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 even the boundlessness of our bodies.

Required Texts:

- Leslie Jamison, *The Empathy Exams* (Graywolf, 2014)
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (Graywolf, 2014)

* I will also be handing out a few photocopied essays and poems in class as supplement to this main reading list.
* We will be watching the films *Orlando, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly,* and *Blade Runner.*
* We’ll often open class by contemplating a photograph together.
* In their essays, students are welcome (encouraged even) to work with visual texts as well as the written texts we have under discussion.
Assessment

first paper, 4-5 pages  15%
second paper, 6-8 pages  30%
presentation  10%
final paper, 8-10 pages  35%
participation  10%

Week 1: January 26
- Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (pp. 1-108)
- Screening: excerpts from Sally Potter’s *Orlando*

Week 2: February 2
- Woolf, *Orlando* (pp. 109-228)
- Screening: excerpts from Sally Potter’s *Orlando*

Week 3: February 9
- Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (pp. 1-98)

Week 4: February 16
- Winterson, *Written on the Body* (pp. 99-192)

Week 5: February 23
- Justin Vivian Bond, *Tango: My Childhood, Backwards and in High Heels* (pp. 1-62)
- first paper due: 4-5 pages, 15% of final grade

Week 6: March 2
- Vivian Bond, *Tango: My Childhood, Backwards and in High Heels* (pp. 63-144)

Week 7: March 9
- Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (pp. 1-102)

March 16 – Spring Break

Week 8: March 23
- Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (pp. 103-223)

Week 9: March 30
- Leslie Jamison, essays from *The Empathy Exams*:
  - “The Empathy Exams” (pp. 1-26)
  - “Devil’s Bait” (pp. 27-56)
  - “Fog Count” (pp. 133-149)
“Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain” (pp. 185-218)

**Week 10: April 6**
- Screening: Julian Schnabel’s *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*
- second paper due: 6-8 pages, 30% of final grade

**Week 11: April 13**
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (pp. 5-132)

**Week 12: April 20**
- Coates, *Between the World and Me* (pp. 134-152)
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (pp. 1-55)

**Week 13: April 27**
- Rankine, *Citizen* (pp. 59-159)

**Week 14: May 4**
- Screening: Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*
- Final papers due on May 11: 8-10 pages, 35% of final grade.

**Course Policies**

*Essays & Conferences:* We will complete three essays over the course of the semester: weighted at 15%, 30%, and 35% of your final grade. I’ll meet with each of you one-on-one to workshop your essays during the term. 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 & Class Presentation:* I’ve been thoughtful in choosing books that engage complex issues of identity, expression, belonging, gender, sexuality, beauty, 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 ten-minute presentation on a week’s reading. Your seminar presentation will be worth 10% of your grade; we’ll draw up the schedule at our first meeting.

*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
and bring a note from the health centre to the next class. Please be courteous and
respectful. We’re a community.

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) 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.