

## The Body in Culture

**Instructor: Prof. ZHANG Charlie Yi (he/him/his)**

Email: charliezhangyi@gmail.com

**Course Hours: Saturday 10:30 a.m. - 1:15 p.m.**

Body has been at the center of debates in contemporary social theory. Body also serves as a crucial anchor for social politics and imagining of an alternative world. Building upon the scholarship of feminist and queer analysis of the exertion of power through life, affect, biology, and biotechnology, this course introduces students to theoretical debates over body, and helps them develop critical understanding of embedded meanings of different forms of life and afterlife. We will address these questions: What bodies are deemed livable, productive, and why? How do capital and biopolitics/necropolitics energize each other? How are bodies gendered, racialized, sexualized, and classed in biopolitical systems? How do global economies work through disparately structured bodies? How do neoliberal ideas about individual sovereignty converge/collide with national and global and health legal systems that influence our perceptions of disease, virus, and pandemic? How do concepts of nation, border, and sovereignty animate lives and deaths of populations—human, non-human, near-human, and posthuman? How do organic bodies meet and interact with inorganic bodies to affect our co-existence?

### Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will have acquired an understanding of the theoretical and methodological writings by critical scholars on the topic of body and increased their skills in reading and writing about such works. Course readings will familiarize students with:

1. The historical and cultural specificity of different conceptions of and approach to body.
2. Varieties of critical theorizing about body within the contexts of feminist theory, post-structuralism, queer theory, critical race theory, affect theory, and political economy.
3. The construction and deconstruction of body in a variety of settings, e.g., the state, family, work, science and technology, and activist movements, as well as from various (inter)disciplinary perspectives.
4. The variety of methods applied to the analysis of body by feminist/queer scholars and their efforts to theorize about these approaches.
5. The terminology and different theoretical perspectives used in discussions of body.

### Required Readings:

Jasbir Puar. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblage: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sarah Franklin. 2013. *Biological Relatives: IVF, Stem Cells, and the Future of Kinship*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

## **Course Requirements**

### **Short Posts (2 x 500 words)**

One of the principal ways we will listen to and talk to each other in this class is through engaged responses to the readings. You may focus on one article more than others (but demonstrating some knowledge of the set of texts will be important). Comparison across the semester's readings is highly encouraged. You are welcome to focus on one issue across the articles/book, or a number of issues in one article/book, or indeed a very close reading of a particular passage. Please make sure that you provide a sense of the material you are addressing through substantive summary or paraphrase instead of just quotation and clearly highlight an overarching argument rather than a series of scattered observations. Please post an entry of around 500 words (keeping to the length is important, though a few words more or less are okay) on the readings by 11:00 pm on Fridays and please read others' posts by class time. You should submit TWO posts during the semester.

### **Presentations (2)**

Careful reading of the texts and informed participation in seminar meetings is required. Because the class meets once a week, students are expected to come to class having read the assigned materials, ready to actively participate in discussion about the materials with questions, thoughts, and ideas. Students should also be prepared to discuss the presentation questions as described below.

Each student needs to choose two readings and lead the class discussions for the chosen weeks. In your presentation, you should:

1. Identify the historical, political, social context and background for the author(s) and texts under discussion.
2. Outline the main argument or concepts in the text, and the evidence or (inter)disciplinary framework used to make the argument.
3. Offer your opinion about how the concepts and ideas contradict or align with other authors we've read.
4. Look up any concepts you're unfamiliar with and offer definitions.

A 2–3-page handout responding to these requirements should be prepared in advance and sent to the class. You should include 3 written questions that interrogate the assigned readings, consider

the implications of the readings in relation to the interests of the course (as stated in the Course Description), and should be used to spark class discussions. You will also be expected to answer questions posed by others.

### **Final Project**

The final project is a 20-minute group presentation on a topic that demonstrates the relationships between bodies and power, broadly defined. You will do this by identifying a theme from the readings and using it to analyze your topic. Possible topics can include issues of sex, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, social class and inequality, and many others. You will be evaluated on how well you connect the theoretical material to concrete examples from your social world. In addition to the intellectual content, you will also be evaluated on your presentation skills. This includes how well your group communicates the key points of your analysis and how well your group handles 10 minutes of Q&A following the presentation.

### **Assessment**

Your grade will be assessed according to your engagement with the class materials, as evidenced in both your written work and class participation. You will be evaluated on your ability to express your ideas and analysis in a cogent and well-structured manner, and creatively explore the theories and methodologies introduced in this course.

Generally, performance that exceeds or falls short of expectations within a grade category will receive a modification of + / - to the overall letter grade.

Participation	20%
Short Posts (2)	20%
Presentation (2)	20%
Final Project	40%

- A** Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes
- B** Good performance on all learning outcomes
- C** Satisfactory performance on learning outcomes
- D** Non-satisfactory performance on learning outcomes
- F** Failure to complete assessment requirements, including plagiarism

### **Academic Honesty**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on honesty in academic work submitted by students and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on cheating and plagiarism. Any related offence will lead to disciplinary action including termination of studies at the University. For a description of CUHK's policy on academic honesty, view the following

website: [http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng\\_htm\\_files\\_\(2013-14\)/index\\_page2.htm](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/index_page2.htm)

*The Chinese University of Hong Kong community embraces diversity of age, background, beliefs, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and other visible and non-visible categories. I welcome all students in this course and expect that all students contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment. If you have any concerns about classroom climate, please come to me to share your concern.*

### **Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools**

For assignments and assessment tasks that count towards the final course grades, students are not allowed to submit work which is produced with the collaboration of or supported by the use of any generative AI tools.

Any breach of the regulations will be considered an act of academic dishonesty and will be handled according to the University's Procedures for Handling Cases of Academic Dishonesty.

### **Course Schedule**

- 1. Jan. 10 Introduction: The Body in Culture**
- 2. Jan. 17 Inventing “the Body” and Its Discontents**
  - Ed Cohen. 2012. A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body: Introductory Ruminations. *Avant: Journal of the Philosophical-Interdisciplinary Vanguard* Vol. 3, No. 1: 65-96.
  - Nickolas Rose. 2013. The Human Sciences in a Biological Age. *Theory, Culture & Society* Vol. 30 No.1: 3-34
- 3. Jan. 24 Performing the Body**
  - Judith Butler. 2006. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Part 1 and conclusion. New York and London: Routledge.
  - Jemima Repo. Herculine Barbin and the Omission of Biopolitics from Judith Butler's Gender Genealogy. *Feminist Theory* Vol. 15 No. 1: 73–88.
- 4. Jan. 31 Power Over/Of the Body**
  - Michel Foucault. 1979. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Part 1, 5.

Recommended—Michel Foucault. 1979. *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, Part 2, 3, 4.

**5. Feb. 7 From Biopower to Biopolitics**

- Maurizio Lazzarato, “From Biopower to Biopolitics,” <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcbiopolitics.htm>
- Donna Haraway. 1989. *The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse*. *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* Vol.1, No.1: 3-43.
- Jingxue Zhang and Charlie Yi Zhang. 2023. “Enter with Green Code Only”: Biometric Citizenship and Fragmented Living in China. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 82 no.3: 385-406.

**6. Feb. 14 Biomedicine and Marketization**

- Sarah Franklin. 2013. *Biological Relatives: IVF, Stem Cells, and the Future of Kinship*, Introduction, Chapter 1-2.

**7. Feb. 21 Biomedicine and Marketization (continued)**

- Sarah Franklin. 2013. *Biological Relatives: IVF, Stem Cells, and the Future of Kinship*, Chapter 3-5.

Recommended—Sarah Franklin. 2013. *Biological Relatives: IVF, Stem Cells, and the Future of Kinship*, Chapter 6-8, Afterword.

**8. Feb. 28 Queer Biopolitics/Necropolitics**

- Jasbir Puar. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblage: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1.

**9. Mar. 7 Queer Biopolitics/Necropolitics (continued)**

- Jasbir Puar. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblage: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Chapter 2, 3.

Recommended—Jasbir Puar. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblage: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Chapter 4 and conclusion.

**10. Mar. 14 From Biopolitics to Affect**

- Brian Massumi. 1995. *The Autonomy of Affect*. *Cultural Critique* No. 31 (Autumn): 83-109.

- Jasbir Puar. 2012. "I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess": Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory. *philoSophia* Vol. 2, No.1: 49-66.
- Seigwoth, Gregory J. and Melissa Gregg. 2010. "An Inventory of Shimmers." In *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigwoth, 1–25. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

**11. Mar. 21 From Cyborg to Animal**

- Donna Haraway. 2004. *The Haraway Reader, "Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience."* New York and London: Routledge.
- Donna Haraway. 2007. *When Species Meet, Chapter 2 "Value Added Dogs and Lively Capital."* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

**12. Mar. 28 From Posthuman to New Materialism**

- N. Katherine Hayles. 2010. After Shocks: Posthuman Ambivalence. *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* No. 1: 262–271.
- Diana Coole and Samantha Frost. 2010. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics, Introducing the New Materialisms.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Recommended— Anna Tsing. 2021. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

**13. Apr. 4 Qingming Festival**

**14. Apr. 11 Final Presentations (via Zoom)**