Patrice Petro
Tuesday, Feb. 16th, 2016 at 9am, SSMS 2135

Scholars across a range of disciplines have discussed and debated the impact of austerity measures on contemporary politics and culture. What I call “austerity media” comprises a central and popular, but under recognized, aspect of this contemporary economic condition. Looking at both contemporary reality television and fictional programming, I discuss how austerity narratives are cheaply produced (hence, industrially austere), how they interact with the crises of nonfictional economies (hence, both offer and validate narratives of austere living), and how they promote an ethos of individuality and self-help (hence, ideologically aligned with austerity policies). I argue that austerity media texts reveal that we have too much information, but no ability to process it; too much stuff, and nowhere to store it; too much feeling, and no way to express it. Moreover, this state of affairs is pathologized and gendered as female or feminine, despite the reality of the real hoarders in our midst (the banking industry and corporations) and the very real poverty among men and women and families post-2008.

Patrice Petro is Professor of English, Film Studies, and Global Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where she also serves as Vice Provost and Director of the Center for International Education. She is the author, editor, and co-editor of thirteen books, most recently, After Capitalism: Horizons of Finance, Culture, and Citizenship (2016), Teaching Film (MLA, 2012), and Idols of Modernity: Movie Stars of the 1920s (Rutgers, 2010). She is Past President of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, the US’s leading professional organization of college and university educators, filmmakers, historians, critics, scholars, and others devoted to the study of the moving image.