

FEIT INTERDISCIPLINARY SEMINAR PROGRAM

SPRING 2020

“States, Bodies, and Power”

ETRH

Tuesday/Thursday 2:30-3:45

David Hershinow, English

Marcus Johnson, Political Science

Until the Civil Rights era, laws in many southern states required Black people to use different restrooms from white people; today, laws throughout the country continue to require the segregation of public restroom facilities on the basis of sex and gender identity. In many municipalities, mothers who attempt to nurse in public can be arrested for public indecency. In North Dakota, lawmakers responded to indigenous tribal efforts to stop the Dakota Access pipeline by passing legislation that protects drivers of cars who run over and kill protesters.

These examples all have one thing in common: they illustrate the role that the government plays in assigning social and political meaning to the embodied lives of the people it governs. Students in this course will examine the processes through which states construct and define the boundaries between genders, sexual orientations, races, and (dis-)abilities, while also investigating how people belonging to these categories can respond to and contest these political and social boundaries. We will study a range of texts from the social sciences that theorize how seemingly “natural” differences between bodies are actually constructed by the state in pursuit of material and ideological goals, and we will apply these theories to the analysis of real-world laws and government ordinances, on the one hand, and works of literary fiction, on the other.

How does literature lay bare forces that may otherwise operate under cover of familiarity? How might literature offer a field on which alternate political possibilities might be imagined? Social-scientific texts may include work by Melissa Nobles, Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon, and Judith Butler. Literary texts may include work by Ralph Ellison, Claudia Rankine, Imogen Binnie, and Paul Beatty.

Black Archeologies: Archiving Black Environments

UWH

Wednesday 6:05-9

Erica Richardson, English

Marisa Solomon, Anthropology

Gwendolyn Brooks in her prolific corpus of poetry chronicling black social life in 1940s and 1950s honors the objects that surround black people from cans of beans to “receipts and dolls and cloths.” In *TopDog/Underdog* (2001), playwright Suzan-Lori Parks offers a nuanced depiction of fraternal intimacy and competition between two brothers as they strive to fashion a home out of abandoned and stolen items. These are but two examples of writers who have

resisted the ways in which trash and discarded items have often been used to criminalize and stereotype black people and their communities.

In this course, we will consider a number of inquiries about trash and blackness as represented in literature and culture. Questions that will drive the seminar include but are not limited to the following: What ideas about the discarded do we take for granted? What ideologies structure our concerns about trash and what tools do we need to make these structures salient? What kinds of landscapes do we consider “the environment”? How can we re-read material objects and people? And with these tools, what narratives of conflict, struggle, survival, even thriving may we recognize and imagine?

Co-taught by an anthropologist and a literary scholar, this course will explore a range of literary and cultural genres including nonfiction essays, ethnography, plays, poetry, music videos and film, bringing issues of style and aesthetics to bear upon our inquiries as well. Texts we may consider will include: short stories and poetry from Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1928), Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the 2012 film *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, and Sidney Mintz’s ethnography *Sweetness and Power* (1985). Specific themes will include soil, blood, food and nurturance, squatting, salvaging, repurposing, recycling, and resistance.

FALL 2019

The Art of Words

MWH

Wednesdays 11:10-2:05

Cheryl Smith, English

Zoe Saldana, Fine and Performing Arts

[Description to follow]

Spike Lee vs. Alfred Hitchcock

URH

Thursdays 6:05-9:05

Arthur Lewin, Black and Latino Studies

Stephen Whitty, Film Critic

While many compare Spike Lee to Woody Allen, a more accurate comparison is perhaps to Alfred Hitchcock. These two original and prolific filmmakers are rooted in different genres – Hitchcock in suspense and Lee in social commentary – but they are in many ways similar. Though each received studio funding, neither was ever tied down to one particular studio. They were Hollywood “outsiders,” Hitchcock British and Lee African American. Spike Lee’s penchant for playing parts in many of his films echoes Hitchcock’s obligatory cameos. Both began directing in their twenties and both made a film a year for many years. And while they have each been revered as cinema icons, neither won the Academy Award. Both heavily sprinkled subliminal cues throughout their films. And each man's body of work can actually serve as an extended historical document. The course will be co-taught by an expert on the representation of Black Americans in the mass media and by a renowned film critic who has twice served as chair of the New York Circle of Film Critics.

The Nature of Science and Religion

ETRH

Tuesday/Thursday 2:30-3:45

Carla Bellamy, Anthropology

Rebecca Spokony, Natural Sciences (Biology)

In this course we will investigate a series of guiding questions that are all implicit in the course title. We will consider the ways in which nature is conceptualized in several religious traditions and we will contrast these conceptualizations with the ways in which modern science conceptualizes and relates to the natural world. We will then use our findings about nature in religious and scientific discourses to ask a series of related questions about the natures of

religion and science as forms of discovery and knowledge creation and the potential flaws and limits of each approach.

FUTURE FEITS / all tentative

FALL 2020

TBA

Abby Anderton,
Andrew Sloin, History

TBA [?]

Stephanie Golob, Political Science
TBA [Modern Languages?]
Mark Rice, History

TBA [?]

Zoe Griffith, History
TBA

Money (last: fall 2017)

Matthew Eataough, Global Studies/English
Laura Kolb, English

TBA

SPRING 2021

TBA

Elizabeth Heath, History
TBA

TBA

Gary Hentzi, English
John Maciuika, Fine and Performing Arts

Musical Theater (last: fall 2017)

Elizabeth Wollman, Fine and Performing Arts
Vince Digirolamo, History