

How Religion Makes Bodies

Saints, Cyborgs, Monsters

Description:

Human bodies are shaped by their environments. Variations in climate, diet, and neighboring organisms all impact how and what a human body can be. Human environments are also impacted by human activity – from the changes we make to the ecosystem to the production of images and ideas. These social and cultural environments shape bodies just as the ecosystem does. For example, the drive to be a better athlete may cause you to train your body differently than the drive to be a better dancer. Living in Syracuse in February will change your body in ways that living in Australia in February wouldn't. Being gendered female or male allows and prohibits access to certain places. Gender, sexuality, race, age, nationality, are some of the concepts that structure and restructure human bodies. Religious practices and ideas shape and are shaped by these structures as well, and in turn shape and re-shape human bodies.

What can a body do? is a central question to religious thinking: What does it mean to be human? To be non-human? What is a human body? Where are its limits? What can a religious body do differently? This question of the body is one way to begin an inquiry into what it means to be human, and religion is one way to think about the limits of embodiment. For example, how is the body of a monk who meditates and eats very little shaped differently than the body of a yogi? How is a Muslim female body seen differently than my male body? This course will use fiction, e.g. *Frankenstein*, film, and philosophy to look through historical, theological, anthropological, scientific and literary lenses as it raises questions about human embodiment in relation to religious ideas and practices.

Aims:

Through this inquiry, we will learn to ask about how religious practice and thinking shapes what the human body can do, what it can't do, and what it is allowed to do or not do and by whom. We will explore many formations of human embodiment and the structures that form and de-form these embodied forms. We will learn to think about what constitutes a human body and what does not, and how these ideas shape what it means to be human. We will read texts with various locations, raise critical questions, and consequently write and create from a more informed and mature position about how religion makes, shapes, and re-shapes human bodies.

Texts:

William Gibson, *Neuromancer* ISBN 978-0441569595
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Norton Critical Edition) ISBN 978-0393927931
Additional texts will be available via BlackBoard

Class Policies

To build and foster an environment of discussion based learning

For me, as the instructor, this means knowing that I do not hold all answers. It means that I am here to learn. It means the questions we are interested in lie somewhere between us all. For you, as a student, this means being responsible for the learning that takes place in the time we have together. It means being prepared for class by reading, annotating, and questioning the texts for each class session. It means investing in this time as ours.

To respect the learning of others

Within our learning environment we will encounter ideas, opinions and instances that are sensitive and, at times, personal. In order to assure the learning of others takes place in a safe environment, this means understanding difference even if we are yet to understand our differences. This also means respecting the time we have set aside to learn with each other. Punctual attendance, remaining in class for the whole period allotted, and refraining from using electronic devices towards distraction is part of ensuring this respect.

To practice and maintain an environment of academic integrity and respect

Academic integrity goes beyond issues of cheating and plagiarism. It means investing in a respecting the environment built by way of the policies and promises above, and ensuring an atmosphere of respect for the instructor, the students, and the material.

Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations...The presumptive penalty for a first instance of academic dishonesty by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of academic integrity policy. SU students are required to read an online summary of the university's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

Learning Activities:

Participation (15 pts)

Examining Questions (10 pts)

Exams (10,15,20 pts)

Discussion Leader and Respondent (15 pts)

Final Activity (15)

Participation

Our class is just that - *ours*. This means we are all responsible for coming prepared to class having read and thought about the material for that day. Participation means more than speaking in class. It means being in class in a way that enhances the discussion and learning. This could mean being a frequent conversation partner or it could mean speaking once a class. The emphasis in participation is on quality rather than quantity. Staying enrolled in this class means you aim to participate.

Examining Questions

These questions, due on BlackBoard every Sunday by 11:59p (starting after Week 3), are an opportunity for you to ask questions that you would like to see on the exam (with the possibility of them appearing there!). Taking what we have read for the current unit, formulate two (2) exam questions that critically engage the material in relationship to questions of embodiment – you are the instructor now.

Discussion Facilitator and Respondent

Facilitator:

On select Fridays (starting Week 3) during the semester (of the student's choosing, to be arranged with the instructor) you will begin and lead a class discussion of that week's problems/concepts. This is an opportunity to organize the discussion around the questions you have.

Respondent:

The respondent is responsible for synthesizing the Facilitator's questions in a critical and scholarly way. In other words, the respondent is there to respond at and to the level of questions raised. This could mean raising questions of your own that further the questions of the Facilitator, or questions or concepts that challenge those questions.

Exams

Exams take place at the pause between our concentrations, and are a moments to practice and improve your critical reading and writing by composing responses to essay questions. Possible exam questions will be distributed a week in advance, so you can prepare. This means, that on the day of the exam, you are expected to perform the preparation allowed you. The exams increase in point value across the semester as an indicator of this expectation.

Final Activity – Mandatory, During the Final Exam Period

This final activity is an opportunity for you to exercise and perform the creative analytic skills developed over the semester for thinking about the body and embodiment. Its final form is based on what is yet to

happen and will be shaped by how and what we learn together this semester. Active participation in all aspects of this course will have us all prepared for this creative activity.

Introductions

Week 1.

M 8/28: Introductions

W 8/30: Jean-Francis Lyotard “Can Thought Go On Without A Body?”

F 9/1: Caroline Bynum “Why All the Fuss About the Body?”

Dissolution/Desire

Week 2.

M 9/4: NO CLASS

W 9/6: Plato “Allegory of the Cave”

F 9/8: Discussion

Week 3.

M 9/11: “How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs”

W 9/13: “How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs”

F 9/15: NO CLASS

Week 4.

M 9/18: *Neuromancer* Pt. I

W 9/20: *Neuromancer* Pt. II, III

F 9/22: *Neuromancer* Pt. IV

Week 5.

M 9/25: Selections from tractate *Mikva'ot*

W 9/27: Jennifer A Selby “Un/veiling Women’s Bodies: Secularism and Sexuality in Full-face Veil Prohibitions in France and Qu’ebec”

F 9/29: Exam #1

Mechanization/Worship

Week 6.

M 10/2: Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”

W 10/4: Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”

F 10/6: Discussion

Week 7.

M 10/9: “Exploring Electric Limits” in Thomas de la Pena’s *The Body Electric*

W 10/11: “Exploring Electric Limits” in Thomas de la Pena’s *The Body Electric*

F 10/13: Discussion

Week 8. – Digital Religion

M 10/16: Ella Brians “The Virtual Body and the Strange Persistence of the Flesh”

W 10/18: Interact with Online Religious Rituals

F 10/20: Discussion

Week 9.

M 10/23: *Metropolis*

W 10/25: *Metropolis*

F 10/27 Exam #2

Normalization/Race

Week 10.

M 10/30: *American Jesus* (selections)

W 11/1: *American Jesus* (selections)

F 11/3: Discussion

Week 11.

M 11/6: Jalane D. Schmidt, “Cuba’s Virgin of Charity”

W 11/8: Journalistic Approaches to Black Lives Matter

F 11/10: Discussion

Week 12. Religious Bodies in Popular Culture

M 11/13: Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body* (Introduction)

W 11/15: Jane Naomi Iwamura, “The Monk Goes to Hollywood”

F 11/17: Exam #3

Monstrous/Human

Week 13.

M 11/27: *Frankenstein* Vol. I, Letters I-IV

W 11/29: *Frankenstein* Vol. I, Chapters I-V

F 12/1: *Frankenstein* Vol. I, Chapter VI- Vol. II, Chapter I

Week 14.

M 12/4: *Frankenstein* Vol II, Chapter II - IX

W 12/6: *Frankenstein* Vol II, Chapter X –Vol. III, Chapter III

F 12/8: *Frankenstein* Vol III, Chapter IV - VII

M 12/11 3-5p Final Learning Activity