

The Department of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics
And
The Department of Jewish History
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Present

Body Building: Constructions of Corporeality, 1500-2020

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Fall 2023 - Spring 2024
Course no. 132.2.0234
Thursdays, 12-14
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What is the body? This seminar traces the cultural evolution of the body, as it has been constructed in European and American, Jewish and Christian imagination from the early modern period to (post)modernity. The seminar treats the body as a social, historical and cultural construct, a *thing* that is constantly molded, among other forces, by practice, prejudice, and performance; shaped by fantasies, anxieties, and beliefs. To demonstrate the extent to which constructions of the body have morphed through time, space, and culture, the seminar will investigate bodies as they traverse early modern Europe, 20th century Brazil, 21st century Israel, 19th century U.S.; as they exert and are crushed by forces of enslavement, imperialism, nation building, gender talk, or medical discourse and praxis; as they come into cultural-biological contact with illness, deformation, plagues, and reproduction; and as they become a receptacle for the supernatural and a benchmark for the natural, and as the focus of sexualized, gendered, and racialized discourses. Through bodies of text that are institutionally labeled “historical”, “scientific”, and “literary”-distinctions which we will also take to task—we will move between macro views of the body as an integral whole to micro foci on specific organs and bodily functions. In that vein, we will dedicate special discussions to the body in parts, to the hair and the nails which delineate its borders; to the nose and mouth which complicate its integrity; and to those parts that mark the body as Other—the womb, the clitoris, the brain, the skin. Of course, we will also invite bodies of theory into this conversation: fat studies, disability studies, trans studies, critical race studies, psychoanalysis, the history of science, and translation studies, will all have something to add to this conundrum called the body.

Course requirements:

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed up to six unexcused absences during the year, including *tkufat ha-shinuyim*. Any additional absence will affect your grade. If you need to be absent (in person or via Zoom) for more than six classes due to a personal emergency, please get in touch with us in advance about possible arrangements. You are responsible for material you miss during an absence.*

Participate productively in class discussions. Please come prepared to discuss your take of the text in class. Participation is an incredibly important aspect of this course, which will frequently involve class discussions. If you are nervous about participating and/or public speaking in general, please contact us as soon as possible – we can brainstorm ways to make you feel more comfortable in class and consider alternative methods of participation.

Deliver one ~10 minute oral presentation during the final lesson of the semester. Your presentation should focus on one or more of the texts discussed during the semester, tying it to the larger concerns of the course. Please also prepare a PPT slide show to accompany your presentation. Please sign up for presentations soon after the beginning of the semester.

Submit four reading reports throughout the year (two per semester). Students will choose two texts from two separate lessons each semester on which to submit reading reports. Reports will include your thoughts or comments on the selected text. Your comments will not be graded, and they can be as deep or as haphazard as you like, but their submission is a prerequisite to passing the course. Each report should be submitted at the beginning of the lesson for which the paper discussed therein has been assigned. For obvious reasons, late submissions will not be accepted.

Write a final essay (~10 pages for *referat*, ~20 pages for *seminar*).

Sources: In your papers, you must document each and every source you consult as we do not tolerate plagiarism. You will find a number of resources on Moodle; use them to understand the issues we discuss, and ask questions whenever anything is not entirely clear to you.

Grade Distribution:

Participation 10%

4 reading reports: 20%

Oral Presentation: 20%

Final paper (10-20 pages): 50%

*** Due to the circumstances surrounding the academic year, allowances will be made in case of special circumstances, such as Reserve Duty (*milluim*) or other affairs relating to the war. If you are impacted by such circumstances, please promptly inform us so that we can provide appropriate accommodations. Your well-being and academic progress are important to us.**

Course Schedule and Reading

Fall Semester

1. **Body Building: An Introduction (4.1)**
2. **Bodies that Matter, Bodies and Matter (11.1)**
 - Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Routledge, 2011
 - Rublack, Ulinka. "Fluxes: The Early Modern Body and the Emotions," *History Workshop Journal* 53 (2002): 1-16
3. **The Ailing Body: Theoretical Aspects (18.1)**
 - Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* [1925], Wesleyan University Press, 2012
 - Elaine Scarry, "Introduction," in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford UP, 1985, pp. 3-27
4. **The Ailing Body: Workshop (25.1)**
 - Edith Wharton, "The Lady's Maid's Bell" [1902] in *Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton*, Wordsworth Editions, 2009, pp. 3-22
 - Sedgwick, Eve. *A Dialogue on Love*, Beacon Press, 2000
5. **Racialized Bodies: Historical Aspects (1.2)**
 - Wheeler, Roxanne. *The Complexion of Race*, 2000
 - Nirenberg, David. "Was There Race Before Modernity." 2009
6. **Racialized Bodies: Theoretical Aspects (8.2)**
 - Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952], trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2008
7. **Race Workshop I (15.2)**
 - Lindau, Barukh. *Reshit limudim*. Berlin, 1788
8. **Race Workshop II (22.2)**
 - Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. New York: Penguin Books, 2015
9. **The Jewish Body: Historical Aspects (29.2)**
 - Lipton, Sarah. *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (2014)
 - Juette, Robert. *The Jewish Body: A History* (2020)
10. **The Jewish Body: Theoretical Aspects (7.3)**
 - Boyarin, Daniel. *Unheroic Conduct* (1997)
 - Panizza, Oskar. *The Operated Jew* (1896)
11. **Student presentations (14.3)**