

LT168 Theories of the Body

Seminar Leader: Clio Nicastro

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Course Times: Mon & Wed 9:00-10:30

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

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. This course introduces the main theories of literature and culture by looking at the site of the body and the way in which it is the locus of feeling, symptom, ailment, illness and states of mind that both constitute and transcend the ordinary and the everyday. What does it mean to think through the body and what are its 'dialectics'? Is there such a thing as a 'natural' body or are bodies always constructed by class, race, gender, and our personal stories? We will look specifically at efforts to find a language to speak for/through the body, its desires, and its idiosyncrasies. What does the concept of idiosyncrasy reveal about the role of bodily borders/boundaries and the fear of contagion? What can studies of 'self-health' or 'somatic individuality' reveal about the body as it is lived in health and illness? How do the non-linear temporal dimensions of some conditions that involve chronicity or relapses (like autoimmune disease, cancer, eating disorders) sabotage the narrative need to end a story? What happens when these stories bring up incompatible forms of reason?

We will, furthermore, discuss the link between *mimesis* and emulation. This is a classical concept that has acquired new meanings and potential in the digital age. We examine its rewriting in art history through Aby Warburg's concepts of *Pathosformel* and of "image-symptoms," two concepts the German art historian used at the beginning of the 20th Century to rewrite art history as a history of human gestures and expression, of moving bodies and their affects. What kinds of stories are mapped onto our physical bodies? And how are they influenced by their narratives and their representations – their *Pathosformeln*?

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 (*see below special consideration for fall 2020). 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

Regular attendance and active participation are essential to the success of this course. Attendance at ALL classes is expected. Missing more than two 90--minute sessions in a semester will reduce the course grade by up to one grade step (e.g., B+ to B). Late arrival or leaving during class time will count as an absence. Missing more than 30% of all sessions may result in failing the course. Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2020:

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. As I believe it is important to give all students the same information for them to decide whether they are interested in the seminar, I will be available for an individual introductory meeting. 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 (2500 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

Monday, August 31 – Introduction to the course, presentation of the syllabus //Excerpt from Lisa Blackman, *The Body. Key Concepts* (2008)

Wednesday, September 2 – Introduction to Aby Warburg

Week 2 Thinking through the Body

Monday, September 7 – Excerpt from Lisa Blackman, *The Body. Key Concepts* (2008)

Wednesday, September 9 – Lisa Yun Lee, The Bared-Breasts Incident in Renée Heberle (ed by) *Feminist Interpretations of Adorno* (2006) + Excerpts from Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (1951)

Week 3 Thinking through the Body

Monday, September 14 – Excerpt from Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of Theodor Adorno* (2005)

Wednesday, September 16 – Excerpt from Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of Theodor Adorno* (2005)

Week 4 Body Capital

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

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

Week 5 The Medical Gaze

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

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

Week 6 The (male) Medical Gaze

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

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

Week 7 Idiosyncrasies: between Uniqueness and Symptoms

Monday, October 12 – Screening of the film *Safe* (Todd Haynes, 1995)

Wednesday, October 14 – Roddey Reid, *UnSafe at Any Distance: Todd Haynes' Visual Culture of Health and Risk* (1998)

Week 8

Monday, October 19 – Sunday, October 25 - Fall Break

Week 9 Idiosyncrasies: between Uniqueness and Symptoms

Monday, October 26 – Dodie Bellamy, “*When the Sick Rule the World*” (2015)

Wednesday, October 28 – Guest Lecturer Vira Sachenko (University of Potsdam): *On Being Ill* by Virginia Woolf

Week 10 Sick Resistance

Monday, November 2 – Johanna Hedva, *Sick Woman Theory*

Wednesday, November 4 – Paul B. Preciado *Learning from the Virus* (2020)

Week 11 Writing/Reimagining Symptoms and Pain

Monday, November 9 – Excerpt from bell hooks, *sisters of the yam. Black women and self-recovery* (2015)

Wednesday, November 11 – Excerpt from Sami Shalk Bodyminds, *Reimagined. (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (2018)

Week 12 Writing/Reimagining Symptoms and Pain

Monday, November 16 – Excerpt from Javier Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History* (2012)

Wednesday, November 18 – Excerpt from Amy Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays. Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (2016)

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

Monday, November 23 – *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* by Caroline Walker Bynum

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

Week 14 Writing Eating Disorders

Monday, November 30 - Anna Aresi, ‘The Fine Line: Narratives of Recovery from Anorexia in Italian and American Memoirs’ in *Starvation, Food Obsession and Identity. Eating Disorders in Contemporary Women's Writing* (2018)

Wednesday, December 2 – Excerpt from Roxane Gay, *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* (2017)

Week 15 Eating Disorders: Contagious Images (?)

Monday, 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)

Wednesday, December 9 – Recap and final remarks

Completion week

Monday, December 14 – Wednesday, December 16

Essay Deadlines

Midterm Essay: Due October 17, 23:59

Final Essay: Due December 18, 23:59