

**Art History 282B - Section 1:**  
**Empathy and Embodiment in Contemporary Art**  
**San José State University**  
**Spring Semester 2009**  
Art Building 139 -- Thursday, 3:00-5:45 PM

**Dr. Anthony Raynsford** – [Anthony.Raynsford@sjsu.edu](mailto:Anthony.Raynsford@sjsu.edu) -- Phone (408) 924-4796

Office: Art Building, Room 123

Office hours: Wednesday, 1:00-4:00 PM, or Tuesday, Thursday by appointment

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

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

\* Emergency: 911.....Campus Escort: 42222

\* Individuals with disabilities may contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC), Administrative Building 110, 408/924-6000, for a variety of formats such as Braille, large print, sign interpreters, assistive listening devices, audio tape and accommodations for physical accessibility. The Learning Assistance Resource Center (LARC), Student Services Center 600, 924-2587, is available free to all students seeking help with writing.

\* The \$10 course fee for this Art History class supports course materials including website and image development.

**GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION:**

**Topic and Scope of the Course:** Over the last twenty years, theme of embodiment has remerged as one of the dominant motifs within contemporary art. Not only have questions of embodiment been framed in and through the materiality of things and artifacts, but also bodies have increasingly become objects of representation. The anthropomorphism of such artists as Louise Bourgeois and George Segal has found divergent echoes in the works of younger artists, such as Damien Hirst, Antony Gormley and Chris Ofili. Questions of embodiment in contemporary art have emerged under such themes as performance, identity, spectatorship, subjectivity, gender and the materiality of media. Artists have frequently invoked a return to the body in a double sense: that of embodied perceivers and that of embodied things (artworks). This mirroring of the body in the artwork parallels, in many cases, a version of empathetic response that has long been part of aesthetic theory. Therefore, the theme of embodiment is hardly new to contemporary art. Rather, it represents yet the latest pendulum swing in thinking of artworks either in terms of embodied experiential encounters or in terms disembodied visual codes (color fields, signs, cultural codes, etc.)

In exploring the theme of embodiment, this course will investigate contemporary art through the historical lenses of empathy theory, phenomenology and psychoanalysis. In reading contemporary art through these earlier discourses, one may begin to open up the contemporary aesthetics of embodiment at deeper levels, both intellectual and experiential. Since the theories themselves often emerged as explanations for quite different art objects, one task will be to place contemporary art in dialog with these theories. On an intellectual level the course will begin to investigate how contemporary works of art might be further explained or illuminated by these theories. On an experiential level, each participant will begin to test his or her own subjective reactions against the accounts of subjectivity and consciousness contained within the various theoretical models. Each of the three theoretical models will, in turn, be tested against the other two.

The course will begin with the origins of empathy theory 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 theoretical method. 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 theoretical 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.

The course will next examine the theoretical discourses opened up by phenomenology in the mid-twentieth century, particularly through the writings of French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty, who became deeply engaged with the work of Cézanne, above all treated the physical body as the medium of perception and consciousness. 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.

In psychoanalysis the body once again entered into the core of theoretical 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, especially through unconscious processes of splitting, abjection and identification. Jacques Lacan, partly influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, described a field of the gaze by which both bodies and vision were caught, as in a trap. 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. Critics, such as 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.

Finally, the course will approach the theme of embodiment, especially as it has been inflected by theories of power, identity and information technology. As artists and critics 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. As they began to respond to the technological revolutions of cybernetics and computing, they began to investigate the body as a hybridized, de-localized, even monstrous entity. As these discourses have brought the body and embodied experience back to the center of aesthetic and cultural theory, 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. Even as questions of empathy seem have been de-centered or overturned in such post-humanist accounts, the apparent return empathy within contemporary art today requires a closer look. What is, in fact, the experiential and / or aesthetic status of the body today? How does the phenomenon of embodiment register?

**Purpose of Course:** This course is an advanced graduate seminar, whose purpose is to provide a forum for collective investigation of a single topic 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 artistic practices or historical research. Students will be expected to read texts

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closely on two levels: 1) an intellectual level of content (i.e. what is the author arguing?) and 2) an experiential level of application (does the experience being described resonate with my own experience of objects?) Students will 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.

The purpose of the course is to enable each student to attain the following goals:

- Understand and be able explain key texts in the theory of art;
- Apply textual knowledge analytically and intuitively to works of contemporary art;
- Learn to recognize basic themes and problems within the theme of embodiment, as these have emerged both historically and within the present;
- Learn to critically analyze theoretical texts and develop further implications;
- Learn to do research in the field of contemporary art;
- Be able to synthesize new points of view from a series of contrasting arguments;
- Apply textual knowledge to subjective realms of aesthetic experience; and
- Write clearly, persuasively, and critically while using or referencing a variety of theoretical models.
- **Note:** As in any university course, ART 282B requires consistent student effort in order to achieve these learning goals. In other words, what you get out of the course will depend a great deal on what you put in.

**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.

**Course Prerequisites:** Prerequisite: ARTH 191A and admission to classified MFA status in art or instructor consent.

**Required Texts:** All required readings will be available for download at the websites listed below. In addition, key images from lecture will be made available on the Course Website.

- ARTH 72 On-Line Reader. Available on-line through King Library Electronic Course Reserves. At < [www.sjlibrary.org/services/reserves/index.htm](http://www.sjlibrary.org/services/reserves/index.htm) >; you will need a library password to access.
- ARTH 72 Course Website. Available at <http://arth.sjsu.edu/> .
- Additional resources will be made available on the SJSU Blackboard site for the course at <http://sjsu6.blackboard.com/webct/> . For more information, please contact IT Support Services: 924-2377, [helpdesk@sjsu.edu](mailto:helpdesk@sjsu.edu).
- Other resources may be posted to the official blog for the course: <http://art282b.blogspot.com/> .

COURSE SCHEDULE:

**Week 1 – January 22: Course Introduction**

**Week 2 – January 29: Empathetic Bodies / Symbolic Forms**

Robert Vischer, *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics*, in Mallgrave and Ikonomou 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.

**Week 3 – February 5: Distanced Bodies / Visual Judgments**

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.

**Week 4 – February 12: Kinesthetic Bodies / Architectural Space**

August Schmarsow, “The Essence of Architectural Creation” in Mallgrave and Ikonomou 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.

**Week 5 – February 19: Aesthetic Experience / Theoretical Ekphrasis**

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.

**Week 6 – February 26: Empathy / Abstraction**

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.

**Week 7 – March 5: Absent Bodies / The Anti-Theatrical Spectator**

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.

**Week 8 – March 12: Visible Bodies / Phenomenological Vision**

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

*Paper proposal due Thursday 12 March*

**Week 9 – March 19: Body Identifications / Objects of the Gaze**

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; Briony

Fer, "Objects beyond Objecthood," in *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 22, 1999, pp. 27-36.

**Week 10 – March 26: Spring Break**

[NO CLASS]

**Week 11 – April 2: Viewing Subjects / Disciplined Bodies**

Michel Foucault, "Las Meninas," in *The Order of Things*, pp. 3-16; Michel Foucault, "Docile Bodies," in *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 135-169; Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," in *October*, v. 78, pp. 106-24.

**Week 12 – April 9: Sculpture, Presence and Site**

Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *October*, vol. 8, Spring 1979, pp. 30-44, pp. 135-69, 195-228; W.JT. Mitchell, "What Sculpture Wants," in *What Do Pictures Want?*, pp. 309-13; Miwon Kwon, "One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity" in *October*, vol. 80, Spring 1997, pp. 85-110

**Week 13 – April 16: Body Art / Corporeal Performances**

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.

**Week 14 – April 23: Digital Bodies / Cyborgs**

N. Katherine Hayles, "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers," in *October*, vol. 66, Autumn 1993, pp. 69-91; Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," in *October*, vol. 59, Winter 1992, pp.3-7; Stelarc, "Robotics and Remote Existence: Postevolutionary Strategies," in *Leonardo*, vol. 24, 1991, pp. 591-595.

**Week 15 –April 30: Presentations and / or Field Trip (to be announced)**

**Week 16 – May 7: Presentations**

*Final papers due in class May 7<sup>th</sup>!*

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**General Requirements:**

Attendance and active participation are essential to your success in this course as they represent your opportunity to apply what you have learned, to articulate your ideas clearly and effectively, to develop analytical and critical thinking about contemporary art and aesthetic theory

Students should be prepared to discuss all of the assigned readings for each class session. It is important to read the assigned material carefully and before each class session.

**Presentations and Writing Assignments:**

- Students will be expected to verbally present one of the assigned readings over the course of the semester;
- Students will be expected to give their reflections on the readings in the official blog for the course. Two of the blog entries (chosen by the student) will be graded;
- Grading criteria for all writing assignments is posted to the Blackboard site;
- Students will be expected to submit a final paper of 8 to 10 pages;

- King Library Reference Librarians are an excellent resource for research information. See also the King Library Electronic "Articles & Databases" at < [www.sjlibrary.org](http://www.sjlibrary.org) > and Course Website links to legitimate on-line resources; and

**Relative weight of course requirements:**

Blog Entries	20%
Paper Proposal	10%
Final Presentation	10%
Final Paper	40%
Participation	20%

**Policy on assignments and class attendance:**

- Students are asked to turn off cell phones and to limit laptop use to note-taking while in class;
- All papers must be original to this class (no "recycling"), meet all requirements of the assignment, and provide proper in-text source citations for all sources used (including textbook and Internet sources) for credit. All final papers must be submitted with outline and draft versions for credit. Late papers will not be accepted.
- **Please note:** Except in cases of documented emergencies, incomplete grades are not given in this course.

**University Policies:**

**A) Academic Integrity Statement**

The University's Academic Integrity Policy is available at

[http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial\\_affairs/Academic\\_Integrity\\_Policy\\_S07-2.pdf](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf) .

From the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development: "Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University's Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development." Further information can be found at < [http://sa.sjsu.edu/student\\_conduct](http://sa.sjsu.edu/student_conduct) >."

**B) Campus Policy in Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act:**

"If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC, in Administrative Building 110, 408/924-6000) to establish a record of their disability."

**C) Dropping and Adding:**

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. Information on add/drops are available at <http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html> .

Information about late drop is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy> .

Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

**Additional Note:**

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. Students will collectively have the opportunity to shape the ways in which the course unfolds.