

Teaching Anthropology of the Body

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This term I've been teaching [Anthropology of the Body](#), which is an upper-level undergraduate seminar at McGill. While I was putting together the syllabus I was particularly struck by the range of approaches to the topic; perhaps this isn't surprising, but there are probably as many ways to frame and teach "anthropology of the body" as there are ways to introduce students to medical anthropology in the first place.

In my own syllabus—which you can find [here](#)—I've tried to address both key concepts and analytical frameworks (body techniques, embodiment, biopower, and so on) and more topically-focused themes (organ transplantation, placebo effect, etc). When I wrote the syllabus, I felt like I was trying to "balance" two different ways of framing questions within a course – not quite theory vs. ethnography, but something close to that. In hindsight, it seems much easier to work with the simple idea that all of our analytical frameworks are developed to respond to particular problematics, whether social, institutional, political, conceptual. This is something close to an anthropological cliché, but I think that it remains useful when thinking about how to organize knowledge in an area as rich as contemporary anthropological literature on the body.

Some resources which I've found particularly useful for designing the course: In addition to a number of articles and book chapters, I'm using a reader edited by Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar – [Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life](#). It has a nice selection of more theoretical pieces and now classic ethnographic ones—like Aihwa Ong's [article](#) on possession in Malaysian factories and Emily Martin's "[The Egg and the Sperm](#)."

I always find it useful to look at other people's syllabi, and there are a number of good ones available online. SMA has a [page on the anthropology of the body](#) in its syllabus collection, which is good – although it needs updating. I found particularly useful Loic Wacquant's mammoth syllabus "[The body in and out of social theory](#)."

Finally, there are several reviews which I found extremely useful: Margaret Lock's review from 1993—"[Cultivating the Body](#)"—remains an excellent account of many issues central to this area. Also very useful were Leslie

Sharp's "[The commodification of the body and its parts](#)"; Linda Hogle's [review on enhancement technologies](#); Steven Van Wolputte's [piece on embodiment and selfhood](#); Helen Gremillion's [article on the cultural politics of body size](#); and a [review essay](#) by Thomas Csordas.

It would be interesting to hear from readers who have taught a similar course: How have you gone about designing and organizing the material? Are there other resources which you would recommend?

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