

LT168 Theories of the Body

Seminar Leader: Clio Nicaastro
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Course Times: Tue&Thu 9:00-10:30
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

The body has always attracted the interest of thinkers and researchers from different disciplines, from philosophy to critical theory to neuroscience. The crucial challenge has been to overcome the dichotomy between mind and body, reason and feeling, that has affected Western culture especially from Descartes on. What does it mean to think through the body and what are its 'dialectics' (Lisa Yun Lee)? Is there such a thing as a 'natural' body or are bodies always constructed by class, race, gender, and our personal stories? This course introduces the main theories of literature and culture by looking at the body as an object of the "medical gaze" (Barbara Duden, Michel Foucault) and of political/gender persecutions (Silvia Federici) as well as a site of both active and passive resistance and expression. The experience of the body is often at the limit of the expressible and challenges the artistic and verbal forms we have available to articulate and give meaning to it. Furthermore, we will look at efforts to find a language to speak for/through the body, its desires, and its idiosyncrasies (Dodie Bellamy, Audre Lorde). What kinds of stories are mapped and inscribed in our physical bodies (Paul B. Preciado, Roxane Gay)? Does the body forget? And how are our bodies influenced by their narratives and representations?

An important question we will address during the seminar is what it means for a text to be 'accessible'. We will discuss this issue not only as critical 'readers', by comparing the different styles of the authors we will encounter, but also as 'writers'.

Requirements

Preparing for class involves reading thoughtfully and engaging with the set text for each class, for instance, by thinking through the argument of a particular section and taking notes while reading. Try to formulate and address questions before you come to class: What is the argument being made by the author? What terms recur throughout the text? How does it relate to other texts we have read on the course? If you find a particular section difficult to understand underline unfamiliar terms and try to ask yourself what specifically is unclear (don't worry if you find the texts difficult or if you are not familiar with all the references; remember it is always possible that the author is being unclear or contradictory).

Students are expected to participate actively in class. The purpose of the class is to come to a better understanding of it through collective discussion. Students are therefore encouraged to ask questions as well as making statements in class. The texts will be uploaded every week on google classroom. Students are asked to bring paper copies of the reading to class and to not use laptops. The use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. If you have a disability accommodation, please inform your instructor at the beginning of the course.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Regular attendance and active participation are essential to the success of this course. Attendance at ALL classes is expected. Late arrival or leaving during class time will count as an absence. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2021:

Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill.

If you cannot attend class because of COVID-19 restrictions, online alternatives will be provided, e.g. remote participation and/or asynchronous options for those who currently live in a time zone that is incompatible with the schedule of the seminar. During any online session it is strongly encouraged to have your camera on. We will try to make up for the physical distance through assignment that facilitate class discussion when students are not doing it at the same time.

Assessment

The assessment will be made on the basis of two essays and class participation (See 'Grade Breakdown' and 'Essay Deadlines' below).

Assignments

The deadlines for all writing assignments can be found under 'Essay deadlines.'

Essays: The midterm essay (2000 words) responds to a thematic question and should represent your understanding of one aspect of the course reading. The final essay (3000 words) is expected to be more ambitious and somewhat longer, trying to develop a more comprehensive account of a particular conceptual question or topic you will have encountered during the course and drawing on a wider range of sources.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and

feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Classroom participation: 30%

Midterm Essay: 30%

Final Essay: 40%

Schedule

Week 1 Introduction

Tuesday, August 31 – Introduction to the course//Presentation of the syllabus.

Jayna Brown, *Body*, in "Keywords for African American Studies", ed. by R. Edwards et al. (2018)

Thursday, September 2 - Excerpt from Willemijn Ruberg, *History of the Body* (2019)

Week 2 A dualistic Conception of the Subject

Tuesday, September 7 – Renè Descartes, *Second Meditation*, in "Meditations on First Philosophy" (1641)

Thursday, September 9 – Renè Descartes, *Second Meditation*, in "Meditations on First Philosophy" (1641)

Week 3 Body Capital

Tuesday, September 14 – Excerpt from Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004)

Thursday, September 16 – Excerpt from Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004)

Week 4 Body Capital

Tuesday, September 21 – Excerpt from Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004)

Thursday, September 23 – Excerpt from Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004)

Week 5 The Medical Gaze

Tuesday, September 28 – Excerpt from Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (1976)

Thursday, September 30 – Excerpt from Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (1976)

Week 6 The Medical Gaze

Tuesday, October 5 – Excerpt from Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (1991)

Thursday, October 7 – Excerpt from Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (1991)

Week 7 Spectacularizing Symptoms

Tuesday, October 12 – Gilman Sander *The image of the Hysteric*, in "Hysteria Beyond Freud" (1993)

Thursday, October 14 – Excerpt from Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (1985)

Week 8

Monday, October 18 – Sunday, October 24 - Fall Break

Week 9 Spectacularizing symptoms

Tuesday, October 26 – Excerpt from Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (1985)

Thursday, October 28 – Excerpts from Giuliana Bruno *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari* (1992)

Week 10

Tuesday, November 2 – Film screening

Thursday, November 4 – Guest speaker

Week 11 Writing with the Body

Tuesday, November 9 – Excerpt from Gloria Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981)

Thursday, November 11 – Excerpt from Gloria Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981)

Week 12 Writing with the Body

Tuesday, November 16 – Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975)

Thursday, November 18 – Hélène Cixous, *Writing Blind Conversation with the Donkey in "Stigmata"* (1998)

Week 13 Eating Disorders: Symptom(s) of the Time?

Tuesday, November 23 – Johanna Hedva, *Sick Woman Theory* (2020)

Thursday, November 25 – Excerpt from Susan Bordo *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993).

Week 14 Eating Disorders: Symptom(s) of the Time?

Tuesday, November 30 – Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (1987)

Thursday, December 2 – Excerpt from Mary Winkler, Letha Cole (ed. by), *The Good Body. Ascetism in Contemporary Culture* (1994)

Week 15 Eating Disorders: Contagious Images (?)

Tuesday, December 7 – "Does ana = Anorexia? Online Interaction and the Construction of New Discursive Objects" David C. Giles in *The Palgrave Handbook of Adult Mental Health* (2016)

Thursday, December 9 – Recap and final remarks

Completion week

Monday, December 13 – Friday, December 17

Essay Deadlines

Midterm Essay: Due October 17, 23:59

Final Essay: Due December 19, 23:59