

LT168 Theories of the Body

Seminar Leader: Clio Nicastro

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

Room: Please check Google Calendar closer to the start of the term

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

Our 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. 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.

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, September 3: 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 5: Excerpt from Willemijn Ruberg, “History of the Body” (2019)

Week 2 I think therefore I am (?)

Tuesday, September 10: No class

Thursday, September 12: Renè Descartes, *First Meditation + Second Meditation* in “Meditations on First Philosophy” (1641)

Week 3 A history of the Body

Tuesday September 17: Correspondence between Renè Descartes and Elisabeth von Bohemia + Excerpt from Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (1987)

Thursday, September 19: Excerpt from Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (1991)

Week 4 The medical Gaze

Tuesday, September 24: Excerpt from Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (1991)

Thursday, September 26: Excerpt from Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1978)

+ 7 pm Guest lecture performance by artist [Tiara Roxanne](#). Attendance at this event is required as it is an important part of the seminar.

Week 5 The medical Gaze

Tuesday, October 1: Excerpt from Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1978)

Thursday, October 3: No class: federal holiday

Week 6 Body capital

Tuesday, October 8: Excerpt from Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004)

Thursday, October 10: Excerpt from Silvia Federici, *Caliban and The Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004)

Week 7 Racialized bodies

Tuesday, October 15: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America* (1997)

Thursday, October 17: Review of midterm drafts

Midterm Essay: Due October 23, 23:59

FALL BREAK (October 21-27)

Week 8 Racialized bodies

Tuesday, October 29: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America* (1997)

Thursday, October 31: bell hooks, excerpts from *Remembered Rupture. The Writer at Work* (1999) + *Writing Beyond Race Living Theory and Practice*

Week 9 Writing with the Body

Tuesday, November 5: Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (1978) + *Poetry is not a Luxury* (1985)

Thursday, November 7: Eduard Glissant, *Poetics of relation* (1990)

Week 10 Writing with the Body

Tuesday, November 12: Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975)

Thursday, November 14: Rossana Rossanda, Excerpts from *This Body That Inhabits me* (2021)

Week 11 Writing with the Body

Tuesday, November 19: Excerpts from Anne Carson, *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (2005)

Thursday, November 21: Excerpts from Simon Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (1947) + Excerpts from Kris Kraus *Aliens and Anorexia* (2000)

Week 12 Eating Disorders

Tuesday, November 26: Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993)

Thursday, November 28: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (1987)

Week 13 Bodily Dysmorphia

Tuesday, December 3: Excerpt from Alessandra Lemma, *Under the Skin: A Psychoanalytic Study of Body Modification* (2010)

Thursday, December 5: Films by experimental filmmaker Sandra Lahire

Week 14 Bodily Dysmorphia

Tuesday, December 10: Bodily Dysmorphia and Eco-anxiety

Thursday, December 12: Recap and final remarks/Review of final draft

Completion week

16-22 December

Final Essay: Due December 23, 23:59