What does it mean for bodies to think? Until the seventeenth century thinking was exclusively considered a matter of the soul, or indeed “the matter” of the soul—God’s unextended body as it were. Even for that most famous of thinking bodies, Rene Descartes, when he conjured his famous body/mind duality (based on the thought form “I think therefore I am”) to prove the existence of God, mind was attributed to our unextended God-aspect, not to “the body” (which for Descartes was just a “thing” or at best a machine).

So when and why does “the body” begin to think? And what does it mean for the body “to think” anyway? In order to answer this we might first need to think a little about how “the body” became the place of the (thinking) person in the first place, and then to consider what happens when this body becomes the most personal place to think? Thus, this class addresses not the question: “What is a thinking body?” but the question: “What do thinking bodies do?” Moreover, it does so by considering what the thinking body has done in the past in order to consider what it might (be able to) do in the future. In other words, this course tracks the developing of the “thinking body” as a way of making sense of what human beings “are” and consequently what “we” are as humans—and what we might yet become.

Possible Texts

- Descartes, Meditations of First Philosophy, 1&2
- Locke, “Identity and Difference”
- Shelly, Frankenstein
- Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals
- Stevenson, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
- Gilman, “TheYellow Wallpaper”
- Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents
- Lacan, “Mirror Stage”
- Sartre, Section from Being and Nothingness
- Fanon, “The Lived Experience of Blackness”
- Butler, Lilith’s Brood
- Foucault, “Docile Bodies” from Discipline and Punish
- Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman”
- Scott, Blade Runner
- Warchovskis, The Matrix
- Agamben, “Genius”
- Armstrong, “Sharing One Skin”