According to Western tradition, the human figure – beautiful, flawless, transcendent – was the original and ultimate subject of art. Why, then, has art so often returned to bodies that are carnal, ugly, disgusting, or horrific? This course will consider artistic modes (grotesque, abject, obscene) and subjects (excretion, mortality, perversion, deformity) that make up this alternative aesthetic history. What different purposes has body horror served across historical contexts? Horror has frequently been leveraged against women, sexual minorities, and nonwhite peoples in order to justify their disenfranchised positions; why, then, have these groups sometimes claimed repulsive identities with pleasure and pride?

COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING GOALS:
1. To introduce key authors, texts, and artworks who might be seen as participating in an anti-aesthetic and/or anti-aesthetic tradition
2. To consider historical precedents for the contemporary notion of body horror, and whether horror provided the same cultural meanings in different historical contexts
3. To investigate conflicting understandings of the body as natural and transhistorical, or contingent and socially constructed
4. To practice close, critical looking at transgressive material, and to explore the value of an aesthetics not necessarily founded on beauty or pleasure

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
Weekly reading and viewing assignments are required for all students. Readings will be distributed in class and posted on NYUClasses, where students will also find a selection of weekly assigned images. Films will be on reserve at the Avery Fisher Center on the 2nd floor of Bobst Library. During a few weeks, books will be placed on reserve at Bobst Circulation; these are available for reviewing images but do not require additional reading.

IMAGE AND FILM ASSIGNMENTS ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT AS READINGS.

All students will submit weekly written responses to the reading and viewing assignments. These responses will guide the class discussion, and are therefore due by email the night before (i.e. Sunday) by 9pm. 1-2 pages (no longer, please!), typed & double spaced. Weekly responses should engage with at least two of the week’s works (broadly defined) and/or the themes of the course as a whole. While a reasonable degree of care and finish are appreciated, these are not full-fledged research papers, and you do not need to restate every point the author makes. Your task is to synthesize the meaning(s) of the work as a whole, to highlight one or a few issues that you found especially important or confusing, and to raise some questions for group discussion.

Attendance and class participation are mandatory. Each student may have one excused absence from class and weekly assignments; this is intended for seniors scheduling their colloquia but is available to all. Additional excused absences, extensions, and incompletes will be granted only upon the written advice of your doctor, psychologist, spiritual adviser, or dean. Absences WILL count against your final grade!

No phones or laptops at the seminar table, please. Any illicit texting, etc. will result in an immediate pop quiz for the entire class.

The term project will be a take-home final consisting of several short essays. Instructions for the final will be distributed on Dec. 5. Our last class meeting on TUESDAY, Dec. 13 will be a chance to workshop your final essays. Submissions will be due on Dec. 20. No creative projects; please don’t ask.
Final grades will comprise:
1. Attendance and class participation = 35%
2. Weekly writing assignments (averaged) = 35%
3. Take-home final = 30%

“You belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of Gallatin include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html.”

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS

1. Sep. 12: Introduction

2. Sep. 19: Doing Bodies

   Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, pp. 3-85.

3. Sep. 26: Disgusting Theories


4. Oct. 3: Grotesque & Carnivalesque

   Timothy Hyman, *Carnivalesque*, pp. 8-61.
Oct 10: Fall break – NO CLASS

5. Oct. 17: Abject


Bataille, *The Story of the Eye*, pp. 3-16, 32-40, 47-64, 70-84.


7. Oct. 31: Sex – Male & Female


Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, pp. 21-64.


8. Nov. 7: Sex – Spoiled Identities

Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, pp. 16-42.


9. Nov. 14: Sick


Nancy Princenthal, _Hannah Wilke_, pp. 99-123.


10. Nov. 21: Hurt, Dead


RoseLee Goldberg, _Performance: Live Art Since 1960_ (excerpts)
Tracey Warr & Amelia Jones, _The Artist’s Body_ (excerpts)

LOOK: Lionello Puppi, _Torment in Art_
   Paul Koudounaris, _Heavenly Bodies, The Empire of Death and Memento Mori_


11. Nov. 28: Freaks

Leslie Fiedler, _Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self_, pp. 13-36, 137-53.


LOOK: Stanley Burns, _Early Medical Photography in America (1839-1883)_
   Laura Lindgren, _Mütter Museum: Historic Medical Photographs_.

WATCH: Tod Browning, _Freaks_, 1932.
12. Dec. 5: Black and Jew


Scott Bukatman, Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction, pp. 243-68, 279-91.

Shinya Tsukamoto, Tetsuo, the Iron Man, 1989


Finals will be due in my mailbox by 5pm on Dec. 20.