

LT168 Theories of the Body

Seminar Leader: Clio Nicaastro

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Course Times: Tuesday & Thursday 9:00-10:30

Room:

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

The body has always attracted the interest of thinkers and researchers from different cultures and from a wide range of academic disciplines, from philosophy to critical theory to psychoanalysis and neuroscience. One of the crucial challenges since the enlightenment has been to reflect on and try to overcome the supposed dichotomy between mind and body, reason and feeling, from Descartes on. How can we explore the anxiety for a fluid idea of our body affected by changes and transformation? Is there such a thing as a 'natural' body or are the experiences of our bodies always constructed by class, race, gender, and our personal stories? How are our bodies influenced by our narratives and by those images beyond our immediate control, in social media, TV, films? 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 images (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. We will look at efforts to find a language to speak for/through the body, its desires, its idiosyncrasies, and its symptoms. With this in mind, we will examine the cultural and aesthetic challenges that arise with respect to both the problems that arise with medical definition and diagnosis as well as the mass and popular representations of eating disorders, taking into account cinematic, literary, and artistic depictions of these issues.

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. 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 2022:

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 30 – 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 1 - Excerpt from John O’Neill “The Five Bodies” (1985)

Week 2 I think therefore I am (?)

Tuesday, September 6 – Excerpt from John O’Neill, *The Five Bodies* (1985)

Thursday, September 8 – Renè Descartes, *Second Meditation*, in “Meditations on First Philosophy” (1641)

Week 3 I think therefore I am (?)

Tuesday, September 13 – Renè Descartes, *Second Meditation*, in “Meditations on First Philosophy” (1641)

Thursday, September 15 – Excerpt from John O’Neill, *The Five Bodies* (1985)

Week 4 Body Capital

Tuesday, September 20 – Excerpt from Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004)

Thursday, September 22 – Excerpt from Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004)

Week 5 A history of the Body

Tuesday, September 27– Excerpt from Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (1991)

Thursday, September 29– Excerpt from Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (1991)

Week 6 Unruled bodies

Tuesday, October 4 – Excerpt from Elaine Showalter, *Hystories : Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* (1998)

Thursday, October 6 – Sander Gilman, *Wandering Imaginations of Race and Hysteria* (2020)

Week 7 Dysmorphia

Tuesday, October 11 – Mass hysteria and new social media

Thursday, October 13 – Definition of Dysmorphia from the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders (DSM 2022)” + Excerpt from Sander L. Gilman “Making the Body Beautiful” (1999)

Week 8 Dysmorphia

Tuesday, October 18 - Definition of Dysmorphia from the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders (DSM 2022)” + Excerpt from Sander L. Gilman “Making the Body Beautiful” (1999)

Thursday, October 20 - Excerpt from Anna Freud, “The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense” (1936)

Fall break

Monday, October 24 – Sunday, October 30- Fall Break

Week 9 Dysmorphia

Tuesday, November 1 – Excerpt from Alessandra Lemma, “Under the Skin: A Psychoanalytic Study of Body Modification (2010)

Thursday, November 3 – Guest speaker

Week 10 Eating Disorders: Symptom(s) of the Time?

Tuesday, November 8– Excerpt from Rossana Rossanda, “This Body that inhabits me” (2022)

Thursday, November 10 – Excerpt from Joan Jacobs Brumberg “The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls” (1998)

Week 11 Eating Disorders: Symptom(s) of the Time?

Tuesday, November 15 – William Gull, *Anorexia Nervosa* (1873); Ernest Charles Laségue, *On Hysterical Anorexia* (1873)

Thursday, November 17 – Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (1987)

Week 12 Eating Disorders: Symptom(s) of the Time?

Tuesday, November 22 – Excerpt from Hilde Bruch, *Eating Disorders: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Person Within*

Thursday, November 24– Excerpt from Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993).

Week 13

Tuesday, November 29 – Film Screening

Thursday, December 1 – Film discussion

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

Tuesday, December 6 - “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 8 – Recap and final remarks

Completion week

Monday, December 12 – Friday, December 18

Essay Deadlines

Midterm Essay: Due October 19, 23:59

Final Essay: Due December 18, 23:59