E58.2206
Dis/ability Studies: Art, Media, Philosophy

Cross-listed in Gallatin as K80.2433.

Instructor: Nicholas Mirzoeff, Dept. of Media, Culture and Communication

This class introduces students to the concepts used in the new interdisciplinary field of disability studies. Dis/ability (as it is written in the field) studies argues that “disability” is a socially-constructed set of restrictions placed on particular bodies or mentalities. Further, it suggests that all persons have experienced dis/ability as infants and will do so again (either temporarily or permanently) at some point in their lives. One way of understanding these concepts is to look at the extensive presence of people with dis/abilities in art, media and philosophy as both makers and subjects.

This seminar class will be a joint exploration of the necessarily connected experience and representation of dis/ability, embodiment and the 'normal' in modern Western culture. It centers on questions of dis/ability in the three fields at three critical interfaces, namely the formation of Western rationality in the seventeenth century; the generalization and medicalization of the concept of the “normal” in the nineteenth century; and the
emergence of dis/ability as a new form of identity in the past forty years.

Requirements
1) Attendance and participation are important in a seminar class.
2) Three short (two-page double spaced) response papers to an aspect of each section’s readings, determined by student interests. These could include close readings of passages in assigned texts; interpretations of visual materials; or interfaces of other readings with assigned texts.
3) Group presentations of readings. These presentations should raise questions for group discussion. Groups might present a series of questions to be discussed in small groups, highlight themes of importance, illustrate key images etc. It is not expected that other readings should be brought in, as this puts other seminar members at a disadvantage.
4) The development of a project related to one or more of the areas studied, whether practice-based or critical, by arrangement with the instructor. The project should consider how dis/ability studies could or should transform your own area of study. The project can be collaborative. It will involve research but should not attempt to offer final results so much as a proposal for future critical understanding.

Grading based on attendance (10%), participation (10%), class presentations (25%), three short responses (15%), final project (35%).

The class will be wheelchair accessible.

Readings
Lennard Davis (ed.), The Disability Studies Reader (2nd ed, 2006)
Helen Keller, The Story of My Life
Longmore and Umanksy, The New Disability History (NYU Press, 2001)
Descartes, Discourse on Method
Michel Foucault (ed.), The Memoirs of Herculine Barbin

Optional: Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar (eds), Beyond the Body Proper (Duke, 2007)
Resources
The Disability Studies Quarterly is on-line at http://www.dsq-sds.org/DPubS?service=UI&version=1.0&verb=Display&page=home&handle=osul.dsq

Disability Studies Blog: http://disstud.blogspot.com/

On-line resource list: http://thechp.syr.edu/disability_studies_2003_current.html

Articles are available on the Blackboard site for this class or via NYU Libraries.

Meetings (all Thursdays)

Introductory

Jan 22 Week One: Introductions

Jan 29 Week Two: Dis/ability as Critical Concept

Readings: “MLA Conference on Disability Studies and the University,” held at Emory in March 2004, from PMLA 120.2

Catherine Kudlick, “Disability History: Why We Need Another ‘Other’”

Section 1: Dis/abling Rationality

Feb 5 Week Three
Descartes and the Blind Man


Feb 12 Week 4:
Representing Dis/ability in the Age of Absolutism

Jennifer Montagu: “Velazquez Marginalia: His Slave Juan de Pareja”


Image bank: Velazquez Las Meninas, Juan de Pareja. Ribera, The Club Footed Boy (see Google Earth for close up of Las Meninas). Picasso, Las Meninas (numerous versions)

Feb 19 Week 5

New Bodies: Slavery and Colonialism
Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History” and Joyner “This Unnatural and Fratricidal Strife” in Longmore and Umanksy.

Images: Juan Campeche, Juan Avilès.

Scroll down for “exhibition site” http://modules.quaibranly.fr/metis/metis_en.html

First response paper due on or before Feb 19

Section II: The “Normal”

Feb 26 Week 6:
The “Normal” and the “Pathological”
Reading Lennard Davis: “Constructing Normalcy,” in Davis Tremain, “On the Government of Disability” in Davis Irving Goffman, from Stigma in Davis
Susan Sontag, from *AIDS and its Metaphors* in Davis
Dorothy Porter, review of Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*

Mar 5 Week 7
The Heteronormative

McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence” and
Garland Thompson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” in Davis

Mar 12 Week 8:
*Imagining Helen Keller*
Readings Keller, *The Story of My Life* (1902)

On Keller’s activism: 

Nielsen, “Helen Keller and the Politics of Civic Fitness,” in Longmore and Umanksy.

Films: *The Miracle Worker* (1962), dir. Arthur Penn; and
*Black* (2005), dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali

Second response paper due on or before March 12

Mar 19  Spring break!

**Section III: Identity and/as dis/ability**

Mar 26 Week 9:
Representing “the disabled”

Viewings:
*L’enfant sauvage* (dir. François Truffaut),
*Children of a Lesser God* (199)
*Murderball* (2005)


*TDR* v. 51 no. 4 (Winter 2007) p. 80-8.
(films available in the Avery Fisher Video Library, 2nd floor Bobst)

April 2 Week 10:
Performing Dis/ability
Discussion of film showings in the Dis This Film Series. Visit from member of The Fearless Theater Company
Meeting with Trina Rose, director of A Yellow Brick Road

April 9 Week 11
Global Biocultures
Readings: Wilson, “(Re)writing the Genetic Body Text: Disability, Textuality and the Human Genome Project” and Davidson, “Universal Design: The Work of Disability in an age of globalization” in Davis

Third response paper due on or before April 9

April 16 Week 12: individual consultations on projects

Presentations
April 23 Week 13
Presentation of student projects

April 30 Week 14
Presentation of student projects