

WOST 294M
Pictures of Health: Gender, Medicine, and Film
 University of Massachusetts, Amherst
 Bartlett 302 / T 2:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m.; Th 2:30-3:45
 Spring 2008

Professor: Mary Elizabeth Strunk
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→ **Course Description and Objectives**

Both the cinema and Western medicine had their origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this course, we will begin to examine the long relationship between the two, with an emphasis on how dominant modes of visibility (i.e., ways of seeing and showing) have affected both. We will consider the ideologies embedded in both cinematic and medical technologies and how these have impacted the ideal of “health” as well as perceptions of medical authority and obligation.

Together, we will ask how movies have influenced medicine's public image and the ways that we imagine our own bodies. How has a century of filmmaking helped define the “normal” body and the categories of health and illness? How have films shaped ideas about "natural" ways of living, aging, and dying? How have gender, race, class, and sexuality affected how medical science and medical practitioners are portrayed on-screen — and, by extension, how they are regarded in real life?

Our approach to the semester’s films and readings will be steeped in an awareness of intersectionality, or the recognition that power relations based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, class, disability and other markers of difference do not act independently of one another. Topics will include: the politics of illness; reproduction; intersexuality/transsexuality; death/dying; aging; disability; mental illness; public health; disease/disaster management; environmental health/activism; pandemics; pharmaceuticals; health care reform; and other issues that class members select as priorities for further study

→ **Required Texts** (Available at Food for Thought Books in Amherst)

- Signs of Life: Cinema and Medicine. Graeme Harper and Andrew Moor. (Wallflower Press, 2005)
- Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors. Susan Sontag. (Picador, 1990)
- “Miss Evers’ Boys” (play) David Feldshuh. (Dramatist’s Play Services, 1998)
- “Wit” (play) Margaret Edson (Faber and Faber 2003)
- Multiple readings on e-reserves
- Assigned films

→ **Assignments and Deadlines**

Participation, in-class writing		20%
Discussion-leading + SPARK post	TBD (Individual sign-ups)	10%
Film Comment (Revision)	Within one week of discussion-leading	20%
Project Proposal and bibliography	Th 4/24	5%
Literature Review	Th 5/1	15%
On-line Presentation	5/8-5/13	10%
Final Project	Due noon, 5/20	20%

Total: 100%

Reading/Discussion Schedule:

- Jan. 29** Screening: *Frankenstein* (1931), excerpts from *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)
 Introductions, Course Overview
 __Visit http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/frankenstein/frank_birth.html
- Jan. 31** __Jon Turney, "Mary Shelley's Creation," and "Conclusion: The Human Body Shop," in *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics, and Popular Culture*, Yale University Press, 1998, 13-25, 200-222.
 __"Science and the Cinema" in Lisa Cartwright's *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 1-16.
 __Excerpt: *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994)
- Feb. 5** Screening: *Miss Evers' Boys* (1997)
 __David Feldshuh, "Miss Evers' Boys"
 __Michel Foucault, "Preface," *The Birth of the Clinic*, xi-xix.
- Feb. 7** __James Jones, "The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment: 'A Moral Astigmatism'" in *The 'Racial' Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*. Sandra Harding, ed., Indiana University Press, 1993, 275-286.
 __Ashraf Rushdy, "Exquisite Corpse," in *The Best American Essays 2001*, Kathleen Norris, Robert Atwan, eds., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001, 261-269.
- Feb. 12** Screening: *Wit* (2001)
 __Margaret Edson, "W;t"
 __Susan Sontag, "Illness as Metaphor," pp. 3-42.
- Feb. 14** __Brian Glasser, "Magic bullets, dark victories, and cold comforts: some preliminary observations about stories of sickness in the cinema," in *Signs of Life: Cinema and Medicine*, Wallflower Press, 2005, 7-18.
 __Excerpt: *The Doctor* (1991)
- (Feb. 19)** Screening: *A Healthy Baby Girl* (1996)
 __Susan Sontag, "Illness as Metaphor," pp. 43-87.
- Feb. 21** __Lucy Fischer, "Birth traumas: medicine, parturition and horror in *Rosemary's Baby*," in *Signs of Life*, 19-32.
 __Jennifer Glaser, "Sex and the Sickbed," in *Twentysomething Essays by Twentysomething Writers: The Best New Voices of 2006*, edited by Matt Kellogg and Jillian Quint, Random House, 2006
 __Excerpt: *Dead Ringers* (1988)
 • Optional e-reserve:
 __"Dead Ringers: Masculine Embodiment," in Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, Minnesota, 1993, 149-155
- Feb. 26** Screening: *And the Band Played On* (1993)
 __Randy Shiltz, "Prologue," *And the Band Played On*, St. Martin's Press, 1987, xxi-xxiii.
 __Kenneth MacKinnon, "The mainstream AIDS movie prior to the 1990s," in *Signs of Life*, 33-44.
 __Susan Sontag, "AIDS and its Metaphors," pp. 93-148.
- Feb. 28** Guest presentation by Karen Lederer
 __Susan Sontag, "AIDS and its Metaphors," pp. 148-183.
 __Excerpt: *Philadelphia* (1993)

- Mar. 4** Screening: *Yesterday* (2004)
 __<http://www.yesterdaythemovie.co.za/index.asp>
- Mar. 6** __Susan D. Moeller, "Compassion Fatigue" in *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death*, Routledge, 1999, 33-53.
 __Internal Policy Document, African National Congress (March 2002) "Castro Hlongwana, Caravans, Cats, Geese, Foot & Mouth and Statistics: HIV/AIDS and the Struggle for the Humanisation of the African"
 __Zackie Achmat, "The Treatment Action Campaign, HIV/AIDS and the Government," *Transformation* 54 (2004), 76-84.
- Mar. 11** Screening: *Sicko* (2007)
- Mar. 13** **Special Session on developing the Final Project**
Draft proposals due at the end of class.
 __Atul Gawande, "Sick and Twisted," *The New Yorker*, July 23, 2007.
- SPRING BREAK**
- Mar. 25** Screening: *Lorenzo's Oil* (1995)
- Mar. 27** __M. Roy Jobson and Donna Knapp van Bogaert, "Just a story or a 'just story'? Ethical issues in a film with a medical theme," in *Signs of Life*, 82-91.
 __ Atul Gawande, "The Learning Curve," *The New Yorker*, Jan 28, 2002, 52.
- Apr. 1** Screening: *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989)
- Apr. 3** __Marita Sturken, "Reenactment and the Making of History: The Vietnam War as Docudrama," in *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, UC Press, 1997, 85-121.
 __ Tom Shakespeare, "Sex, death, and stereotypes: disability in *Sick and Crash*," in *Signs of Life*, 58-68.
- Apr. 8** Screening: *Girl, Interrupted* (1999)
- Apr. 10** __ Laura Hillenbrand, "A Sudden Illness," in *The Best American Essays 2004*, Louis Menand and Robert Atwan, eds, Houghton Mifflin, 96-113.
 On-line: <http://www.cfids-cab.org/MESA/Hillenbrand.html>
 __ Pam Houston, "Out of Habit, I Start Apologizing," in *Minding the Body: Women Writers on Body and Soul*, Patricia Foster, ed., (New York, Doubleday, 1994), 147-158.
- Apr. 15** Screening: *Normal* (2003)
- Apr. 17** __Reading TBA
 __Excerpt: *TransGeneration* (2006)
- Apr. 22** Screening: *Return of Navajo Boy* (2000)
- Apr. 24** **Final Project Proposal Due.**
 __Karl Grossman, "Environmental Racism," in *The 'Racial' Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*. Sandra Harding, ed., IUP, 1993, 326-334.
 __Excerpt: *Atomic Café* (1982)

- Apr. 29** Screening: *Safe* (1995)
- May 1** **Literature Review Due.**
 __ Gaye Naismith, “Tales from the Crypt: Contamination and Quarantine in Todd Hanes’s [*Safe*],” in *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender, and Science*, Paula A. Treichler, Lisa Cartwright, Constance Penley, eds. NYU Press, 1998, 360-387.
- May 6** Screening: *Gattaca* (1997)
 __ Jackie Stacey, “Imitation of life: the politics of the new genetics in cinema,” in *Signs of Life*, 153-165.
- May 8** Presentations.
- May 13** Course review and final project preparations.

Final Project due at NOON on Tuesday, May 20.
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→ Course Structure

If you’ve taken women’s studies courses in the past, you already know that the field of “women’s studies” actually contains numerous cross-currents and ongoing debates across interdisciplinary boundaries. So it will be with this class, which draws on the work of film makers, film scholars, historians, theorists, journalists, playwrights, essayists, policy makers, and activists to help answer our driving questions: *What is “health”? How and why has “health” been defined, visualized, and hierarchized?* Taken together, the readings will help you to weave together many different strands of thought, drawing connections and contrasts among multiple perspectives and analytical approaches.

Each of us will bring to this class our individual opinions on health, and health care and the systems and practices that shape them. Ours will be a classroom of open minds – and one that honors the sensitivity and privacy of the issues we may discuss. I expect that each of you will help build a classroom environment based on trust, confidentiality, and community, while also challenging each other in intellectually rigorous discussions. It is your job to prepare yourself to think critically, to articulate ideas clearly, and to listen attentively and respectfully to your classmates, who may have perspectives quite different from your own.

Most of our Thursday class meetings will be run seminar-style, which means that they will be based largely on class discussion and interactive learning exercises bracketed by a pair of short lectures. We may occasionally jumpstart our discussions with a pop quiz. Therefore, you must come to class having read and having read *well*.

→ Readings

Reading well means taking detailed notes on the readings and films. (You will also be “reading” the latter, after all, and not merely taking them in as forms of passive entertainment.) Your course notes are invaluable. They greatly enhance comprehension and also elevate the level of our class discussions. (When you are reading for multiple classes, you know how essential notes are for jogging your memory about a particular text under discussion.) A set of reliable reading notes also makes paper writing far, far easier than it would be if you had conjure a film sequence from memory or re-enter the readings “cold.” In our class meetings, we will frequently parse specific sections of what we have read, so **you must always bring to class the text or articles to be discussed that day.**

* A Note on E-reserve articles: As course readers have become more and more expensive, e-reserves are now the most economical way to assemble readings for class. **You are required to print out all e-reserve articles so that you can bring them to class.** If you do not have access to a printer, OIT will print them out for you for a fee. If you find yourself having a problem with this system, I trust that you will let me know BEFORE the day that readings are due.

→ Participation / Short homework assignments / In-class work

You will receive frequent, short writing assignments or quizzes that will enable you to experiment with new ideas, while also allowing me to give you regular feedback on your progress. **Your class participation grade will be based on your performance on these assignments, plus the quality of your participation in class.** Obviously, being absent or late to class will adversely affect your grade. You may not miss screenings without the prior permission of the professor or without a serious reason for doing so. **Students with three or more unexcused absences will automatically have their grades lowered.**

→ Discussion-leading and Pre-class SPARK post (Film Comment Draft)

Each student will sign up to be a discussion leader for one class session. This will involve analyzing the assigned readings 24 hours before they are due and **preparing the first draft of your two-page (max.) Film Comment, which will be posted on SPARK.** (Further description of this assignment appears below.) Because one or two other students will be ruminating on the same set of texts, you are encouraged you to confer with your student partner/s to find engaging ways to collaborate through your written work. (For example, by splitting the reading assignments between you, or ensuring that you are not writing on identical topics.) The Film Comment must be emailed to Professor Strunk **by no later than noon on the day before the discussion is to take place.** Prof. Strunk will append comments and will post the paper to SPARK. The rest of the class will read the paper ahead of class time and students are welcome to post their own comments.

→ Film Comment Revision

The Film Comment is an opportunity for you to reflect upon, explore, and apply new ideas from our texts and the class discussions. **Note that this is NOT merely a summary or opinion paper.** Think of the Film Comment as a more academic version of the film reviews you might read in the New York Times or any other media outlet that employs professional film critics. You will be writing less as a critic of the film's technical merits (although such elements are certainly fair game) than as an interpreter of the film's social or political significance. The best film commentaries are those that "crack open" a film, giving audiences who have already watched the film some new insight that they would not have gained without your analysis. Such commentaries often use the film as a springboard into a discussion of larger social issues or events. Your Film Comment should contain a clear and specific thesis in response to a research question. (You may devise your own question or you may adapt one from the course description that appears at the top of this syllabus.) We will talk more in class about this assignment. I recommend skimming a film guide such as Timothy Corrigan's *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*. (Any recent edition will do.) A copy of Corrigan's book is on reserve in Du Bois.

The Film Comment is a two-stage assignment. You will submit a strong first draft ahead of our class discussion, and this version will be posted to SPARK for your classmates to read before class. After the discussion, you will revise and re-submit the assignment to Professor Strunk. (Electronic submissions are fine, but attachments must be in Word (.doc) format. NOTE THAT I CANNOT ACCEPT ".docx" ATTACHMENTS; so please save your papers accordingly before sending. As insurance against missing a deadline, it's always a good idea to cut-and-paste your paper's text into the body of the email, just in case there is a problem with the attachment.) This assignment may eventually provide fodder for your final project.

→ Final Project

As the culmination of a semester's work, each student will submit a final project — a formal analytical piece that might appear in the U.S. version of a text like *Signs of Life*. The final project is worth **50% of your grade**, which will be broken down as follows:

- 1) **The Proposal** (5%) 250-500 wds summarizing the topic, research question, and your projected argument.
- 2) **The Literature Review** (15%) 1-2 pages; basically, an annotated bibliography in short essay form.
- 3) **The Presentation** (10%) On-line, unless chosen to present in-class in May.
- 4) **Final Project** (20%) An 8-10 page film analysis.

→ Special Opportunities

Frequently, the issues we cover in this class will overlap with topics that you are studying in your economics, history, political science or [fill-in-the-blank] classes. Content related to WOST 294M may also appear in the news or in contemporary political debates, or they may be the subject of popular culture-mediated critiques. I encourage you to be on the lookout for such intersections, and to share them with the class when appropriate. We are lucky to be in the Five College area, in which we could attend a special lecture or event just about every night of the week. On our SPARK site, I'll keep a running list of events that are especially relevant to this class; please feel free to notify me of any such events or student opportunities that I might have missed.

One such student opportunity that I would like everyone to be aware of is the 14th Annual Undergraduate Research Conference, which happens right here on campus on May 2. The conference represents a great opportunity to share your work and to foster the intellectual community at UMass. It's also a smart resume-builder, especially for anyone who may be contemplating graduate school. **The deadline for conference submissions is March 3.** For more information, visit this site: <http://webapp.comcol.umass.edu/msc/default.aspx>.

→ Deadlines

Turn in all written assignments on the day they are due. Except with prior approval of the professor or in the case of extreme emergencies, late assignments will not be accepted.

→ Do I Need to Proofread?

The answer is yes. A sloppy paper detracts mightily from your argument. We all make honest mistakes. But it is disrespectful to submit hastily prepared work to your professor and peers.

→ Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty (knowingly helping another student to cheat). You can review University's official policy on academic honesty here: <http://www.umass.edu/umhome/policies/honesty.html>.