

Crip Performances: An Introduction To Disability Studies

ENG 3910.10 — Disability Studies
Fall 2017; 3 credits

TR: 2:20 - 3:35 pm
Room: Duques 361

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(and by appointment)
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“One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well.” — Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 1990.

“Disability aesthetics refuses to recognize the representation of the healthy body—and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole determination of the aesthetic. Rather, disability aesthetics embraces beauty by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result.” — Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 2010.

I. COURSE DETAILS

Course Description

In this class we will look at how science and culture combine to create the idea of what “normal” human bodies should be in our popular culture—films, novels, plays, musicals, poetry, and other performance-oriented media.

This course is about the myths and paradoxes surrounding ability and disability in America, and serves as an introduction to the burgeoning field of Disability Studies. We will examine the historical moments and cultural ruptures that allowed “disability” as a term to emerge, and examine our frameworks for apprehending and accommodating for physical and/or cognitive impairments. During this term we will approach disabled embodiment through a variety of approaches that inflect disability studies—including performance theory, feminist theory, critical race studies, freak studies, bioethics, and literary analysis—in an effort more richly understand the construction of the “normal” human body as an organizing principle for participating in America’s public sphere cultural commons.

This course takes performance as a starting point because normative bodies are frequently used to portray and measure insufficiency qua disability, further exacerbating concerns about disability as an undesirable mutation while seeming to reference disabled persons as an expansion of neoliberal diversity initiatives. In short—what we read and see in our media diets is naturalized and normalized, but oftentimes the incorporation of disability in pop culture is at the expense of the reality of disabled embodiment. By examining our cultural products featuring disabled bodies, we can uncover complex negotiations of the bodily anxieties we hold as individuals and as a species too.