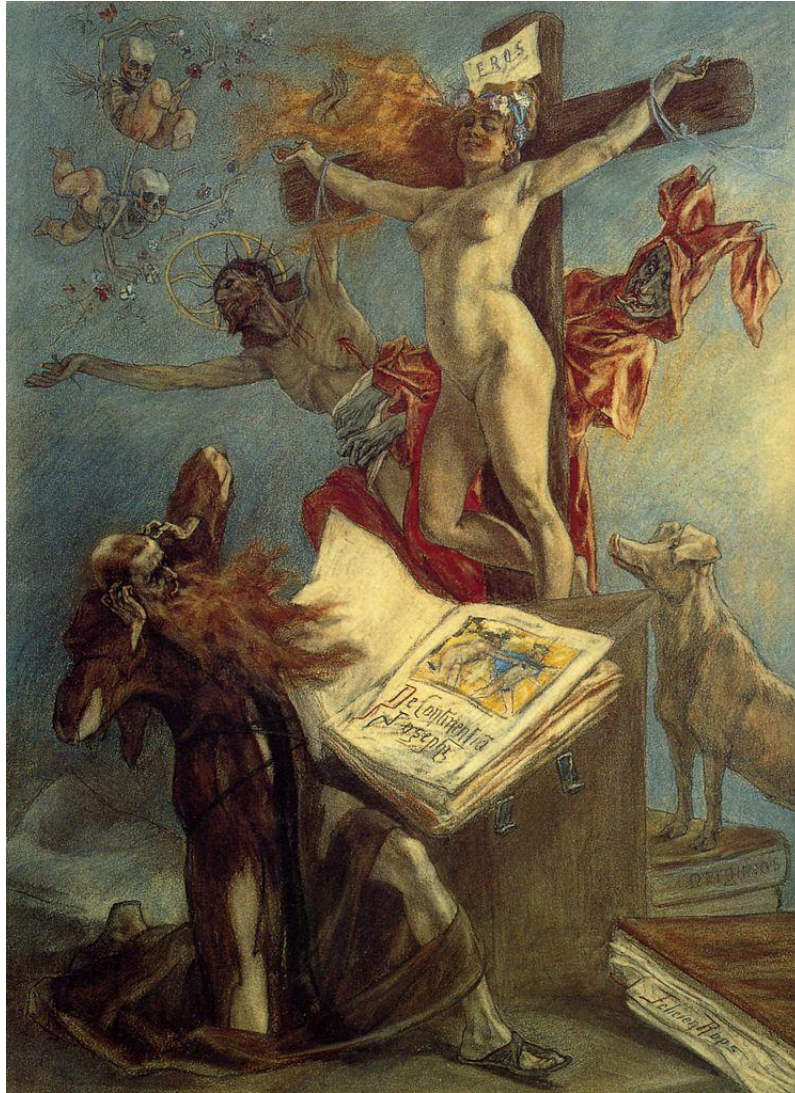


The Flesh and the Word

Cultural History of the Body – Discourse, Representation, and Epistemology
19th, 20th, and 21st centuries



Félicien Rops, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1878 (pastel from *Les Sataniques*, Royal Library of Belgium)

Call for Papers

Doctoral conference of the Centre for Cultural History
in Contemporary Societies (CHCSC)

Wednesday 11 May 2016

University of Versailles-Saint-Quentin

The Flesh and the Word

Cultural History of the Body – Discourse, Representation, and Epistemology
19th, 20th, and 21st centuries

Defined in 1988 as a “puzzle in progress,”¹ the history of the body has since expanded significantly, even though it still arguably remains a “puzzle.”² In the 2005 introduction to the second volume of his *History of the Body* (codirected with Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello), Alain Corbin advises caution in dealing with “a historical object whose dimensions defy any attempts at true synthesis.”³ The three authors also point out that “the body engages with different sciences and necessitates varying methods and epistemologies according to the study of sensations, techniques, uses, or expressions. This heterogeneity is constitutive of the object itself. It is insurmountable and must be reckoned with in a history of the body.”⁴

The body is saturated with, perhaps even structured around, a number of paradoxes and tensions which shape as much as they reveal our relationship to the world – private and public, inside and outside, known and unknown, visible and invisible, ours and other, etc. Both material and imaginary, the body as it is perceived and felt, by ourselves and/or by others, is a construct with complex origins. Tackling this complexity raises as many difficulties as opportunities:

- Does an inter- or transdisciplinary approach of the body still constitute a “history of the body”? What do the disciplines involved stand to gain or lose in the process? Between the practical necessities of collaboration and the demands of a concept in vogue, what are the blind spots of interdisciplinarity?

- Taking into account the “psychosomatic” coming together of body and mind of the 19th and 20th centuries, to what extent could the study of the body today be considered another way of addressing the question of will, desire and freedom?

Either acting or acted upon, puppets or little gods – what bodies did our forefathers “inhabit”? What bodies are we? What bodies are we dreaming of?

The conference will have a reflective approach: what do the humanities tell us about the body? What does the body as an object of study tell us about the humanities?

The aim of the conference is twofold:

- First and foremost, to present recent work (PhD theses in progress or defended in recent years) which falls within this “cultural history⁵ of the body” understood as interdisciplinary (comparative or historiographical approaches are encouraged) in its broadest sense (sociology, literature, anthropology, philosophy, art history, architecture, law, medicine, sports science...)
- Whenever possible, to question the interdisciplinarity, the heterogeneity – or even the impossibility of synthesis – of such a broad and dense field.

Themes might include (but are not limited to):

1. Ecosystems of the body.

Environmental approach of the body (clothes, furniture, tools, accommodation, ergonomics, design, climate, etc.) and its implied practices (poses, postures, attitudes, gestures, mimesis, fashions, norms, nudity, shyness, etc).

2. The appetites of the body

Otherness within one’s self-construction; the body for oneself and the body for others; the desiring body; libido; pleasures and frustrations; sexuality (including moral and legal prohibitions); the discourse of hunger; gastronomy and nutrition; the “cult of the body”, etc.

3. The body under control

Family, medicine, religion, the media, school, the army, prison, the world of work...: what visions of the body do these different worlds convey? What types of responses and impacts do these representations elicit? Of particular interest will be the notions of “power,” “authority,” “guardianship,” “norm,” and “morals.”

4. Seeing the body, reading the body

Painting and graphic arts (including the caricature and the grotesque), sculpture, literature, theatre, dance, opera, photography, cinema, as well as publicity, etc. Testimonies or models?

5. Speaking bodies, spoken bodies?

Who speaks of the body? Wherefrom does the body speak?

The elusive, secret, intimate part of any human being; corporeality, the carnal trait of a voice, a look, an expression (sensuality, suavity, lasciviousness, concupiscence, ...);

Of interest will be the question of the sources and methods of an interdisciplinary history of the body; the works in progress and the areas yet to be explored, etc.

Additional information

Scientific committee: Philippe Artières, Robert Beck, Paule Lévy, Judith Lyon-Caen, André Rauch, Evangelhia Stead, Jean-Claude Yon

Organization committee: Tanguy Bérenger, Vincent Gogibu, Émilie Fromentèze, Christophe Meslin, Laura Muresan

Timeline:

- Deadline for proposals: **15 February 2016**
- Answer: 15 March 2016
- Conference date: Wednesday 11 May 2016 (University of Versailles)

Information for applicants:

This call for papers is open to all PhD students and doctors who completed their thesis in the last few years, in France or abroad. The presentations will be in French or English.

The proposals (\pm 500-word abstracts) are to be sent along with a short bio that includes the title and subject of your PhD thesis as well as your institutional affiliation to doctorants.chcsc@gmail.com by **15 February 2016**.

¹ Yannick Ripa, « L'histoire du corps. Un puzzle en construction », *Histoire de l'éducation*, n° 37, 1988. pp. 47-54; [http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/hedu_0221-6280_1988_num_37_1_1551], our translation.

² Alain Croix, « Heurs et malheurs du corps, bonheur de l'histoire », *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2006/1 (no 53-1), p. 180; [<http://www.cairn.info/revue-d-histoire-moderne-et-contemporaine-2006-1-page-178.htm>].

³ *Histoire du corps*, (dir. d'Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, Georges Vigarello), Volume 2, « De la Révolution à la Grande Guerre », dir. Alain Corbin, éditions du Seuil, 2005, p 9, our translation.

⁴ *Histoire du corps*, (dir. Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, Georges Vigarello), Volume 1, « De la Renaissance aux Lumières », dir. Georges Vigarello, éditions du Seuil, 2005, p 10 (Preface written by Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, et Georges Vigarello), our translation.

⁵ Cultural history being understood as a “social history of representations.” See the Centre for Cultural History in Contemporary Societies’ definition: <http://www.chcsc.uvsq.fr/centre-d-histoire-culturelle-des-societes-contemporaines/langue-fr/le-chcsc/>.