparison to the selfless women of previous times (Tyler 2005).¹⁶ Claims about "ideology"—a system of thought—serve an important function in such arguments.¹⁷ They hold that if a feminist has an "ideology," she cannot think "for herself." She simply believes whatever feminist authorities say, their "dogma."¹⁸ If feminist "ideology" is unhappy/pathological/resentful/hate-filled, then the feminist does not control her own thinking; her ideology controls her (the way unruly emotions do).

Consider, for example, Jeffrey Hart's review in *The New Criterion* (2002) of Carolyn Heilbrun's book of memoirs (2002). In her book, Heilbrun criticizes what she argues was the sexism that she experienced when she was a graduate student and then professor in Columbia University's English Department. Proclaiming that *he* was wholly satisfied with *his own experiences* at Columbia, Hart does not attempt to determine how things might have been different for a woman in academia at that time. Instead, he asserts that Heilbrun and other feminists are simply unreasoning, angry, humorless,

man-hating, and whiny: they are virtually unhinged because their ideology has made them so. According to Hart,

If the emotions and ideas that inform it [Heilbrun's book] came to prevail generally, *life would not be worth living*. . . . Her emotions have been *so wrenched out of shape by feminist dogma* that she cannot present to the readers of her books *a recognizable shared world*. . . . The sentences I have just quoted *drip with resentment and venom*. . . . Hers is a mind *losing active cerebral cells*. . . . In this book we witness the melancholy sight of *a mind in ideologically induced disintegration*. *Her mental lens is befogged*. She has *lost the ability to see the object itself as it actually is*, certainly the *preliminary to reasonable discourse*. She is a tragedy that has happened, unless, in a tough-minded way, you may regard her as a comedy without laughter. She is *besotted with feminism*. (2002, emphasis added)

Because Hart apparently cannot see himself (and his own privileges) in Heilbrun's account, he concludes that she is befogged and besotted. Like Dr. Laura, he presents the idea of feminism as already so intolerable that he need not acknowledge any actual feminist ideas; he presents them in caricature with a confidence that characterizes use of the trope.

Deploying what Albert Memmi calls "the mark of the plural" (1965, 81), these tropes of emotion "turn" *one* feminist into *all* feminists: she is depersonalized and made "collective"; anything said by one person deemed "feminist" can be attributed to anyone else deemed feminist. The "mark of the plural" authorizes the extension of a claim based on one feminist to condemn a mass of unknown women. For example, in her book, Heilbrun indicates that she was denied the chance to teach in Columbia's acclaimed honors course because she was a woman, although she longed to teach it. She notes that she was amused to find that women graduate students later assigned to teach it "hated almost every minute of it" (2002, 23). She provides no other information about these students. Hart, who as a graduate student taught the course, positions anyone who did not like to teach it as—literally—insane:

Who were these "young women"? Clearly they were unsuited to be professors of literature, since they "hated" teaching some of the best things ever written. They surely *belonged in the Department of Abnormal Psychology*, not as teachers, to be sure, but *as objects for scientific study*. What *pathology blinded them* to the best that has been thought

and said. . . . Pretty clearly, they were *radical feminists* who were bored by great literature, “hated” it even, and instead *wanted to teach their gripes*. Harold Bloom has called this faction the “*party of resentment*.” To permit one of these *vipers* into an academic department of literature was an act of tragic folly. (2002, emphasis added)

The confidence inherent to the persona of the Angry Troper gives the Troper license to attribute pathological emotions—insanity, self-absorption, resentment, and evil—to people the Troper has never encountered. Nonetheless, the Troper argues that their manifest irrationality reinforces the importance of walling feminists off from the “economy of reason.”¹⁹ Hart argues, in essence, that their inherent bad character and irrationality make it *impossible* for the angry feminists to be “reasonable,” to join the body politic in applying logic, evidence, and shared value judgments to reach decisions. Feminists cannot even begin to reason, since they cannot apprehend the “object itself as it actually is.” They cannot present “a recognizable shared world.” If their world *were* shared, life would not be worth living.

Hart’s argument constitutes the trope of the angry feminist as a constant play on binaries. On the first side is a life worth living, a recognizable shared world, participating in the best that has been thought and said. On the other side is pathological abnormality, irrationality, resentment, venom. On the first side is the human life of clear thinking and seeing. On the other side is a life of ideologically caused unreason: obscured mental acuity, blindness, mental disintegration, brain decay. On the one side is normality and humanity; on the other side, abnormality and Otherness or nonhumanity (a viper). Binaries have long been recognized as a central and damaging way of structuring Western thought, so feminists and other thinkers have provided us with tools for reconsidering them. Helene Cixous (1980), for example, argues that binaries such as male/female or sun/moon rest on hierarchical oppositions: the first term dominates the second. This is certainly evident in Hart’s binaries. But Jacques Derrida (1978) makes a point that further clarifies how Hart’s binaries create countersubversive force. Derrida argues that the second, unprivileged term of a binary is, in fact, *indispensible* in defining the privileged term. The first term cannot be defined, or exist, or function *without* the secondary term. In this argument, rationality or clear seeing, however “self-evidently” dominant, cannot exist without irrationality, abnormality, resentment. Hart’s countersubversive discourse depends on the privileged first term to create the sense of an “ideal”: the unitary, centered, significant way of living that must be saved. But that ideal depends also on the second term to reaffirm what it is *not*: the irrational other. Without his irrational

feminist, Hart's rationality becomes unintelligible. Without her blindness, can he prove that what he sees is "the object as it really is"? Without her "venom," Hart's rhetoric might look like—venom. The logic of the binary depends on presenting as uniquely valuable and unitary its first, privileged term, dissolving the diversity of others into the disfavored secondary term. It is not surprising that examining the complexities suppressed in the second term has been a productive site for gender and racial politics that recognize and theorize difference.²⁰

It would be hard to deny that Hart uses a misogynous representation of his angry feminist. But whether or not Hart is a misogynist is beside the point. If we bracket claims about the truths of Hart-the-person, we can see some interesting complications in the nature of his emotional appeals to his audience. His appeals to fear and aversion do not center on typical misogynist targets such as female bodies. What is it that Hart presents as horrifying? The feminists' mind as *collective*. Hart's argument about the angry feminist appeals to his audience's fear of "fungibility." For the work of the trope of the angry feminist is to establish the feminists as identical to one another, interchangeable, or "fungible." That is the point of Memmi's "mark of the plural." One feminist stands for all; any can be substituted for another. Like Memmi's colonial subjects, none of the feminists constituted by the trope can be an individual *subject*. In the terms of Hart's discourse, *that* is horrifying: the loss of individual subjectivity. There are multiple sources for the cultural influences that make plausible Hart's positioning of this loss as fundamentally intolerable. I use here Nancy Armstrong's argument about the role of the British novel in creating modern subjectivity. In *How Novels Think*, Armstrong argues that the history of the modern novel and the modern subject are virtually the same, as the novel developing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created a kind of subject—"the individual"—by both appealing to and using that kind of subject:

Simply put, this class- and culture-specific subject is what we mean by "the individual." . . . *To produce an individual, it was also necessary to invalidate competing notions of the subject—often proposed by other novels—as idiosyncratic, less than fully human, fantastic, or dangerous.*" (2005, 3, emphasis added)

Hart and other Angry Tropers invalidate the feminist by defining her as less than an individual (she thinks with an "ideology," obeys a "dogma"). Her connection to others that has enabled her to effect social change positions

her as a grotesque example, an individual folded into a group. Hart and the Angry Tropers employ what they present as the distorted subjectivity of the feminist as an admonishment. It serves the purpose that Armstrong notes of the popular romance that it “renders all alternatives to such [an individual] . . . as a monstrous life form capable of transforming the individual from a self-governing citizen into an instrument of group desire” (2005, 25). This is the hinge that connects the various “categories” of social critics—feminists, gays and lesbians, people of color—that the Troper and other “conservative” discourses conflate. By assuming their connection to a larger social aggregate, feminists and other social critics threaten this notion of the individual who is sovereign and self-governing. Armstrong argues that the novel served to limit our vision of other kinds of subjects. She argues that the novel’s

phobic representations of the human aggregate made it difficult for future novelists, their critics, and readers to imagine a society in which individuals can freely pursue their desires without encroaching on the rights of others. . . . [Now] at a time when individualism has clearly achieved hegemony . . . that model of individualism went on the defensive, as if to say that the modern individual could only define him- or herself as such in opposition to an engulfing otherness, or mass, that obliterated individuality. (2005, 25)

Fear of feminism’s challenge to the idealized subject of the “individual” is part of the emotion that animates Hart’s rhetorical appeals.

The stakes of redeploying affect in the cultural training program that depends on the trope of the angry feminist come into clear relief in cultural commentator Joseph Epstein’s ridicule of feminists in the academy. Epstein, who has been lauded by William F. Buckley, Jr., as the wittiest writer alive, celebrated by the *Wall Street Journal* as America’s leading essayist, and praised in the *Atlantic Monthly* as a “brilliant polemicist” (Gioia 1991), was awarded the National Humanities Medal in 2003 by President George W. Bush.²¹ In an essay in the *Hudson Review* in 1991, Epstein presents a series of his famously “witty” remarks in an all too familiar form, “tweaking” members of the academy to emphasize what he presents as the debilitating left-wing culture of the university. Epstein claims that their emotions lead feminist academics to be irrationally out-of-control, so that “a reasonable feminist” is an oxymoron (13). Feminist academics are silly, oversensitive, and imagine themselves as victims, while actually being enormously powerful.²²

Central to Epstein's effect is drawing on old sexist jokes to speak disparagingly of academic feminists as "angry":

The feminists roll on, perpetually angry, making perfectly comprehensible the joke about the couple in their West Side Manhattan apartment who, having been robbed twice, determine to protect themselves, he wanting to get a revolver, she a pit bull, and so they agree to compromise and instead get a feminist. (28)

Feminists and other women are constantly faced with claims that they must forgive and overlook such "humorous" sexist commentary ("It's just a joke!"). The little girl who is teased should forgive the naughty boy who teases. Women who object to a joke need to "lighten up." Feminists "do not have a sense of humor." This chicanery rides on gendered notions about who should keep forgiving. It functions to misdirect attention from the grounds of the joke. It positions the jokester as always innocent, the joke itself as always funny, and the consequences of the joke as always harmless. Any objection by a feminist or other woman is eagerly taken up to "turn" the debate from whether the joke is puerile and insulting to why it is funny, why that makes it unimpeachable, and what is wrong with her if she does not think so. This sleight-of-hand hinges on mobile deployment of the notion that we all have agreed to hold "humor" as the highest value. It presupposes that we have agreed that a world of "humor" is not a political world. But it is.

Antifeminist jokes such as Epstein's function to recruit readers into discursive regimes of pleasure focused on hostility toward feminists, a kind of indirect discourse that assumes rather than argues. Thomas L. Dumm discusses Freud's theory of the joke in a way that may help us understand the economy of pleasure that Epstein offers. Freud places the third person, the audience of the joke, in a significant position. In the case of the obscene joke, the third person who laughs is "laughing as though he were a spectator of an act of sexual aggression" (Freud 1963, 97, quoted in Dumm 1994, 56). Epstein's joke encourages readers to laugh as witness to his aggression, to align themselves with his hostility. "Since we have been obliged to renounce the expression of hostility by deeds—held back by the passionless third person, in whose interest it is that personal security be preserved—we have, just as in the case of sexual aggressiveness, developed a new technique of invective, which aims at enlisting this third person against our enemy" (Freud 1963, 103, quoted in Dumm 1994, 56–57). The joke actually has two kinds of third-party onlookers. One is other men and sometimes women being recruited to join this aggressive dominant in order to enjoy the joke against the

woman/feminist. But there is also the implicit onlooker of the woman/feminist—the despised other—forced to watch and be unable to object. The feminist is always there, whether she reads the passage or not. The trope of the angry feminist always includes the puppet feminist as audience, using her invisible spectatorship to magnify the pleasure of the dominant display.

The appeal to the audience of the “third person” structured into Epstein’s joke is central to its work as part of the coordinated public relations campaign funded and disseminated by conservative institutions. Masquerading as knowledgeable about scholarly debate, these commentaries are aimed primarily at readers who are not in the academy and do not read scholarly work. Derogating contemporary scholars (often in the name of traditional scholarly values or “common sense”), these commentaries work to marginalize the humanities and social sciences in social and political debate. They are particularly efficient for discrediting feminist, queer, and antiracist arguments for social justice, because they can be deployed opportunistically for dominance; they can rely on prevailing ideologies that appear “self-evident.”

The contradictory claims and affects of those who use the trope of the angry feminist do not usefully serve as evidence that the Troper is “hypocritical.” Rather they reveal themselves as acts of deliberate misdirection, not related to the aims and intentions of actual research but rather a form of discursive politics aimed at discrediting ideas and arguments that do not conform to the conservative and corporate agenda. Scholars who may feel their own intellectual positions are not highly regarded in the academy use contempt deliberately to appeal to more general publics, enlisting them as myrmidons in personal and political scholarly battles. Dennis Dutton, editor of the journal *Philosophy and Literature*, makes an appeal to the popular media through his “Bad Writing” contest, where selected sentences of politically deplored scholars become the scene of widespread ridicule and contempt. Mark Bauerlein reflected on the successful outcome of the 1999 contest, which promoted derisive commentary about Judith Butler’s prose in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Weekly Standard*, the *New Republic*, *Lingua Franca*, and *Salon*. According to Bauerlein, “Beyond the campus walls the 1999 Bad Writing Contest *did its job, solidifying the image of theorists* as an aimless coterie of pseudo-radicals playing to one another and inflicting shopworn countercultural messages on their captive students” (2004, 181, emphasis added). Here Bauerlein makes explicit the role of the Bad Writing Contest. It is one of the tools used by conservatives in a continuing campaign against their political opponents in U.S. higher education.²³ Conservatives use it to discredit the arguments of scholars whose political and intellectual positions they oppose, attempting to dislodge them from a place in the university that allows

them to develop theoretical and intellectual alternatives to conventional arguments reflecting conservative discourses. This work attempts to make the academic life of the university operate by the sensibilities of an everyday public arena.

The trope of the angry feminist is not an argument about unseemly emotions; it is a tool of discursive politics designed to enact and reinforce patterns of social dominance. If it were actually an argument about unseemly emotions, the Troper would behave as if its own emotions were also to be evaluated. Yet in a contradiction also central to the trope, Tropers immerse themselves in emotionalism, irrationality, and self-righteousness in dismissing feminists as prisoners of emotion, irrationality, and self-righteousness. The internal contradictions of such a position do not undermine its discursive authority with its intended audiences, however, for the trope is not intended to persuade by mobilizing evidence into logical arguments. Instead, it is used for expressly political performance: displays of anger, contempt, and ridicule designed to warn potential malefactors about thinking in non-normative ways.

The trope of the angry feminist establishes itself as countersubversion. Like other tropes in the conservative “echo chamber” (see Jamieson and Cappella, 2008), it pops up persistently in punditry, political appeals, and popular journalism. It frames and polices the terms of public debate by focusing attention on claims about the unsatisfactory character of feminists rather than on unjust policies and practices. It protects power by ridiculing its critics, pandering to the anti-intellectualism of business leaders, journalists, and politicians to legitimate neoliberal schemes to privatize and corporatize the university, to replace the life of the mind with vocational training that subsidizes businesses by training and socializing a docile and uncritical labor force. Caricaturing the arguments and ideas of feminists and other social critics plays a central role in this work, not as actual argument about ideas but as a preemptive strike against potential opposition, confirming Lubiano’s claim that we’ve been mugged by a metaphor. As she explains, “domination is so successful precisely because it sets the terrain upon which struggle occurs at the same time that it preempts opposition not only by already inhabiting the vectors where we would resist (i.e., by being powerfully in place and ready to appropriate oppositional gestures), but also by having already written the script we have to argue with and against” (1996, 66). Under these circumstances, we feminists frequently find ourselves tripped up by tropes and mugged by thugs.

Mugging requires *mugs*, a word with multiple meanings. A mug is not only a person who assaults and robs; the word also refers to someone who

makes exaggerated faces in performing, as in a person “mugging” for the camera. When we encounter the trope of the angry feminist over and over again, it is important to bear in mind both senses of the word *mug*. When those who use the trope craft affective and emotional appeals riddled with contempt and hatred to describe feminists as “angry,” they often produce in their own work the exaggerated intense affect that they purport to find so offensive in arguments by others. This use of affect can redirect the sense of nostalgia, loss, victimization, and failure that infuses so much conservative discourse. Disenchanted by the inevitable disappointments of the world that exists, one focuses contempt on subordinated targets, arguing that it is their presence, their agency, and their subjectivity that have spoiled the world one imagines could exist without them. One might even mug others because one fears one is being made a mug.

Because our roles are already structured according to the conventions of travesty, feminist responses to such sneers are also preframed as entertaining; women are free to debate our *own* right to be humans and citizens according to the illegitimate logic of the trope. Such antifeminist insults are not aimed at persuading feminists so much as performing a public shaming. They exhibit uncontrollable women for the amusement and reassurance of other men. By extension they exhibit a range of “political others” as worthy of shaming for “conservative” enjoyment, thus efficiently marking as unworthy an entire range of social arguments. The role of feminist academics is not incidental here. Encouraging readers of the general public to feel superior to academics is a practice to reinforce the challenges to and defunding of the university that has been accomplished also by other means. It positions its audience as *pleasured*, *participatory*, and *politically productive* in the *mere act of reading* that one’s political opponents are simply silly, stupid scoundrels. In other words, it is not merely an argument provided *through* discourse; it is also a way of framing the act of reading itself—the act of responding affectively to derisive claims—to feel like it *counts* as “politics.” These readers have been trained to mug. Trained to enjoy a discourse of animus in substitute for political argumentation, it turns out they have also been trained to *be* mugs.

Feminist Socioforensic Analysis of Discursive Authority

I have argued that a set of critical tools that I call *feminist socioforensic discursive analysis* is indispensable to understand and ultimately to counter the working of tropes like that of the angry feminist. Such a critical tool kit is necessary to reveal the ways that power infuses and limits the notion of reading,

of writing, of critical thinking. If rhetoric is not a neutral technology, if ideas are sedimented in social life rather than packages available to deliver, if the ways we frame textuality, argument, authorship, politeness, and emotion emerge from and participate in gendered and racialized hierarchies, then we see that tools we have regarded as adequate and even robust must themselves come under examination.

Feminist socioforensic discursive analysis seeks to reshape how we construe, critique, and transcend the always already gendered nature of public and scholarly texts, their interpretation, their disaggregation, and the consequences of their framing as “objective” or “subjective,” “scientific” or political.” To reiterate: it argues for transforming the terms of reading by examining those terms more precisely. It examines what Newman characterizes as the “promiscuous conversation of many texts.”

Transforming the terms of reading concentrates our analysis: we investigate how power infuses the scene of argument.²⁴ Socioforensic analysis requires us to ask questions about why the text exists, what it does, and what it *does not* do. This chapter has focused on how the antifeminist uses the trope of the angry feminist to define a field of interest, to establish what counts as a legitimate perspective, and to exclude as illegitimate other ways of thinking about the feminist. So I discuss questions useful for approaching these antifeminist discourses. Gunther Kress suggests starting with a series of productive questions: Why is the topic being written about? How is it being written about? What *other* ways of writing about the topic are there? (1985, 7, emphasis added). These questions focus the analyst’s attention to identify important elements of the scene of argument: What strategy is involved in generating a particular discourse? What rhetoric does it use? *What alternatives are suppressed by this discourse?* (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003, 95, emphasis added). My added italics serve to emphasize that part of the analytic task that examines the “invisible”: what *is not* in the discourse, what is framed, in fact, as *unnecessary* to it. Such sites are often particularly productive for revealing the effects of power. Discourses mobilize power relations to specific ends; they channel power relations to produce certain effects; the imbrication of power and effects often goes unacknowledged and unexamined. Under such circumstances, socioforensic discursive analysis makes discursive power available for critique. As Anne Cranny-Francis et al. note, “Being able to deconstruct discourse—to determine what knowledge is propagated by a particular discourse, what values are embedded in it, the rhetoric it uses—is simultaneously a way of analysing the operations of power in society” (2003, 94). So a feminist discourse can profit from bringing to light the ways that antifeminist discourses attempt to set the terms of debate. But the same questions

and ways of approaching the scene of argument are productive for investigating feminist discourses too. Feminist discourses also draw on and deploy discursive power. In the core chapters of this book, I demonstrate how the tools of knowledge production in the disciplines are inflected by feminists to make compelling claims at the scene of academic argument.

Powerful interests do not acknowledge or give up their advantages willingly. They presume that their sedimented privileges have been earned—that if inequalities exist, these are natural, necessary, and inevitable. They position as irrational anyone who suggests otherwise. Dominant discourses recruit publics by encouraging them to read arguments as transparently personal and divorced from social power. They deny the ways that antifeminist arguments are enabled by and reinforce positions of domination. They deploy contempt routinely to *turn* all attempts at social and political critique *back on the arguer*, to suppress any claim that might be made on the reader. And why would they not? Why would a regime that seeks to naturalize power on the basis of gender, or race, or sexuality welcome challenge? As Cedric Robinson argues, regimes of power are “unrelentingly hostile to their exhibition” (2007, xii).²⁵ Their hostility is often displayed in discourses that encourage affiliation with dominant narratives through complex means of identification and repudiation.²⁶ Like other aggrieved and oppositional groups, feminists challenge power by attempting to work their way out of negative ascription and oppression, constructing long chains of signs and symbols that undo the damage done by dominant discourses.²⁷ The hostile terrain constrains us, but it need not define us.²⁸ Feminists turn hegemony on its head by turning the arguments designed to silence them into arenas where gendered power is exposed, critiqued, and countered. One of the places where this process takes place is at the scene of argument in academic and civic life.

This book identifies feminist and antifeminist textual affect as a rich site for considering how argumentative rhetorics create authority. It uses a tool kit of feminist socioforensic discursive analysis to challenge the limitations of normal reading practices, to encourage more precise definitions of textual affect, to examine the textual features that trigger attributions of “emotion” to particular texts, and to demand that we analyze textual “emotion” in the light of larger discourses about social power. This introductory chapter focuses on the trope of the angry feminist in a wide range of discourses in order to begin developing a kit of critical analytic tools to be used productively to transform the terms of reading affective argument. In subsequent chapters I consider the consequences of the trope of the angry feminist

and other widespread antifeminist criticisms framing affective exchanges in the academic disciplines. Because academic arguments are not sealed off from the everyday world, the trope of the angry feminist also saturates the culture within which feminist *academic* argument takes place and occurs there also. Deployed against feminist scholars in *both* everyday and academic contexts, the trope demonstrates the interdependence in actual social life of discourses we are encouraged to disaggregate. The feminist scholar who argues about Beethoven, women's biology, or the Black family faces spite and contempt in everyday discourse along with other women and feminists. When a similar malicious discourse is deployed against her in the scholarly area, she may find that her colleagues overlook it, trivialize it, or treat it as idiosyncratic bad manners. Further, her own use of any rhetorical strategy that could be interpreted as "emotional" is overinterpreted and puts her at dramatic risk of dismissal, quite unlike the treatment of such rhetoric from those who have not been characterized as emotional. In the six chapters that form the core of this book, I use feminist socioforensic discursive analysis to reveal how the terms of debate set by the trope of the angry feminist shape the scene of argument in sociolegal studies, musicology, and science studies. I demonstrate how critics use strategies authorized by their unacknowledged gendered and racialized status to delegitimize arguments about structures of dominance, attempting to shut down feminist inquiry through the very strategies of textual vehemence that they purport to condemn when used by feminists. Accompanying this analysis, I demonstrate how feminist scholars use affect in constructing alternative rhetorics of authority. Because the disciplinary and interdisciplinary settings of these arguments influence how we regard their use of affective rhetoric, I conclude with an argument about the nature of feminist interdisciplinarity.

Looking specifically at rhetoric that critics might flag for dismissal as "emotional" or "angry" when used in arguments for social equity, I argue for a more precise consideration of the nature of textual affect. Because we have become accustomed to framing textual affect as a means of revealing truths about the person who wrote the text, our analysis is truncated. We treat the task of reading as complete at the point when we make inferences about the authorial bundle, the person whose name the text carries. We also misconstrue what the text is doing because we have modeled it as the "expression" or "emotional style" of the individual whose name the text carries. This derails the analysis of particular social arguments by ignoring their participation in a discursive ocean of social arguments. So what happens when we bracket claims about the truths of the inferred writer, when we transform the terms of reading? We find that we have been treating as transparent (looking

through instead of looking *at*) important questions with deeply political consequences: How are affect and argument constructed in the text? What is happening in the text that leads us to think of it as displaying “emotion”? What counts as proof that the text implies a particular kind of affect? What is a legitimate inference about the significance of textual affect? How do we situate the text in a larger set of disciplinary or interdisciplinary academic discourses? How does the role of the argument in larger public discourses influence our claims about affect? How do we account for our own positions? Our ability to answer these questions is politically significant exactly because the answers have been taken for granted or deemed unnecessary in a climate of contempt, where no provocation at all is necessary to set in motion the recirculation of claims: if one is a feminist, then one is angry about inappropriate things; to be angry about inappropriate things is to exhibit bad character; people with bad character are unworthy; we do not have to listen to unworthy people; therefore we can dismiss the arguments of the feminist as inappropriate. Because feminists are unworthy, it turns out, social inequities are to be vindicated and even celebrated.

Socioforensic discursive analysis takes a different tack.²⁹ It maintains that precise and productive claims about textual evidence require situating texts in larger social and discursive arenas and recognizing how their claims are authorized and deauthorized by various forms of social power. *Rhetoric* here refers to the use of speech or writing to persuade.³⁰ All the texts that I consider in this book are indeed trying to “persuade.” They use arguments to encourage their audiences to embrace points of view or undertake courses of action. But in order to understand how affect functions in these arguments, we must transform the terms of reading. Conventional reading practices often leave us without the tools to ascertain exactly *what* kind of persuasion is going on and toward what goals. They encourage us to assume that we are in a position to *know whether* and *how* we are being persuaded. Yet too often we focus on the most obvious arguments without reflecting on what the entire text and its discursive setting are teaching us about what kind of persons we are and should be, about what kinds of arguments are “fair” (and how to ascertain that and treat unfair arguments), about which people and arguments are legitimate and which can be dismissed without being listened to.

Conventional practices for evaluating argument are especially impoverished.³¹ They structure the goals of reading around reaching decisions framed as binary. For example, they encourage us to see our roles as “evaluators” in the sense of judging an argument as good or bad. This role usually positions “criticism” or “critical thinking” as “finding fault with someone’s thinking” rather than being careful and exact in one’s judgment.³² But choosing either

side, whether positive or negative, truncates analysis by allowing one to accept or refute an argument without any precise articulation of its claims. Our normal reading practices also implicitly frame the purpose of reading arguments as the adoption of a *position* (pro or con), rather than developing an understanding of what is at stake in a position or an argument, what kinds of evidence are made available, what arguments have been obscured by the way the debate is framed. The consumer role that permeates our broader cultural life influences these reading practices by leading us to read many arguments about cultural life as a consumer focused on liking and disliking. The task of reading is positioned as a consumer act focused on whether reading the argument is pleasurable for the specific reader: Did we find it interesting? Did we like or dislike it? Why? The readers' *reaction* to the text becomes the topic of interest, rather than the argument. These ways of approaching texts *mimic* analysis, but actually supplant it.

Feminist socioforensic discursive analysis brackets and blocks these taken-for-granted reading practices in order to develop an analytic stance toward argument. The analyst is concerned with different goals than the consumer: with how the argument is *constructed*, what evidence is used and how, what authorities are cited and why, what rhetorical devices are used to achieve particular effects, what the arguments open, what they occlude, where one could go with the argument. The analyst thus reads symptomatically, diagnostically. Transforming the terms of reading prepares us for analysis: it brackets consideration of the moral worth and psychology of the person who is presented as the writer, disallows the practice of centering our reaction to the text, denies the route of consumer evaluation, and demands that claims about affect be substantiated by reference to textual features and, therefore, be open to debate. Our analysis focuses, then, on the various "modulations" of textual resources: the constructed rhetorical package of the "author," the nature of argumentative claims, the sentence structures, the specific words used, and the like. "Modulation" involves the ways in which texts adapt or adjust or vary their pitch, intensity, tone, or volume. It emphasizes that the force with which a sound is made is *relative*, signaling that the same tone seems louder in a quiet room than in a noisy one. I frequently use the term *textual vehemence* to represent the kinds of textual "tempering" that create rhetorical affect in this context. While our interpretation of textual vehemence includes inferences about the impression created as an authorial package, or the "persona," it is the *text* that is marked, not a person. We have no evidence about an "angry" person here: not the feminist or the Troper. All authors are using affective textual features to make arguments. All write their texts over periods of time, with revisions, receive advice from colleagues

and editors, and do all the things that create texts that cannot be reduced to their authors or the authors' emotions. This book argues that for both the feminist and the antifeminist, the various rhetorics of "textual vehemence"—moments of textual ridicule, irony, indignation, or intensification—work to create claims about the proper nature of our social life. It also argues that feminist claims are undervalued by conventional methods of reading. The feminist scholars whose work I discuss in this book carry out the important work of mobilizing multiple texts and stories to reveal how hegemonic power actually works and what we need to do to combat it: they have indeed moved far *beyond* "the trope of the angry feminist."

Discursive Authority and the Labor of Argument

Feminist socioforensic discursive analysis encourages us to think carefully and productively about the discourses we consume, confront, and contest. Public exchanges, academic debates, and interpersonal arguments and negotiations are sites where the social meanings of gendered identities and feminist identifications get produced. Specialized or expert knowledges such as academic discourses demarcate or "colonize" fields and establish how they can be discussed, including whose voices must be heard and whose can be ignored. Michel Foucault argues that specialized discourses do not produce "more truthful" knowledge, but rather different *kinds* of knowledge. Seeing discourse as connecting knowledge to power, he argues that "truth" "is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (1980, "Truth," 133). Thus, for Foucault, "truth" "is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (133). An academic "regime of truth" authorizes professors to speak about their topics; it does not authorize those studied to speak or to be heard other than as objects for study. This understanding of the frames of "regimes of truth" provides further insight if we revisit Hart's claim that his bad feminists "belonged in the Department of Abnormal Psychology . . . as objects for scientific study." Hart is explicitly *not* arguing that the bad feminists be silenced; rather, they should be required to submit to a regime of truth that defines anything they say as meaningless clamor, heard only as further evidence of their abnormality.

If the terms of inclusion in academic debate require the subordination of women, then feminists must be insubordinate. But that is not all they are. Modern feminism emerged out of a dialogue between institutionalized academic knowledge and what Foucault has aptly named "the insurrection of

knowledges” (2003, 9). Foucault describes this insurrection as a rebellion against the power effects that come from the institutionalization of specialized knowledge. Foucault finds important situated knowledges among people who retain allegiances and draw insight from what he calls “subjugated knowledges,” knowledges that have been disqualified, ridiculed, and dismissed. Foucault’s interest was in the subjugated knowledge that prisoners have about incarceration or that psychiatric patients have about medicine, but scholars of gender and race find insight in the knowledges of other subordinated populations. Foucault cautions readers not to misunderstand his term. He insists that the insurrection of knowledges does not proclaim “the lyrical right to be ignorant,” nor does it elevate immediate experience over evidence, ideas, and reflection. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of learning from discounted knowledges, knowledges that are local, regional, and otherwise particular and differential, knowledges that resist unanimity. The point here is not to seize power, but to interrupt, resist, and deconstruct it, to disturb the certainties of power with the contingencies of social experience (2003, 7).

Feminism is, at least in part, a product of the insurrection of knowledges and of insurrections by actual people against the injustices of gendered power. But it is also a form of scholarly interrogation and critique. It requires drawing on the history and techniques of disciplines while crossing boundaries to solve problems that are not limited to a particular disciplinary arena. Academic argument takes place in specific places in specific institutions at specific historical times through the concrete deployment of particular phrases, sentences, and ideas. This scene of argument is what Antonio Gramsci described as a site of “formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, and persuasion,” a place where practical labor needs to be performed (1971, 192). The practical labor of feminist scholars includes overcoming discursive conventions designed to exclude them. But it also includes negotiating the residue of the trope of the angry feminist and other instances of the “prose of counterinsurgency” designed to position feminists outside the economy of reason, to invalidate their experiences, to suppress their subjectivities and subject positions. The *prose of counterinsurgency* is a term used by subaltern studies theorist and historian Ranajit Guha to explain how and why official government and academic discourse erases the subjectivity, interests, and actions of South Asian peasants from the historical record (1988). Guha argues that the conventions of dominant discourses deny any possibility of the legitimacy of the peasants’ grievances or the worthiness of their actions.³³ Guha advises us that the erasures of the peasants’ arguments cannot be understood unless one examines the discourse itself, to have “a close look at its constituting elements and examine those cuts, seams and stitches—those cobbling

marks—which tell us about the material it is made of and the manner of its absorption into the fabric of writing” (1988, 47). In my book *Authors on Writing: Metaphors and Intellectual Labor*, I argued that metaphors like these about “cuts, seams and stitches” can tell us a great deal about the challenges we face as readers and writers (2005). They help us see the many minor and arduous tasks that exposition and argument require. In this book, it is my contention that the price of entry into academic debates by feminists from the 1990s to the present requires them to explore those “cuts, seams and stitches,” to deploy the right tools for the particular jobs they have to do within a dialogue that began long before they entered it. They have to invite themselves to the party and then rearrange everything in the room once they have arrived. They must confront, contest, invert, and subvert the language of their enemies at the scene of argument.

Transforming the terms of reading necessarily requires transforming the terms of writing. In academic life, the scene of argument for feminists almost always entails dealing with the written word. Writing plays a central role in the work that scholars do, but we often take for granted the many different decisions that writers have to make. We focus on *what* authors create rather than on *how* they create it. Claims, arguments, and conclusions are indeed important, but they become legible to us in scholarship as a result of discursive practices, strategies, and performances. In *Authors on Writing*, I argued that writing needs to be seen as labor, as a concrete praxis performed to achieve discrete and finite ends. Writing may seem private and personal, but it is always a shared social practice, an activity with both critical and creative dimensions. Writers identify problems, pose solutions, inhabit subject positions, promote new subjectivities, appeal to potential allies and attempt to disarm potential enemies. They must appeal to publics new and old. But these publics are not simply already existing discrete social entities; rather, they are conceptual parts of a social imaginary produced through the actual work of writing, reading, and arguing (Michael Warner 2002).³⁴ Such publics are saturated with power—creating and created by institutions of circulation, ideologies of reading, textual genres, and the rhetoric of texts. Writing is a way of learning, a way of looking for allies who are looking for us, a way of winning recognition and resources vital to changing minds and changing social relations.

In the central chapters of this book I use the tool kit of feminist socioforensic discursive analysis to examine the rhetoric of particular disciplinary or cross-disciplinary arguments. Some of the cases I examine were published

since 2000; others were published in the early 1990s, when feminists faced a pernicious and perilous history in the making. Lisa Duggan has identified the important larger societal goals of antifeminism linked with neoliberalism (2003). Duggan argues that the idealized glorification of an imaginary properly gendered, properly sexed, prosperous nuclear family serves as the New Right defense against government actions against sexism, racism, exploitation, and inequality. Within this ideology, bad social conditions are blamed on bad families, while good families are presumed to manage their problems privately without calling for any redistribution of power or wealth. Of course, this ideal private sphere does not actually exist, but is instead evoked through a countersubversive discourse and then promoted through tax and marriage laws that support and subsidize already-privileged groups. The neoliberalism of that time undergirded the much more widespread neoliberalism of the present, just as the discursive debates of the time are echoed in contemporary discourse and power relations (W. Brown, 2005).

Academic feminists in the 1990s tried to do their work as scholars in the face of this antifeminist mobilization. Their initial aims were more to change their disciplines than to change society, to do better scholarship by recognizing the importance of gender as an analytic category and structuring social force. Yet when attempting to address intersections of gendered, racialized, or class injustice, endeavoring to expose the sexist assumptions in the law that excused violence against women, to bring to light musicology's evasion of the centrality of gendered metaphors in musical compositions, or to explain how uncritical acceptance of gendered metaphors in scientific education and practice actually produced bad science, they encountered discursive and professional practices and politics that dismissed them without consideration. How scholars negotiated the rhetorical complications of these arguments forms an important part of the content of this book.

The book focuses on three specific academic scenes of argument: sociolegal studies, musicology, and science studies. All three have public concerns and constituencies that go beyond the academic. All three demonstrate differing notions of argument and evidence. All three demonstrate interplay among academic disciplines, critical social commentary, and more "general" newspaper or television discourses. The nature of these arguments—their general stance and their specialized knowledge—also demonstrate that feminist argument plays out differently in different settings according to this complex field of argument. It demonstrates the impossibility to defining what a "proper" feminist argument might be: To whom? In what setting? For what purpose?

The chapters that follow in this book occur in three sets of two. Each set focuses on a particular discursive politics that ultimately connects academic

arguments with other “publics.” Each set examines vehement rhetorics and methods of discursive policing at the interface of feminist and antifeminist arguments.

The first set, Chapters 2 and 3, concerns sociolegal studies and arguments about gender, race, consumerism, motherhood, and sexual violence. These are all arguments fraught with social and emotional complexity. Looking at their discourses and rhetorics socioforensically encourages us to see not isolated texts, but texts emerging from particular textual conditions, argumentative genealogies, and political and social conditions. Feminist sociolegal studies may emerge from academic and legal contexts, but it also speaks to wider “publics.” Reception of these arguments therefore takes place at multiple discursive sites. Socially shared ideologies of reading often authorize negative commentary on the various arguments, rhetorics, and authors. I look in these two chapters at different structures of discursive policing and of rhetorical decision-making.

“Ideologies of Style: Discursive Policing and Feminist Intersectional Argument” (Chapter 2) argues that “ideologies of style” control how feminism at the scene of argument may be written and read. I examine how discursive policing is employed in three cases of intersectional feminist argument. When Patricia Williams describes how she was refused admittance to the store Benetton on the basis of her race, the editors of a law review and subsequent audiences attempt to control her argument and reduce its emotional resonance. When Dorothy E. Roberts claims that racism and sexism influence the removal of children from Black homes and inflict group harm, Lawrence M. Mead argues that such claims are uncivil, tantamount to libel. I demonstrate how intersectionality and affect influence the deployment of these ideologies of style at the scene of argument.

“Anger: Grammars of Affect and Authority” (Chapter 3) probes the notion of a unified vehemence of “anger” by contrasting the purposes and strategies of two scholars writing about sexual violence: Cynthia K. Gillespie, an attorney discussing the punishments meted out to women who have killed partners who battered them, and Julia Penelope, a linguist who argues that habits of grammar disguise and perpetuate sexual violence in society. I argue that the different effects of their rhetorics stem partly from their greatly differing purposes. Gillespie seeks to show how the language of the law silences women victimized by domestic violence and systematically nullifies women’s judgments about the potential seriousness and threatening nature of male violence. Penelope contends that seemingly harmless grammatical constructions hide the agency of male perpetrators of child sex abuse and sexual violence, making it more difficult to hold them accountable and responsible

for these acts. Their different rhetorical choices create different responses and demands on readers.

The next two chapters look at a specific moment in musicology in the early 1990s, when feminist research entered the scene of interdisciplinary argument and faced a dramatic response. Thinking of this argumentative moment socioforensically allows us to see how feminist arguments work in uneven terrain. Disciplinary histories can create climates that position as outrageous feminist arguments that have already been found productive in other disciplines. In effect, different disciplines have different “structures of feeling” that influence their reception of feminist arguments. “Structures of feeling,” according to Raymond Williams, are composed of “affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought” (1977, 132). The structure of feeling that infuses a discipline may make it difficult even to argue for making room to include previously neglected women; it can create further barriers to arguments that using gender as an analytic category may also require interrogating and altering research paradigms. Disciplinary structures of feeling can infuse scenes of argument, as I demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5.

“Tough Babies, or Anger in the Superior Position” (Chapter 4) explores the trope of the angry feminist as it has been deployed to discipline feminist musicologists, delivered through a persona I call the “Tough Baby” which engages in quite astounding vehemence of its own. The Tough Baby diverts attention away from feminist arguments, ideas, and evidence by substituting punditry for scholarly analysis. The Tough Baby evokes nostalgia for the old days when women allegedly knew their place, and proffers proclamations, recommendations, and condemnations designed to save conventional gender roles from scholarly critique. I delineate the characteristics of the Tough Baby as it is revealed in texts of Robert Craft, Eric Gans, and Pieter van den Toorn.

“Faux Feminism and the Rhetoric of Betrayal” (Chapter 5) examines how Leo Treitler and Paula Higgins use vehement rhetoric in an attempt to curb the challenges of feminist musicologist Susan McClary, whose work examines sexual codes in Beethoven, among other controversial subjects. Treitler and Higgins attempt to “quarantine” McClary and her work through discourses of betrayal and transgression—to recuperate a pure ideal of feminist musicology within the economy of reason in order to expel the “angry feminist” from this domain.

The next two chapters look at arguments about science and reproduction. Science studies—such as sociological studies of science and medical anthropology—represents a particularly complex discursive situation, an in-

tersection of publics that maintain partial and to some degree contradictory perspectives on the relation of scientific, textbook, and popular discourses. Feminist arguments can, therefore, be policed from a variety of perspectives, perhaps most dramatically by exclusion: by claims that scientific arenas are sealed off from the social. According to this line of argument, because science represents “reality,” it cannot be subject to gendered critique. In the face of claims of epistemological “purity,” feminist critics have developed rhetorics designed specifically to “crack open” the claim that scientific narratives are divorced from gendered social attitudes.

“Intensification and the Discourse of Decline” (Chapter 6) scrutinizes the rhetoric used by medical anthropologist Emily Martin to counter deleterious visions of women still found in contemporary textbooks used in medical school and college physiology courses. Martin uses a complex of strategies that I call “intensification” to probe and distill this entrenched language in such a way that it can no longer be defended by scientists.

“Ridicule: Phallic Fables and Spermatic Romance” (Chapter 7) compares strategies used elsewhere by Emily Martin and by a group of scholars and students called the Biology and Gender Study Group with those deployed by a 1940s satirist, Ruth Herschberger. These three use intersecting strategies to ridicule “phallic fables” and the “spermatic romance,” which describe the meeting of the sperm and the egg in the terms of a quest or romance. These critiques do not dispute the “facts” of scientific research, but instead show how the narratives that textbooks use to communicate research findings rely on highly gendered cultural stories that serve patriarchy and misrepresent science. They undermine simplistic stories about science in order to argue for more adequate and more accurate stories. I use these textured textual studies to emphasize that rhetoric is not a neutral tool that can be wielded effectively by anyone in any context, but rather that rhetoric is an effect of power and that it needs to be judged in relation to the interests that it seeks to advance, oppose, or displace.

The concluding chapter argues that feminist socioforensic discursive analysis provides an optic on the significantly different use of textual vehemence to create discursive authority in antifeminist and feminist academic argument.

Feminists cannot escape the gendered history of discourse, but we can destabilize it, explore its contradictions, and work through it to open up new possibilities. As Foucault argues, “We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument

and an effect of power, but also a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (1980, *History*, 101).³⁵ The crux of Foucault’s claim is that discursive effects cannot be known in advance or assumed to reflect the intentions of those who argue, that we cannot know fully the consequences of our own roles in the circulation of discourses. Yet these discourses are what we have—the sites, the circumstances, and the means—to understand ourselves and change our conditions. In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* Judith Butler asks, “[H]ow is it that the abjected come to make their claim through and against the discourses that have sought their repudiation?” (1993, 224). We can contribute to an answer to Butler’s question as it applies to this arena by looking closely at the scene of argument with the tools of feminist socioforensic discursive analysis. Transforming the terms of reading, sharpening our understanding of textual affect, acknowledging the role of labor in academic writing—these tools enable us to reposition ourselves within the agonistic structures of contemporary debate.