

The Body Now: Matter, Form, and Text

ENGLIT 2064, Fall 2016
Monday, 6:00PM-8:50PM
Cathedral of Learning 444

Professor Julian Gill-Peterson
jgp17@pitt.edu
509-D, Cathedral of Learning
Office Hours: Monday, 2:00-3:00pm, or by appointment

Experience has taught us to be wary of grand monumental syntheses that take us from the infinitesimal point of the molecule all the way to human societies, traversing at a gallop the entire history of life across thousands of millennia.
—Michel Foucault, “Bio-history and bio-politics” (1976)

This seminar examines different genealogies for thinking “the body,” paying particular attention to how feminist, queer, trans, and critical race inquiry have shaped the study of the cultural and somatic over the past 40 years. We will locate ourselves within the histories of these interdisciplinary fields, as well as their convergences and divergences, to evaluate contemporary and future methodological and theoretical treatments of embodiment. Readings and assignments will ask you to consider “the body” as a set of common problems of matter, form, and textuality, as well as take them up through your individual research interests and writing projects. The child and childhood, science, and medicine will comprise the core subject matter, but the course is not limited to specific program areas or period. Extensive prior familiarity with theories of the body is not required, but you may wish to do extra genealogical reading, advised by the professor, to fill in certain gaps.

Required Texts

The following books are available at the university bookstore, or by other means at your disposal. Most of them are very recent (and one is not even out yet), so they may be somewhat harder to find at the library unless you use EZ Borrow and plan to time it right. Everything that is not on the list below will be made available via PDF on blackboard, or else is a journal article or ebook that you can retrieve on your own.

Samantha Frost, *Biocultural Creatures: Toward a New Theory of the Human* (Duke, 2016)

Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *The Brain's Body: Neuroscience and Corporeal Politics* (Duke, 2016)

Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Duke, 2015)

Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black*

Feminist Theories of the Human (Duke, 2014)

Angela Wiley, *Undoing Monogamy: The Politics of Science and the Possibilities of Biology* (Duke, 2016)

Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come: Life After the Human Catastrophe* (Minnesota Press, 2016)—**NB: This book does not hit shelves until November.**

Assignments and Grading

Weekly responses and seminar participation:	50%
Conference paper/draft journal article	50%

Weekly response papers

Every week, with the exception of weeks 1 and 14, you will turn in a roughly two page, double-spaced response paper at the beginning of class. I leave the parameters of these responses *very* open ended on purpose. My hope is that you use them in two ways: 1) to intricately engage with the core concepts of the readings for that week (i.e. not just to constantly critique argument, although I invite you to do so when you feel it is important); and 2) to experiment with your thinking and writing. I will give them letter grades on that dual basis, as well as provide written feedback (often to encourage and propel your innovations further), each week.

While we are often asked to summarize and evaluate (read, take apart and take down) scholarship in such short form responses, I would prefer you do anything *but* that, at least in the main. Did an author's style or form of argument intrigue you? Write about it *by writing in the same style*. Did you see a new horizon of theoretical speculation in a single sentence or idea in a book? Expand it into two pages of your own. Did you take issue with an article from the perspective of your own research interests and current projects? Deconstruct the author by mobilizing a snapshot of your own work. Do you have an idea for how to frame your dissertation or project papers after reading several assigned pieces one week? Take a stab at writing out that framing, with reference to them. Did you find yourself overwhelmed by the complexity of a text? Make something conceptual out of that affective experience.

I leave these two pages to you every week as an opportunity to challenge yourself as a reader and writer. Take chances and *write into the problems you encounter* in preparing for class, adding layers each week. I will reward your taking a risk in thinking and writing; I am not looking for disciplinary mastery or flawless prose. The only "requirement" is that you make explicit reference to the readings for that week. You can also refer to earlier responses and build on them week to week, as you like. If the open-ended nature of these responses feels intimidating now or at any point, let me know and we can talk about them before you sit down to write.

I will also use these responses to start the conversation most weeks (i.e. I will use

responses about the previous week's reading to reflect on where we have come from and where we are going). I will also likely call on you to talk about your response in class, to share what you have written and to expand on it with your colleagues. This, as well as the holistic quality (not quantity) of your verbal participation in the seminar, will be factored into your total grade for these assignments.

Final Assignment (choice between two)

Your cumulative assignment will be both an opportunity to reflect on the semester as a whole, but also a concrete chance to advance your professionalization as a graduate student. To that end, there are two forms that the final assignment can take. It is up to you to pick the one that you think you are both adequately prepared to complete and that will be of the most use to you right now in your graduate studies:

- A **conference paper** to be given at the end of the semester, as well as submitted to an actual conference.

In this option you will go through the process of proposing, writing, and presenting a conference paper. The paper should be anchored in your own research agenda, but appropriately integrated into the core concepts and themes of the course (I am not looking for a lit review of the syllabus; however, a "theory" or "methods" paper incorporating readings into your current work could work if it fits into your own research). If you choose this option you will first write an abstract and formally submit it to me (**due November 7**), the organizer of our seminar's one-day conference at the end of the semester. I will give feedback. You will then write a 15-minute conference paper, meeting with me as need be to work on both the genre and content. Finally, you will present the conference paper at our seminar's mini conference, scheduled for the last week of class. We will collectively decide on the exact date and time for this conference, so that everyone can attend and it does not conflict with anyone's schedule. It will be open to the department and I will try to recruit an audience.

(You will also select a real world academic conference to which to submit your abstract and, hopefully, attend it to present, *if* that experience would be helpful professionally. Even if you have presented at conferences before, this exercise could be helpful. For instance, I could work with you on submitting to a major disciplinary conference to which it is notoriously difficult to gain access, like the MLA. Or, we could work on accessing travel funds for a conference that is otherwise too prohibitively costly. Or, if you would like to work on a conference paper that raises your profile in your field and serve as a gateway for making connections with senior scholars that act as gatekeepers to publishing and job opportunities, I could help you tailor your paper to do so. Conferences fulfill many important professionalization roles beyond the content of presentations, so think about what would benefit you most.)

OR,

- A **draft journal article**, to be submitted to a journal in the near future.

This option is in some ways “more” work because it would require a substantially longer piece of writing. I would suggest choosing it if you have a piece of writing that already exists in raw form (say, a conference paper or previous seminar paper) and you would like to turn it into a journal article; or, if you are at the stage in your graduate studies where you have the time this semester to devote to writing an 8,000-10,000 word article on top of the reading load for this course. You could, in that case, use the weekly response papers as opportunities to write and workshop smaller pieces of the article.

If you choose this option, you will need to meet with me in the first month of the semester to discuss your article. We will also select a journal to which you would like to eventually submit this article and I will work with you to produce a piece of original scholarship that has the strongest possible chance of being accepted for publication there. You will submit an abstract of your article on **November 7** for further feedback. Your main task for the semester will be to write the “first draft” of this piece—i.e. *it does not need to be ready for submission in December*. Rather, you could imagine taking my feedback on the article and *then* revising it over next semester before submitting it (I will be more than happy to continue working with you after the semester is over).

In an impossibly competitive job market, having articles on your CV published in journals of record in your field is now more or less a de facto requirement for landing many academic positions (if that is your goal). However, the process of writing and getting a journal article accepted for publication is often mystified and can feel overwhelming. If you are not sure you have anything ready to publish yet, but nevertheless feel you would really benefit from taking a first shot at it, speak with me and we can think about how to tailor this assignment to be as useful as possible in that endeavor.

N.B. If you think there is some other kind of writing project that you need or want to complete this semester and would tie into this course, you can pitch it to me as your final assignment. Just be sure to do so within the first few weeks of class.

Special Collections Visit

On **October 31st** the first half of our class will take place at Hillman Library Special Collections. The librarians and archivists there will have pulled a range of materials in their holdings that intersect with this seminar. In addition to being an opportunity to see what archival resources you have at your fingertips at Pitt, I strongly encourage you to use this session to identify materials you might like to work with in your final assignment—provided there are materials that fit your research interests. Either way, I think this will be a useful visit, even if you generally don’t do archival research.

Course Schedule

Aug 29

Week 1: On Genealogy; or, "Having" a Body

**Please read the following *before* class meets for the first time:

Colin Koopman, "Introduction: What Genealogy Does," in *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Indiana U Press, 2009). Available as an ebook through PittCatt.

Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by D.F. Bouchard (Cornell, 1977).

Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Duke, 2009), pp 11-26, chapter 2.

September 5: LABOR DAY, NO CLASS

Sept 12

Week 2: The Embodied Brain as a Case Study in Agential Realism

Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *The Brain's Body*. Skip chapter 4.

Karen Barad, "Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter," from *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke, 2007). Available as an ebook via PittCatt.

Sept 19

Week 3: Feminist Theory through Biological Data

Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism*. Skip chapter 3.

Sept 26

Week 4: What's Queer About Biology

Angela Wiley, *Undoing Monogamy*.

Oct 3

Week 5: The Child's Body as a Metaphor for Growth

Donna Haraway, Foreword, Introduction, chapters 1 and 2 of *Crystals, Fabrics and Fields: Metaphors that Shape Embryos* (Yale, 1976).

Stephen Jay Gould, "Pervasive Influence," in *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Harvard, 1977).

Oct 10

Week 6: Organic Form

Paul Weiss, "Beauty and the Beast: Life and the Rule of Order," *Scientific Monthly* 18 (1955): 286-299.

Pillip C. Ritterbush, *The Art of Organic Forms* (The Smithsonian, 1968).

OCT 17: NO CLASS for "Fall Break"

(we will ignore the "Tuesday" is "Monday" thing)

Oct 24

Week 7: The Human as a Biochemical Form

Samantha Frost, *Biocultural Creatures*. Skip chapter 4.

Oct 31

Week 8: Transgender and the Endocrine Body

*****Visit to Special Collections: Meet in Hillman 363 for first half of class.**

Joanne Meyerowitz, "Sex Change," in *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Harvard, 2002).

Bernice Hausman, "Glands, Hormones, and Personality," in *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Duke, 1995).

Jay Prosser, selection from *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (Columbia, 1998), pp 7-8. (read this for the critique of Hausman)

Henry Rubin, "The Logic of Treatment," in *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men* (Vanderbilt, 2003)

Nov 7

Week 9: Speculating on the Trans* Body

Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (The Feminist Press, 2013), chapters 2, 6, and a selection from chapter 12.

Jord/ana Rosenberg, "Trans/War Boy/Gender: On the Primitive Accumulation of T," *Salvage* (2016), <http://salvage.zone/in-print/transwar-boygender-on-the-primitive-accumulation-of-t/>

*****Conference/article abstract due.**

Nov 14

Week 10: Flesh and the Sociogeny of Race

Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, 2 (1987): 64-81.

Hortense Spillers, "Peter's Pans: Eating in the Diaspora," pp. 18-23, in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (U Chicago, 2003).

Syliva Wynter, "Towards the Sociogenic Principle, Fanon, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience of 'Identity,' and What it's Like to be 'Black,'" in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*, edited by Mercedes F. Duran-Cogan and Antonio Gomez-Moriana (Routledge, 2001), 30-66.

Franz Fanon, chapters 1 and 5 of *Black Skins, White Masks* (Grove, 1967).

Fred Moten, "Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester's Scream," from *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minnesota, 2003).

Nov 21

Week 11: Black Studies and the Body

Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

Nov 28

Week 12: Biomedicine, or Life Without A Body and Sex

Sarah Franklin, *Dolly Mixtures: The Remaking of Genealogy* (Duke, 2007), chapters 1 and 2.

Hannah Landecker, *Culturing Life: How Cells Became Technologies* (Harvard, 2009), introduction and chapter 1.

Dec 5

Week 13: The Child-Form and Futurity

Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come*.

Dec 12

Week 14: Conference week.

Details TBD

*****Journal article draft due if applicable.**