

Title: Body/Text: Representing the Body in Polish Literature and Culture
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This talk discusses my experience teaching a course on representations of the body in Polish literature and culture for a mixed audience of undergraduate and graduate students. We began from the premise that the body is the seemingly accessible material reality that we experience on a daily basis, yet it remains an enigma, impossible to capture through proliferating discourses of the sciences, humanities, and art. The course aimed to introduce the concept of the body as a critical category using case studies from twentieth- and twenty-first century Polish literature, cinema, and visual arts. I invited students to reflect on the human body as a site of incessant fascination and inquiry (from childhood curiosity to scholarly dissection), and as an idea variously conceptualized across time by the languages of literature and art, cinema, music, philosophy, theology, medicine etc. Some topics of particular interest included: the body and mind/soul dichotomy, body in text/body as text, body and cognition/language, body and gender, body and the discourse of desire, body and trauma/pain/death, maternal body, body and politics, body and its image, metamorphoses of the body, persons and things, animal bodies, virtual bodies, and bodies in the cybernetic age. The course drew upon interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives to analyze the depiction of the body in Polish literature and culture. To that end we read critical texts by Baudrillard, Butler, Bynum, Foucault, Goffman, Grosz, Haraway, Scarry, Schildrick and Price, Spelman, and Suleiman, vis-à-vis primary texts: poetry by Herbert, Miłosz, Świrszczyńska, Szymborska, and Zagajewski, prose by Chwin, Gombrowicz, Masłowska, Schulz, and Tokarczuk, films by Has and Kieslowski, and images by Abakanowicz, Fangor, Kozyra, Schulz, and Szapocznikow.