

16 988:525 WGS Colloquium: Refuse Bodies, (un)Grievable Lives

Th10:55-1:55

RDJC 011 C/D

Professor Marisa Fuentes

This course considers how humans become disposable and the (material, discursive) conditions necessary to produce inurability to violence against different bodies and populations, historical and contemporary. In this course we will begin by thinking about how enslaved commodities became non-commodifiable “refuse” (the sick and dying, unsellable African captives) and unremembered/uncommemorable and make connections with other populations who have lived and died through similar circumstances (Saidiya Hartman, Fuentes, Vincent Brown, Stephanie Smallwood).

We will then consider Holocaust histories, theorizations and etymologies of the “Muselmann” (A German word meaning “Muslim” referring to the starving, exhausted and dying in Auschwitz-Birkenau) through the works of Primo Levi, Gregorio Agamben and Roberto Esposito. These scholars will help us think about ontologies of the dispossessed and “personhood.” Finally we will read Judith Butler’s work on “precarious lives” and the “(un)grievable” to make connections about the continued production of violence against those who most experience precarity including Palestinians, refugees and other victims of war.

The object here is to contemplate the many ways in which precarity and disposability has been reproduced over time. It is also understanding how commemoration of certain bodies effaces the possibility of mourning others: Who counts as grievable? Which narratives of resistance or victimhood obscure other vulnerable lives?