IMAGINING THE BODY: FLESH, MEANING AND REPRESENTATION

Course convenor: John Tercier

Over the last fifty years, discussion of the body has been taken beyond nature and into culture. Anatomy and physiology have given way to semiotics and social theory. How is flesh configured to make a body? How are bodies made meaningful? How are they represented? How read? How accepted and rejected? How is sense made of the body as an object of representation in photography, film, print, medical imaging, and art? As the subject of experience, through pleasure, pain, sex, disease and death? What is the body we dream of and what of the body that “eats, works, dies, and is afraid?”

This course explores somatic experience as shaped by and represented in medicine, science and art. Students will be introduced to interdisciplinary study, drawing on the history of medicine, art history, media theory, sociology, and the social studies of science and technology. Charting a course along the intellectual and practical boundaries of the humanities, art, science, and medicine, we will explore the conceptual and empirical grids through which somatic experience, life and the body have been perceived, imagined and expressed.

In the readings we will examine different disciplinary approaches to the body and gain some insight into the methodologies employed by those disciplines. In the seminars we will look at specific examples of concepts of the body as they manifest in art, science, cinema and other forms of representation. In our discussions we will attempt to employ critical analysis of the multiple images of the body and contradictory concepts of life to help us synthesize an informed view of the lived body. As well as gaining an understanding of key social, medical, scientific and artistic issues you will develop critical thinking, reading and writing skills and participate in lively debate.

The overall aims of this course are for you to:

- Gain a detailed understanding of the key debates and developments in social and media theory as they relate to changing conceptualizations of the body.
- Explore the historical relations of physiology and representation, through a series of topics and themes that draw in larger social and cultural contexts.
- Investigate how perceptions of identity, health, illness, disability and gender have been molded by the media.
- Integrate the history of the body into social, political and economic history.
- Understand different methodological approaches to an understanding of the body, including physiologic, phenomenological, historiographical, and sociological.
- Improve your skills in analyzing multiple sources of information about the structure, function and meaning of the body: including illustrations, photography, models, cinema, TV, and academic, medical, scientific and popular texts.

At the end of this course you will be able to:

- Employ a variety of disciplinary approaches to critically evaluate key themes and issues in analyses of the body, health, illness and their representations.
- Present arguments, in written and oral form, accurately, succinctly and lucidly, in accordance with appropriate scholarly conventions.
- Have a critical understanding of primary source visual material and demonstrate an appreciation of critical interpretations and methodologies.
- Bring primary evidence to bear on their interpretations of concepts/perspectives/debates from the appropriate secondary literature.
- Identify problems, formulate hypotheses, assess evidence, and sustain arguments using ideas and techniques learned in the course.
- Summarize the relative merits of alternative interpretations and evaluate their significance.
- Work as part of a team in seminar discussions.
- Independently organize their study and workload.

**Introductory Reading**

There is no required text for this course. Readings are provided in the course reader, however, the following books may be of interest to students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title 1</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comar, Philippe</td>
<td>The Human Body: Image and Emotion, Thames and Hudson, 1999.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Recommended: This is a small, inexpensive, well-illustrated book with limited but engaging text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fraser, M and M. Greco (eds.)</td>
<td>The Body: A Reader London: Routledge, 2005.</td>
<td></td>
<td>A student reader of short excerpts from a broad selection of social, anthropological and cultural theory. A number of readings are included in the course reader.</td>
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CLASS 1. INTRODUCTION: THE BODY

What is the body? What is its relation to the mind, nature, culture, the self and society? How has the 20th century variously displayed, hid, ignored and obsessed over it? This first class is a general introduction to current attitudes towards the study of the body. This week’s seminar focuses on images of the body from the past. We will look at changing modes of anatomical illustration and discuss the social, scientific and ideological conditions influencing them.

Required Readings:
- Introduction 1-43

Please look at the following sites: Anatomies online:

Seminar Readings:

Reference Readings:
Sociology of the Body
- Author’s preface: Towards a Somatic Society, pp.1-14
- Introduction: What is a Body, pp. 15-28

Anatomy
- Anatomy – 176-186
We will look at the development of physiological doctrines, that is, theories explaining the function of the body and its parts, and how they have changed over time and influenced the ways in which European science, medicine and art have thought about, represented and treated the body. In the seminar we will examine three-dimensional, scientific models of the body:
- La Specola = 18th century wax models from the “La Specola” museum in Florence.
- Korperwelten = an exhibit of plasticized corpses currently touring the world.
- The Visible Human Project = virtual anatomy project on the web.

Required Readings:

Please look at the following websites:
1. La Specola Museum
   - http://www.specola.unifi.it/cere/default-e.htm
3. Visible Human Project -
   http://www.uchsc.edu/sm/chs/gallery/gallery.html
   http://www.anatomy.wright.edu/qtvr/library/library.html#

Seminar Readings:
The following excerpts count as 1 article:
  - Introduction – pp. xiii-xvii
  - The Corpse as an Anatomical Object – pp. 30- 51

Reference Readings:
Physiologies:
CLASS 3: MENS SANA IN CORPORE SANO: MIND/ BODY

In differentiating between the body and the mind, modern western culture conceives of the body as an organic machine under the direction of mind or consciousness. However, this separation of mind and body is not entirely unproblematic. In this lecture we will look at changing historical constructions of the mind and body and the ways in which they have influenced the other oppositional constructions such as nature/culture and self/society. In the seminar we will look at the changing diagnosis of shell shock, neuropsychiatric syndrome, combat fatigue, and post-traumatic stress disorder as they are constructed through the lens of the cinema camera.

**Required Readings:**


Plato, *Cratylus*, v.399d-400d.


**Seminar Readings:**


Reference Readings:

Mind Body


Shell Shock


Neuroses


Web Resources:
Prelinger Archives: http://www.archive.org/movies/movieslisting-browse.php?collection=prelinger&PHPSESSID=2af3549f7c284b5f9fbfc7c7800c1b1a
- This is a large on-line collection of “ephemeral” film—old educational, public service and documentary film. It includes films on health and the body, but is a great resource in other topic areas.

CLASS 4: MAKING BODIES: NURTURE OR NATURE

For the scientist, physician and undertaker, the body simply is. It is a physical object to be scrutinized, treated and disposed of. However, our bodies also carry meaning—they are gendered, colored and identified with certain groups and beliefs. We will examine to what extent the body is the essential physical basis of existence identifying us as human, and to what extent it is constructed as a symbol or sign, a means of communicating our humanity. The seminar will look at the nineteenth century science of physiognomy and its use of photography to identify, define and control crime, class and race.

Required Readings:
"Introduction to 1970 edition" pp. xxxi-xxxii

**Seminar Readings:**

**Reference Readings:**
**Nature/Culture**
- ch.4: “Measuring Bodies” (113-145)

**Degeneration and Physiognomy**
Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man* (1874),
- Ch. 1, “The Evidence of the Descent of Man from Some Lower Form,” 5-18
Kevles, Daniel. *In the Name of Eugenics*, 1985.
- chs 4-6, 57-112

**Photography and Cinema**
CLASS 5: THE BODY POLITIC: REPRESENTING THE STATE

The head of state, the long arm of the law, a body of workers—images of the body are projected onto the structure of society, and vice versa, social power is often exercised through education, discipline and control over the body. The microcosm and macrocosm are inscribed each onto the other. In the lecture we will look at how the state attempts to control bodies and in the seminar at how it is made to resemble the bodies that it presumably controls.

Required Readings:

Seminar Readings:

Reference Readings:

CLASS 6: THE BODY: A MACHINE FOR LIVING

The relationship between humans and machines is complex. The economics of production demand a functional relationship between the organic and the mechanical. In this class we will examine how encounters between technology, production and desire have played out in the modern period. In the seminar we will examine the job of the cyborg in popular culture as it is portrayed on the cinema screen.

Required Readings:

Seminar Readings:

Hacking, I. 'Canguilhem Among the Cyborgs', Economy and Society 27, 2+3, 1998, 202-16.


**Reference Readings**

**Man the Machine**


**The Gene Machine**


**Virtual Machines**


**Films:**

- RoboCop
- Metropolis


Production is followed by consumption, and the contemporary media, particularly advertising and television, have become central to a vision of the slim, healthy, muscular body in which the good becomes the beautiful becomes the true. In this class we will look at advertising and television and how they sell us the bodies they have sold us on. In the seminar, we will look at resistance to this dominating model of the body in the form of body modification practices such as tattoos, piercings, and surgery.

**Required Readings:**


**Seminar Readings:**


- go to: - http://www.orlan.net//


**Reference Readings:**

**Shape**


- “Muscularity and identity” – 111 – 151.

**Color**


**Function**


**Surgery**


**CLASS 8: ABLE BODIES: THE NORMAL AND THE PATHOLOGICAL**

The body is constantly under threat of error and anomaly. Ability and disability, the ugly and the beautiful, marvels and monsters are polar end points on a continuum of normality. As in last weeks class where we examined the attractions and dangers of the conflation of the good, the beautiful and the true, this week we will scrutinize the confounding of the bad, the ugly and the false. The seminar will look at the horror movie and the concept of the monstrous.

**Required:**


**Seminar Readings:**

- On Organic Norms in Man – pp. 257-273


Reference Readings:


FI LM:
The Elephant Man, dir. by David Lynch
Freaks
Alien

CLASS 9: DESIRE AND SPECTACLE: PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography creates a market for bodies and images of bodies. It, presumably fulfills desire by selling pleasure, while at the same time exercising coercive power, often through gender specific violence. Yet views of pornography have changed markedly over the last two decades, and we may no longer be possible to “know it when we see it”. This session will present arguments from both anti- and pro-porn camps. The seminar will look at visual pleasure, sex and the naked body in mainstream cinema and gallery art.

Required Readings:


Seminar Readings:
- “Power” pp. 13-47.


**Reference Readings:**


**CLASS 10: DEAD BODIES: THE CORPSE**

Having disappeared down the shining corridors of hospitals and hospices, modern death is blamed for its invisibility. However, the dead are making a return—on gallery walls. This class will look at the ways in which the photograph, instantaneous and final, appears to construct modern death. The seminar will look at what the media has to say about the recognition of death and the status of the dead body.

**Required:**


**Seminar Readings:**


**Reference Readings:**


**Film:**
- *Bringing out the Dead*
- *Joyce episode from Buffy*