

## **Cultural Analysis of Disability: Lecture Program**

Supported by Research Group Bodies, Genders, Sexualities – Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis  
(ASCA)

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In cultural analysis, cultural phenomena such as works of art and literature, cinema and new media, popular culture, as well as social belief and value systems are examined. Emphasis is placed on textual, visual and historical details in the context of the social, political or aesthetic movements that underpin them. Their implied normativity and the ways in which identity, difference and otherness are negotiated across the cultural spectrum are questioned. The interdisciplinary approach of cultural analysis invites research at the intersections of core disciplines in the humanities to develop new theoretical frameworks and methodologies for analyzing culture in all its forms and expressions.

The ASCA (Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis) research group Bodies, Genders, Sexualities functions as a meeting point for researchers who approach the intersecting issues of gender, corporality, and sexuality in their work. The group seeks to foster critical engagement with the full range of approaches that inform contemporary theory on bodies, genders, and sexualities, such as feminism, queer theory, phenomenology, (bio)ethics, affect theory, psychoanalysis, postcolonial and decolonial theories, media theory, sports, new materialisms, critical posthumanism, critical race studies, ecocriticism, and more.

A cultural analytic approach to disability specifically entails a critical reconsideration of embodiment, processes of marginalization, and cultural representations of bodies. In this approach embodiment is not taken for granted, but is seen as closely linked to cultural, social, and political processes of knowledge production and societal practices. Disability is seen as a productive site of reflection on human values and injustices. While disability in cultural analysis can serve as a concept through which processes of marginalization, subversion, disruption, and meaning making are uncovered and newly interpreted, it can also serve as a theoretical object, which represents the voices, images, sensualities, everyday experiences, and political struggles of disabled people.

With the help of analyzing cultural objects, such as films, literature, artworks, and popular culture, a cultural analytic approach to disability conceptualizes new ways of seeing, reading, projecting, and relating to bodies. In this context, analyzing, e.g. “disabled theatre,” becomes a way of critically reflecting on the conventions of theatre (“disabling theatre”), on forms of representation, and on practices of looking. Such engagement with culture through theory allows for intersections of cultural, medical, social, political, and academic discourses and practices around disability. The aim of a cultural analysis of disability is thus to expand the field of disability studies into a more interdisciplinary field of research, as well as to take seriously the power of (popular) cultural objects for a theory of culture.

The special strength of cultural analysis of disability is its clear focus on the complex meanings of corporeality.

The lecture program of Cultural Analysis of Disability addresses foremost MA students (university and arts school), but also invites PhD students and other theorists who want to expand their range of critical approaches to the study of culture of disability.

## **Cultural Analysis of Disability – Preliminary Course Outline – 7. May 2015**

### **Content**

This course centers around a new proposed analytical perspective on disability: Cultural Analysis of Disability. This approach emphasizes the idea that disability theory has implications and effects beyond the health and/or social policy sector. Cultural Analysis of Disability is not an established discipline with a fixed methodology. Rather, it is an interdisciplinary research practice that understands theory as a productive and malleable field of cultural production and self-reflection. This course is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach to disability in the social, cultural, political, artistic, ethical, and medical spheres and their intersections. It deals with the implications of the *concept* of disability for individual subjects and societal groups, and it aims to reveal the productivity and necessity of understanding disability as a proper *object* of study for a critical cultural theory.

### **Aims**

- To introduce students to the interdisciplinary research practice of Cultural Analysis
- To develop a sense of the aims of Cultural Analysis of Disability and of how they differ, overlap, challenge, and advance other studies around disability
- To enable students to evaluate and reflect on existing analyses and interpretations of disability
- To close-reading academic articles, exploring cultural objects (such as films, exhibitions, books, theatre performances, demonstrations, poems, works of art, television series), and to discuss on a theoretical level socio-political matters of embodiment and cognition
- To be able to collaborate with other students on ongoing research projects

### **Assignments**

- To work with concepts/objects relating to disability in writing
- To find cultural artefacts that are not explicitly (re-)presenting disability, yet are potentially valuable for an analysis of disability
- To search for new concepts that might be productive for a Cultural Analysis of Disability

### **Possible Course Structure**

- What are Disability Studies? What is Cultural Analysis of Disability?
- Philosophies of the Body
- Disability (Bio)ethics
- Critical Concepts:
  - Mobility, Care, (Inter)dependency
  - Visuality, Shame, Vulnerability
  - Identity, Sex/Gender, Desire
- Outlook towards Emerging Fields of Study (Fat Studies, Food Studies, Environmental Studies, Post-human Theories, Critical Race Studies, Medical Humanities)

### **Teachers**

Dr. Jules Sturm: [j.v.sturm@uva.nl](mailto:j.v.sturm@uva.nl)

Ymke Kelders (rMA): [ymkekelders@gmail.com](mailto:ymkekelders@gmail.com)

Invited guest speakers (TBA)