UHC Medical Humanities: Politics, Biology, and the Body

Mondays 2-4:50 3504 CL

Fall 2017

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DESCRIPTION

This is a cross-disciplinary seminar taught by a humanist and a physician. This seminar brings critical theory into close dialogue with forms of medical knowledge and practice. It offers students the chance to examine the medical construction of the body—the meaning, function, and social place medicine gives to the body—vis-à-vis drugs (licit and il-), disease, treatment, medicalized gender and sexuality, and the discourses and practices of medicine upon ‘pathologies.’ The basic concepts for studying medicine’s power to construct the body are ‘biopower’ and ‘biopolitics.’ We will begin by reading basic texts on these concepts. Historically, Michel Foucault wrote the most important works. We will read parts and excerpts of his books, The History of Sexuality, The Birth of Biopolitics, Discipline and Punish, and I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century. We will consider both the theoretical implications and the real-world milieux these concepts attempt to describe.
We will also read Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* along with more recent texts such as Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” and Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie*. We will read ‘high literature’ by authors such as Kafka and Mann along with a variety of pop (Junkie Lit) and professional writings on the medicalized body. We will read these texts to investigate and reflect on each other as well as our own conceptions of medicine and its ambitions for the human. We will discuss topics such as cosmetic surgery, epigenetics, epigenesis, global health, and the cyborg.