

**Art History O699**

**Empathy, Experience and the Body in Art Historical Discourse**

**Temple University, Department of Art History**

**Fall Semester 2006**

Main Campus

Tuttleman Learning Center, 307 AB

Thursday, 3:00-5:30 PM

Instructor: Anthony Raynsford

awraynsf@temple.edu

Phone x 1-6932, Office: Ritter Annex, 850

Office hours: Tuesday, 1:30-4:30 PM

\* E-mail is generally the best method of contact during non-office hours.

\* Please allow 48-hours for an e-mail response.

**GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION**

**Topic and Scope of the Course:** In the last decade, art historians have increasingly turned to questions of embodied subjectivity in art and architecture. These questions have emerged under such analytical themes as performance, spectacle, spectatorship, ritual, gender and the materiality of media. Such themes have invoked a return to the body in a double sense: that of embodied perceivers and that of embodied things (artworks). However, this shift is hardly new within art history. Rather, it represents yet the latest pendulum swing in a discipline that has alternatively viewed artworks primarily in terms of embodied experiential encounters or in terms disembodied visual codes (iconographies, signs, image structures, etc.) In returning art history to something like the “thingness of things” within a discourse of subjective experience, it may be useful to re-examine the discipline’s own history of such discourse. This course, therefore, will be a historiographic and theoretical investigation into ideas of embodiment and experiential encounter within art history, from the late nineteenth century to the present.

The theory of empathy held that aesthetic experience consisted in a series of correspondences or empathetic responses between the body of a hypothetical viewer and objects of art and architecture. While empathy theory had fallen out of favor by the mid-twentieth century, its models of understanding aesthetic experience have continued to enter into contemporary art historical discourses in numerous ways, both conscious and unconscious. Already by the early twentieth century, however, such empathetic models of experience had come to be denounced by others as being sensational or “theatrical,” the opposite of a more serious intellectual or visual abstraction. Ideal aesthetic experience in this line of criticism became increasingly disembodied, both in terms of the embodied senses of the viewer and in terms of the artwork’s object-ness. Through more recent theories of phenomenology and psychoanalysis the body once again entered into the core of art historical discussions of experience, but in ways that complicated unified notions of bodies and subjects. While phenomenology tended to erase subject-object distinctions in aesthetic experience, psychoanalysis emphasized internal divisions that structured experiences of the body. In psychoanalytic readings of embodied experience, both viewers and bodies were caught in a web of identifications, in a social world of seeing and being seen. Recently, such psychoanalytic readings of the body have extended into issues of identity, gender, performance and abjection. Viewing this return to the body in historical perspective, this seminar will pose the questions: What is now being repeated from empathy theory? What is being rejected, forgotten or repressed?

The course will begin with the disciplinary origins of modern art history in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, when the field was still closely tied to philosophy and experimental psychology. This was a period marked by the emergence of the term, empathy (*Einfühlung*) in the writings of art psychologists, such as Robert Vischer. Art historians, such as Heinrich Wölfflin and August Schmarsow, for whom the body became both the medium and analog for the experiential encounter, then soon transformed empathy theory into an art historical method. At the same time, however, this primacy of the body and its sensory motor responses was contested by series of art historians for whom the artistic response required spectatorial distance and visual sensations purified of embodied presence. Thus writers from Konrad Fiedler to Wilhelm Worringer placed pure visual abstraction over and against the corporeal encounter with the object. Michael Fried in the mid-twentieth century in some ways repeated such criticism in his famous opposition between absorption and theatricality. At the same time Fried's discourse moved closer to the perceptual models of phenomenology.

The course will next examine the art historical discourses opened up by phenomenology and psychoanalysis in the mid-twentieth century, beginning with the writings of French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. While Merleau-Ponty reasserted the primacy of the body in visual sensation, he also postulated an anonymous visibility that preceded any distinction between the visual and the tactile, or even between subject and object. Meanwhile, Jacques Lacan, partly influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, described a field of the gaze by which both bodies and vision were structured and which then also manifested itself in the relations of spectators to artworks. Art historians, such as Norman Bryson and Hal Foster, who may be counted as part of post-structuralist turn after 1960, especially drew on Lacanian psychoanalysis in their descriptions of spectatorial experience. Consequently also, a whole series of debates emerged around Albertian perspective, now seen a complex apparatus of the gaze – a screen for the imaginary identification of bodies, subjects and spaces, within which the spectator was then implicated.

Finally, the course will approach contemporary art history, especially as it has been inflected by theories of power and identity. As art historians began to draw on the writings of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, they placed an increasing emphasis on the body as a site, both of social control and of performative identity. While these discourses have brought the body and embodied experience back to the center of art history, they have been based, as much as empathy theory was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, on assumptions about what the body is and how is experienced in relation to art. Placing these assumptions in the wider context of art historiography can allow new investigations to emerge.

Current art historical discussions of the body have often fallen into a certain disciplinary amnesia on the topic of embodied experience. One of the purposes of this course will be to counteract such amnesia. In reviewing this history of the discipline, students will be able, not only to critically assess certain received ideas and assumptions within art history, but also think constructively about what might still be useful and relevant to the present writing of art history. In other words, how can some of these older discourses be made productive today? How can the juxtaposition of older and newer discourses illuminate ongoing problems and dialectics in art history?

Students will be encouraged to apply knowledge from the course to their own specialized research topics, either new or ongoing. The research may either investigate a theoretical, historiographic problem, or it may apply such problems to specific artists, artworks or contexts of spectatorship.

**Purpose of the Course:** This course is an advanced graduate seminar, whose purpose is to provide a forum for methodological discussion and the presentation of individual research. The course will allow students to develop familiarity with a key body of theoretical texts, in order thereby to apply these texts to new or ongoing research projects. Students will be expected to develop research projects related to the theme of the course as well as to present their work to the class. Students will also be expected to take an active role in class discussions, including introducing one of the readings during the semester.

**Class Format:** This course will be a seminar course, with heavy emphasis placed on student discussion, presentation and independent research. Each week, one or two students will be expected to lead the discussion on one or more of the readings. All students should come prepared to each class with questions and comments about particular passages in the readings, with a view towards connecting them to the larger issues of the course. The last session will be reserved for student presentations of final research projects. This final session may extend slightly longer than the usual seminar time.

**Required Texts:** All assigned articles and book chapters are available on e-reserve as well as in file folders outside the Art History department.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### **August 31: Course Introduction**

#### **September 7: Empathetic Bodies / Symbolic Forms [Vischer]**

Robert Vischer, *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics*, in Mallgrave and Ikonomidou eds., *Empathy, Form and Space* pp. 90-123; Mundt, Ernest K., "Three Aspects of German Aesthetic Theory," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, v. 17, March 1959, pp. 287-310.

#### **September 14: Distanced Bodies / Visual Judgments [Fiedler – Hildebrand]**

Conrad Fiedler, *On Judging Works of Visual Art*, Schaefer-Simmern and Mood trans., chapters 3 and 5, pp. 27-62, 69-76; Adolf Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, Meyer and Ogden trans, chapters 1 and 4, pp. 21-35, 106-123.

#### **September 21: Kinesthetic Bodies / Architectural Space [Schmarsow – Frankl]**

August Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation" in Mallgrave and Ikonomidou eds., *Empathy, Form and Space* pp. 282-297; Paul Frankl, *Principles of Architectural History*, chapter 4, pp. 157-184; Mitchell Schwartz, "The Emergence of Architectural Space: August Schmarsow's Theory of 'Raumgestaltung,'" in *Assemblage*, no. 15, August 1991, pp.48-61.

#### **September 28: Aesthetic Experience / Art Historical Ekphrasis [Wölfflin]**

Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 1-72; Mark Jarzombek, "De-Scribing the Language of Looking: Wölfflin and the History of Aesthetic Experientialism," in *Assemblage*, no. 23, April 1994, pp. 29-69.

#### **October 5: Empathy / Abstraction [Worringer – Riegl]**

Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, chapters 1 and 2, pp. 3-48; Alois Riegl, "The Geometric Style," in *Problems of Style*, pp. 14-40;

Juliet Koss, "On the Limits of Empathy," in *The Art Bulletin*, v. 88, March 2006, pp. 139-57.  
[RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSALS DUE IN CLASS!]

**October 12: Absent Bodies / The Anti-Theatrical Spectator [Fried – Greenberg]**

Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood, Essays and Reviews*, pp. 148-172;  
Michael Fried, "The Structure of Beholding in Courbet's 'Burial at Ornans,'" *Critical Inquiry*, v.  
9, June 1983, pp. 635-83; Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in *Modernism with a  
Vengeance*, pp. 250-56.

**October 19: Visible Bodies / Phenomenological Vision [Merleau-Ponty]**

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Eye and Mind" in *The Merleau-Ponty  
Aesthetics Reader*, pp. 59-75, 121-49; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm,"  
in *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 130-155; Forrest Williams, "Cézanne and French  
Phenomenology," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, v. 12, pp. 481-92.

**October 26: Body Identifications / Objects of the Gaze [Lacan – Bryson]**

Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in  
Psychoanalytic Experience; Jacques Lacan, "The Split between the Eye and the Gaze" and "What  
is a Picture?" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 67-78, 105-119; Norman  
Bryson, "Mortal Sight: The Oath of the Horatii," in *Tradition and Desire*, pp. 63-84; Norman  
Bryson, "The Gaze and the Glance," *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, pp. 87-131.

**November 2: Viewing Subjects / Representational Mirrors [Foucault – Alpers – Foster]**

Michel Foucault, "Las Meninas," in *The Order of Things*, pp. 3-16; Leo Steinberg, "Velazquez'  
Las Meninas," in *October*, v. 19, Winter 1981, pp. 45-54; Svetlana Alpers, "Interpretation without  
Representation, or, The Viewing of Las Meninas," in *Representations*, no. 1, February 1983, pp.  
30-42; David Carrier, "Art and Its Spectators," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, v.  
45, Autumn 1986, pp. 5-17; Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," in *October*, v. 78, pp. 106-  
24.

**November 9: Disciplined Bodies / Architecture [Foucault – Deleuze – Martin]**

Michel Foucault, "Docile Bodies," and "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 135-69, 195-  
228; Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," in Neal Leach ed, *Rethinking  
Architecture*, pp. 309-13; Reinhold Martin, "The Physiognomy of the Office" in *The  
Organizational Complex*, pp. 81-121

**November 16: Body Art / Corporeal Performances [Butler – Jones – Jay]**

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and  
Feminist Theory" in *Theatre Journal*, v. 40, December 1988, pp. 519-31; Amelia Jones,  
"Postmodernism, Subjectivity, and Body Art: A Trajectory" and "The Body in Action: Vito  
Acconci," in *Body Art / Performing the Subject*, pp. 21-52, 103-50; Martin Jay, "Somaesthetics  
and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Body Art", in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, v. 36  
pp. 55-69.

**November 23:** [THANKSGIVING --- NO CLASS!]

**November 30: Student Presentations**

[FINAL PAPERS DUE IN CLASS!!!]

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **General Requirements:**

The course is an advanced graduate seminar in art history, with a heavy emphasis on the modern period. Evaluations will be based on class participation, project presentations, a project proposal, and a final seminar project, consisting of a 15-20-page paper arising out of a dialog with the readings in the course. These projects will be presented as 15-minute oral presentations at the last seminar session. Course performance will be evaluated on a combination of class participation, especially close attention to the readings, and independent research, both written and presented to the class.

### **Relative weight of course requirements:**

- 1) Research Paper Proposal (15%)
- 2) Research Paper Presentation (15%)
- 3) Final Research Paper (50%)
- 4) Class Participation (20%)

### **Policy on late assignments and class participation:**

Extensions and incompletes will only be granted in cases of documented personal emergencies. Since class participation is an essential component of the course, students may normally not miss more than 2 sessions without their final grades being negatively affected.

### **Statement of Academic Rights and Responsibilities:**

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has a policy statement on Student and Faculty and Academic Rights and Responsibilities which can be accessed through the following link: [http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy\\_no=03.70.02](http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02).

### **Exceptional Accommodations:**

Any student who has a documented need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should discuss the matter privately with me within the first two weeks of classes. The student should also contact Disability Resources and Services at (215) 204-1280.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

This syllabus is subject to change, in the event of unforeseen circumstances, or in the case that changes will significantly enhance the quality of the course.