

Anthropology 238
The Vulnerable Body
Spring 2008
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The Vulnerable Body: Anthropological Understandings

Course Description

This course begins with the assumption that the human body is a unit upon which collective categories are engraved. These categories can vary from social values, to religious beliefs, to feelings of national belonging, to standards of sexuality and beauty. Readings in this course will concentrate around the classic and recent attempts in the social and historical sciences to develop ways of understanding this phenomenon of “embodiment.” We will begin with an overview of what is considered to be the “construction” of the human body in various societies. We will investigate how the body has been observed, experienced, classified, modified, and sacralized in different social formations. We will then trace the emergence of clinical biomedicine in early-modern Europe. We will read about specific diseases and epidemics. And, we will follow the transformations in body perceptions and embodiment practices that occurred through the concerted efforts of missionaries and colonialists around the globe. We will explore representations and techniques of body modification that take place presently in both the modern West and the Third World. The focus will be on the “closed” modern body as it attempts to simultaneously reproduce itself and delineate the physical and imagery margins between itself and the wider socio-political context. The course will end with an attempt in understanding cancer as the disease of the industrialized “vulnerable” modern body.

Course Requirements

Class Participation	20%
Mid-term exam	40%
Final research paper	40%

Class attendance is required. Assigned readings should be completed before coming to class. Your participation in class discussions will affect your grade. A mid-term examination and a final research paper will also be required. The topic for your final paper should be discussed and approved before the middle of April. You will be required to make a small presentation in class on your paper topic.

Required Readings

The following books (although we will not read them in their entirety) have been ordered and should be available for purchase at the Bookstore. The rest of the readings will be posted on e-reserve.

Feldman, Alan	<u>Formations of violence: The narrative of the body and political terror in Northern Ireland</u>
Foucault, Michel	<u>Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison</u>
Kleinman, Arthur	<u>The Illness Narratives</u>
Martin, Emily	<u>The Woman in the Body: A cultural analysis of reproduction</u>
McNeill, William	<u>Plagues and peoples</u>
Murphy, Robert	<u>The body silent</u>
Seremetakis, Nadia	<u>The Last Word</u>
Sontag, Susan	<u>Illness as Metaphor</u>
Taussig, Michael	<u>Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man</u>

Course Sections

Thursday, January 31

Introduction to the course

Film: *The body beautiful*

Thursday, February 7

Human bodies in biological evolution and prehistory

Read:

McNeill, William Plagues and Peoples Introduction, Chapters 1, 2,3,

Thursday, February 14

European transformations: The “closing” of the modern body

Read:

Foucault, Michel Discipline and Punish

“The body of the condemned”

“Generalized punishment”

“Docile bodies”

Thursday, February 21

Colonized bodies and the body as a site of resistance

Read:

McNeill, William Plagues and Peoples, Chapter 4

Taussig, Michael Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man, Chapters 1,2,7,8

Thursday, February 28

Political violence and the modern body

Read:

Feldman, Alan Formations of violence, Chapters 1,2,3,4

Film: *Saving Private Ryan*

Thursday, March 6

Cultural embodiment: Classical perspectives on body symbolism and theoretical trends

Read:

Turner, Victor The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual
(Introduction and Chapter 6) (e-reserve)

Van Gennep, Arnold The Rites of Passage (Chapter 6) (e-reserve)

Csordas, Thomas, “Embodiment as a paradigm in Anthropology.”

Ethos 18:5-47, 1990 (e-reserve)

Csordas, Thomas “Somatic Modes of Attention” Cultural

Anthropology 8(2): 135-156, 1993 (e-reserve)

Film: *Naya: The story of a !Kung woman*

Thursday, March 13

Adoring the dead

Read:

Seremetakis, Nadia The Last Word, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 8, 9

Thursday, March 20

Mid-term examination

Thursday, March 27 No class, spring break

Thursday April 3

The body as scientific object: Introducing biomedicine

Read:

McNeill, William Plagues and Peoples, Chapter 6

Foucault, Michel “The politics of health in the 18th century” (e-reserve)

“The birth of biopolitics” (e-reserve)

Film: *The forgotten village*

Thursday, April 10

The body and its malcontents: Illness and metaphors

Read:

Kleinman, Arthur The illness narratives, Chapters 1,2,3

Sontag, Susan “Illness as metaphor”

Thursday, April 17

Gendered bodies: Reproduction in the modern era

Read:

Martin, Emily The Woman in the body, Chapters 1,2,3,4,6,7,11,12

Thursday, April 24

The dysfunctional Body

Read:

Murphy, Robert The body silent, Chapters 1,2,3,4,5,6

Thursday, May 1

Student presentations

Final papers due Friday, May 19 by 4:00pm

Have a nice summer