

Call for Papers

Disturbed Representations of the Body in Film

Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris, June 26-28, 2014

I – Preamble

This conference invites artists and academics in film and media studies to reflect on disturbed representations of the human body on screen. Proposals can focus on bodies that do not fit norms and usual representations such as bodies that are, for example, wounded or mutilated (war, horror and gore, medical sequences...), robotised or hybrid (exoskeletons, between the biological and the mechanistic...), animalistic, recreated or metamorphosing (surgery, mutation, transsexualism, ageing, disease...), deformed, disfigured, or monstrous, etc. Proposals could also examine the filmic techniques and strategies that can disturb the representation of the body on screen (framing, editing, lighting, focus, etc.).

Representations of atypical or even monstrous figures – which dramatically contrast with mainstream, normalised images of the human body – raise many issues such as marginality, transgression, hybridity, the mutations and evolutions of the human figure, plasticity of the body, the frontier between the normal and the pathological, and between the human and the unhuman, etc. Proposals are encouraged to explore such issues and/or to address the effects produced by the representation of such bodies on the audience (morbid fascination or repulsion, pleasure or disgust, detachment or visceral involvement...).

II – Suggestions

This is a non-exhaustive list of issues, themes, and avenues of thought that the conference will address:

Possible Philosophical Approaches:

- Why do some filmmakers seek to disturb the traditional representations of the body?
- What aesthetic resources do they use to shape bodies that are far from their normative or conventional representations?
- Are these original, sometimes distressing, representations of the human body necessarily related to specific filmic genres such as horror and gore films or science-fiction?
- Which theoretical and philosophical conceptions of the body inform these representations?
- What (re)definitions of the body do they suggest?
- What vision(s) of human beings do they encapsulate?
- What social, cultural or political implications do they contain?
- What critical discourses can these figures embody?

Possible Thematic Approaches:

- The Monstrous
- Post-humans and Trans-humans
- The Human and the Unhuman

- Animalistic Bodies
- New Era, New Bodies
- Sexual Deviance
- Gender Transgression
- (Cinematic) Genre Transgression
- Homosexuality, Transsexualism, Hermaphroditism...
- The Body as an Allegory of Social, Cultural, Political, or Economical Evolutions or Crisis
- Bodily Lacks, Excesses and Extremes (e.g.: anorexia/bulimia, obesity, diseases, withdrawal symptoms...)
- Sensory Overload in Films, Visceral and Distressing Sensations, and Spectators' Troubled Bodies
- Mutations, Transformations, Metamorphoses, and "Becomings"

Filmic Techniques and Strategies that Disturb Bodies on Screen: Suggested Analyses

- Special effects, prostheses, make-up and costumes are major tools for shaping, transforming and inventing new, original bodies on screen.
- The mise-en-scene can also effect disfigurement of the body, especially through framing choices, blurring, or superimpositions that can fragment, obscure, or diffract the images of the body.
- The strategic use of lighting and reflections on bodies (shades, striation) can also cut up, redraw, and distort their contours.
- The cuts in the editing can also "attack" the bodies, cause them to lose their unity, their consistency, or their density.
- Similarly, sound effects and aural textures can either dematerialise the bodies or render them distressing and monstrous.

III – A Few Examples...

- Unusual representations of the body are to be found in many horror and gore films as well as in zombie, vampire, or ghost films which invent a wide range of abnormal, disfigured, fragmented, disembodied, and monstrous bodies...
- A new cinematic tendency, often called "Extreme Cinema", combines the characteristics of *auteur* or art films with elements of extreme violence and morbid sex which disturb the conventional representations of the human body. This new tendency can be found in the films of Gaspar No , Claire Denis, Bruno Dumont, Michael Haneke, Lars Von Trier, and Nicolas Winding Refn, among others, which present marginal, bestial, aggressive or attacked bodies and make them the bearers of broader social, cultural or philosophical issues.
- This is also the case of the "Body Horror" or "Biological Horror" genre which gained renown through directors such as David Cronenberg, Brian Yuzna, Lloyd Kaufman, and Clive Barker. In these fiction films, horror essentially derives from the the representation of degeneration, destruction or monstrous transformation of the bodies: diseases, psychosomatic pathologies, and other diverse phenomena of mutation distort the traits of the human figure, sometimes so much that it is utterly unidentifiable as such.
- Certain productions (action or combat films, series...) feature super-humans or super-heroes whose bodies are not subjected to the same physical limits as ordinary people.
- Other films rethink the human body in the light of gender studies and queer theories, offering new representations of the body that are much more plastic and unstable than in more classical films that reproduce an essentialist vision of identity and corporality.

- Certain experimental films resculpt the human figure through diverse filmic techniques and strategies that offer a new range of representations of the human body.

IV – Practical Information

Submission and Registration:

The candidates should submit a 500-word proposal (for a 20-minute paper) and a short bio to the conference email address (BodyInFilm.ENS@gmail.com) before the 15th of January, 2014. They will receive an answer from the organisers by the end of February. There will be a 20 euro registration fee for the participants.

Conference Languages:

English and French

Dates and Location:

The conference will be held at Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris (France), on the 26th, 27th and the 28th of June, 2014.

Organisers:

Jérôme Bloch, Benjamin Flores, Sophie Walon (ARIAS, ENS, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris III).

Presented papers will be considered for publication in a volume of essays (publisher to be confirmed).