Unit 3 Argument—Otherness and Representations of the Body

“The figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness. The stranger has already come too close; the stranger is ‘in my face’. The stranger then is not simply the one whom we have not yet encountered, but the one whom we have already encountered, or already faced. The stranger comes to be faced as a form of recognition: we recognise somebody as a stranger, rather than simply failing to recognise them.”

—Sarah Ahmed, “Recognising Strangers” (46)

“A society has been created and perpetuated which has excluded so many of its members.”

—Irving Zola, Missing Pieces (244)

In “Recognising Strangers,” feminist and critical race theorist Sara Ahmed explores the concept of the stranger, a figure we acknowledge only because we are suspicious or fearful of this Other person. The stranger is made visible because it threatens us—our safety, our way of life, our very being. The stranger is the Other, which post-colonial theorist Edward Said has identified as a figure of difference. We define ourselves by this Other, identifying particular people as different from ourselves. We see this in popular discourses: the AIDS crisis (the gay male Other who threatens “healthy” sexuality), immigration policy (the foreign Other who threatens jobs and nationalism), the autism epidemic (the disabled Other who threatens ability and livelihood), and birth control debates (the feminist Other who threatens cultural and religious values).

We’ll spend the rest of this semester analyzing, questioning, critiquing, and arguing about how and why we construct particular bodies as Other. We’ll ask difficult questions: What local and institutional structures are in place that exclude particular bodies? Who benefits from these structures? How are particular bodies granted and denied access to particular spaces, to different positions of power? Why is difference seen as a threat? What are the contemporary debates and critiques circulating about Othered (raced, sexed, classed, disabled) bodies? How do you identify and position yourself within these different conversations of difference?

Your purpose here is to persuade your audience to adopt the position that you recommend from the position of authority you have constructed through research and critical reflection. You will identify a political, social, or popular controversy that is related to questions of Otherness, then listen to and analyze the arguments embedded within these debates: Who is saying what? What positions are the participants taking? What are the ethical and social consequences of those positions? What is the history of this issue? What arguments are being constructed for particular audiences? Which positions are most credible? Which positions seem to have the most power?

NOTE: You may benefit from conducting primary research, which we will discuss further.¹

¹ Conducting primary research means relying on your own analysis and drawing your own conclusions, rather than relying on the interpretation of a scholar or expert.
Examples of some general topics you may want to explore could include, but definitely are not limited to... **Body Art** (tattoos, piercings, suspension, branding); **Language** (Othering phrases, controversial words, lyrics about the body); **Art** (graffiti, performance art); **Sex/Gender** (saturation of sexuality, hyper-masculinity, androgyny, trans/LGBTQ); **Ability** (popular representations of disability, accessibility, “cure” rhetoric, sex taboos); **Activism** (human rights, animal-rights activism); **Race** (post-racial US, raced bodies, immigration, ethnic identities).

Similar to Unit 2, you must zoom in on a particular part of the issue to make an effective argument. And again, there is no predetermined formula to follow or structure to imitate as you attempt to organize your essay. However, keep the following principles and practices in mind:

- **Make your purpose explicit**: What are you attempting to persuade the audience to think, believe, or do?
- **Contextualize and analyze the debate**: Why is this issue relevant? What are the different issues? What arguments might important stakeholders make?
- **Demonstrate audience awareness**: What does your audience believe or assume about this topic? What rhetorical appeals and strategies are appropriate for your rhetorical situation and for anticipating counter-arguments?
- **Keep in mind a critical audience**: Do you have ideas that are unsupported, over-generalized, obvious, or poorly articulated?

The paper should ultimately include:

- An argumentative thesis that takes a critical, complicated position within the controversy.
- Rich description and analysis of the controversy.
- No more than three carefully selected secondary sources (one should be scholarly).
- Primary sourcing (e.g. direct observations, interviews, analysis of primary documents).
- A range of reasonable evidence to support your claims (e.g. facts, statistics, anecdotes).
- Appropriate and effective rhetorical appeals.
- An organizational structure that allows for thoughtful and thorough development of ideas.

**The Nitty Gritty**

Your argument essay should be 6-8 pages long, 12-point font, double-spaced. Please use proper MLA citation and compose an appropriate title for your essay. The essay and its corresponding reflection are due on the last day of class, **Thursday, December 6th**.

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