Writing the Body
Spring 2017
Thursday 2-4:30pm

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Description

We can’t escape our bodies, even though there are times when we might want to. Fundamental to our experience, identity, and expression, bodies can also be a source of contention and oppression: we can be defined and controlled by them. This course explores representations of the body through captivating novels, poems, and a few essays, as well as films and photography. We’ll watch one protagonist switch gender and adventure through four centuries, another struggle with a facial disfigurement that will devastatingly circumscribe her life. We’ll become more alert to the way in which bodies are gazed upon, surveilled, and policed. We’ll investigate our relationship with our own bodies and the bodies of others, assessing whether empathy is a redemptive relationship of attunement or perhaps an act of trespass. We’ll wonder over the binaries and boundaries, politics and pain, the erotics, the robotics, and the boundlessness of our bodies.

Required Texts:
Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me (Random House, 2015)
Leslie Jamison, The Empathy Exams (Graywolf, 2014)
Maggie Nelson, The Argonauts (Graywolf, 2015)
Claudia Rankine, Citizen (Graywolf, 2014)
Virginia Woolf, Orlando (Penguin, 1993)

* I will also be handing out a few photocopied essays and poems in class as supplement to this main reading list.
* We’ll often open class by contemplating a photograph or a video clip together.
* In their essays, students are welcome (encouraged even) to work with visual and cinematic texts as well as the written texts we have under discussion.
* We’ll have two movie nights as well, to watch Moonlight & I am not your Negro
Assessment
first paper, 4-5 pages 25%
presentation 20%
final paper, 8-10 pages 45%
participation 10%

Week 1: January 25
• Getting our bearings by way of Beyonce’s Formation

Week 2: February 1
• Leslie Jamison, The Empathy Exams

Week 3: February 8
• Jamison, The Empathy Exams

Week 4: February 15
• Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me

Week 5: February 22
• Claudia Rankine, Citizen

Week 6: March 2
• Rankine, Citizen

Week 7: March 8
• essays and poems including Anatole Broyard’s “Intoxicated by my Illness” and Laura Hillenbrand’s “A Sudden Illness” (photocopied packet will be distributed)
• first paper due in class: please sign up for a one-on-one conference with me between Feb. 22 and March 5 so we can discuss your draft

March 16 – Spring Break

Week 8: March 22
• Virginia Woolf, Orlando

Week 9: March 29
• Woolf, Orlando

Week 10: April 5
• Maggie Nelson, The Argonauts
Week 11: April 12
• Nelson, *The Argonauts*

Week 12: April 19
• Naomi Alderman, *The Power*

Week 13: April 26
• Alderman, *The Power*

Week 14: May 3
• Reflections
• Final papers will be due on May 7, 3pm at my office: 8-10 pages, 45% of final grade. Please make a conference meeting with me between April 13 and May 4 so I can offer feedback on your draft.

**Course Policies**

*Essays & Conferences:* We will complete two essays over the course of the semester: weighted at 25% and 45% of your final grade. I’ll meet with each of you one-on-one to workshop your essays while you are writing up. Feedback is crucial to developing our thinking and expression. Please also take advantage of the services of the Writing Center run by my gifted and committed colleagues in the Expository Writing Program. This is a free program, available all semester, and you would be wise to make frequent use of the excellent resource. You need to plan well ahead as the service is very popular, but once you have a meeting, you will be able to meet individually with a consultant who is an experienced teacher of EWP’s writing courses: [http://ewp.cas.nyu.edu/object/writing.center](http://ewp.cas.nyu.edu/object/writing.center)

*Reading, Blogging, & Class Presentations:* I’ve been thoughtful in choosing books that engage complex issues of identity, expression, belonging, gender, sexuality, and race relations. I expect the list will make for stimulating and joyful reading. Please be steeped. Truly invest yourself, marking up your texts and making notes. Always put in the time to prepare, as the meaning we make is a collaborative project. Each student will take responsibility for thoughtfully and provocatively kicking off seminar with a 10-15 minute presentation on a week's reading. Your seminar presentation will be worth 20% of your grade; we’ll draw up the schedule when we meet. Nearly weekly we will write short blogs too — a simple paragraph posted to our wordpress site so we can be in rich conversation with one another.

*Participation:* Our seminar is a rare and wondrously intimate educational opportunity in this large university. I want to hear all your voices. Together, we can create a stimulating forum for learning. That’s why you should be an active participant in class, but if you need extra incentive, 10% of the grade is set aside for an assessment of this element. Participation means speaking and
listening in class and small-group work. It includes responsive preparation of readings, timely completion of reading and writing assignments, and being on time to class so you can contribute to the discussion as soon as we kick off.

**Attendance and timeliness:** Attendance is mandatory. Absences and a pattern of showing up late for class will adversely affect your final grade. If you are going to be absent or late to class, you must have a valid reason and let me know at least 24 hours in advance. If the absence is due to illness, please email me to let me know by noon that day. We’re a community and we value your presence and contributions.

**Academic Integrity:** We’re at university to learn, grow and develop. Plagiarism short-circuits that educational process and will not be tolerated. Please read over the CAS guidelines ([http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity](http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity)) and be conscientious about how you source your ideas: cite every leaning, no matter how small, and strive to make your own original contribution. I am most interested in your dynamic, responsive, reflective mind.

**Format for submission of work:** Take pride in your work and present it professionally, in a portfolio folder with all work leading up to the essay on one side and your final masterpiece on the other. Please use word format, 12 point font, typed on a single side of the page, double-spaced and stapled. Please include a title page with an evocative title in the center of the page, and your name, my name, and the date in the lower right corner. Your final essays must include a ‘Works Cited’ list that follows MLA format.

**Only Golden Rule:** keep an open and curious mind, and trust and explore the connections that come to you… you will be amazed at what you discover as you do.