MPhil in Culture and Criticism 2019-20

Dr David Hillman, *The Body in Culture*
Lent Term, Weeks 1-6

This course explores historical and theoretical perspectives on the place of the body in culture, from early modernity through to the twentieth century. The classes will centre upon literary and philosophical texts, including Rabelais, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Descartes, Mary Shelley, and Joyce, alongside theorists of the body, including Bakhtin, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Freud, Lacan, Levinas and Nancy. Some questions we will explore include: Is the body a form of knowledge? What part does the body play in the construction of self and other? What makes bodies such compelling objects of desire or repulsion? How is the immediate materiality of the body represented in literary texts? How, conversely, can the body itself be ‘written’ - marked and changed by ideological and socio-historical forces? What, ultimately, can we say about the enigmatic, paradoxical, impossible relation between the body and language?

The course selects some salient writers and thinkers whose understanding of embodiment opens up a variety of avenues of interrogation of these questions. It is not conceived of as in any way exhaustive of the topic, nor does it attempt to put across an established theory. These seminars are intended to act as introductions to a set of issues which constitute the ‘backbone’ of embodiment and its theorization; as a provocation to engage with an area of study with increasing significance to a variety of critical disciplines.

The course assumes that you are able to devote a minimum of six to eight hours of reading-time to prepare for each class. The specified reading for the class is made up of core reading – texts that will form the basis of class discussion each week – and secondary readings, which will offer in-depth critical material on the primary texts and/or suggest further lines of enquiry emerging from the week’s main texts. The secondary reading is not compulsory, but to get the greatest benefit from the course you will need to explore at least some of this material. Most of the texts are readily available in the various Cambridge libraries, but PDFs of the core reading will be posted on Moodle or emailed to participants. Each week I will ask one or two of the group to pre-circulate (by e-mail) a one-page response to a core text, and will also ask for short presentations in class on material from the secondary list. The aim of these presentations is to open up angles on the core text(s), rather than merely précis a given critical text.

I will not be providing a list of topics for those wishing to write coursework essays for this seminar. I would prefer you to propose your own essay topics, and to consult me before beginning to write (such consultation is compulsory). Essays may employ whatever materials and theories you choose, but should bear a clear relation to the themes central to the course.

My e-mail address is: dah54@cam.ac.uk
Week 1: What is a Body?

Topics and questions we might explore include: Is the body a form of knowledge? What kinds of knowledge can the body provide? Epistemologies of and from the body; subjectivity, objectivity and the body; bodies and/as cultural artifacts; can the body be written (and how are texts bodily)?

Core Reading:

- Michel de Montaigne, 'Of Experience' in the Essays of Michel de Montaigne, Book 3, essay 13 (we'll be using the Donald Frame translation; it’s worth either reading some of the original French or reading the (1603) John Florio translation too)


- Marcel Mauss, ‘Techniques of the Body’ [1934], in (e.g.) Incorporations, ed. Jonathan Carey and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 454-77

Secondary Reading:

- Michel de Montaigne, ‘Of the Education of Children’; ‘Upon Some Verses of Virgil’; ‘Of Physiognomy’
- Havi Carel, Phenomenology of Illness (Oxford University Press, 2016), Introduction (1-13)
Week 2: Insides

Topics and questions we might explore include: Does the body have a history? Epistemic shifts; nostalgia and embodiment; vulnerability, power and ideology; the social body; selfhood and inwardness; inside and outside; does the body have an inside?

Core Reading:

- Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Oxford or Arden my preferred editions)

Secondary Reading:

- Jean Starobinski, ‘The Inside and the Outside’, *The Hudson Review*, vol. 28 no. 3 (Autumn 1975), 333-51
- Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and
Week 3: Philosophical Bodies

Topics and questions we might explore include: Do bodies think? Physics and metaphysics; bodies and machines; did the Enlightenment change the body? Secularisation, commodification, textualisation of bodies.

Core Reading:


Secondary Reading:

- René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Properly Conducting One’s Reason and of Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*
Week 4: Bodies in Parts

Topics and questions we might explore include: bodily disintegration and reintegration; part-whole relations; the (dis)ordered and the disabled body; What makes a body grotesque? What makes a body gendered? The uncanny; monstrosity and humanity; Can there be a mechanical (inorganic) monster?

Core Reading:


Secondary Reading:

- Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the
Week 5: **Surfaces/Skin**

Topics and questions we might explore include: skin and self; surface and depth; the modernist body; bodies in consumer culture; language and the body; psychoanalysis and the body; jouissance, sexuality and the body.

**Core Reading:**


**Secondary Reading:**

- Susan Bordo, Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)
- Richard Brown, James Joyce and Sexuality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Richard Brown, ed., Joyce, ‘Penelope’ and the Body (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005)

Week 6: Hungry Bodies

Topics and questions we might explore include: eating and ethics; sharing food & commensality; which bodies get to eat? What counts as eating? How does eating intersect with appetite? hungering, starving, fasting: Why eat and why not eat? When and why is eating (and the bodies that eat) understood to be normal, healthy, and whole, and when excessive, immoral, disruptive, or pathological? Whose bodies supply food and sustenance for other bodies? Is it possible to eat with a clear conscience?

Core Reading:

- Chris Kraus, Aliens and Anorexia (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013)


Secondary Reading:


- Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural Construct* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)


