

# ENG 8006, Winter 2011

## The Mediated Body

### Seminar in Film and Media Studies

Meets Tuesday, 6pm–9pm. Screenings to be arranged  
State Hall 326

Instructor: Scott Richmond

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Office Hours: Wednesday, 10am–12noon, and by appointment

## Course Description

Humanistic reflection on the body has made clear that “the body” is not only a problem for the biological and medical sciences, especially at a time when such disciplines are exerting increasing control over life. Rather, “embodiment” names the problem of how social, cultural, psychic, experiential, and aesthetic mediations make the body not only a biological object but also a lived body. This course aims to open up the field of inquiry where the lived body is also always the mediated body. The major figures of the course—and, in some sense, the two poles of contemporary approaches to embodiment—are Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault. Roughly the first half of the course will be dedicated to these two thinkers and their very different approaches to embodiment. The rest of the course will address two complimentary tasks: on the one hand, working toward a reconciliation of sorts between Foucault and Merleau-Ponty; and, on the other, investigating scenes of the mediation of the body—in both senses of that locution. We will follow, on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty’s slogan that “the body is a general medium for having a world.” On the other, we will focus explicitly on scenes of embodied encounters with media, most significantly (but not exclusively) cinema, installation art, and digital media. That is, we will attend simultaneously to the body’s encounter with media, and its complementary role as mediator. Beyond Foucault and Merleau-Ponty, we will read theorists such as Marcel Mauss, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Lacan, Jean Laplanche, Donna Haraway, Giorgio Agamben, Mark Hansen, Eugene Thacker, and others. This is a reading-intensive course. Students will be expected to develop significant research papers over the course of the semester.

## Course Objectives

("In this course, students will learn how to x...")

The form of the bullet-pointed course objective can't quite capture how I think about the pedagogical imperatives of this course. They're overlapping, diffuse, and messy; not the articulated and pointed ideal that reigns among good pedagogy types (of which I am normally one). So instead, let me tell you about how I'm thinking about what this course is, what I hope it can do, and what I hope I can offer you.

Of course, the first thing a course like this does is *Cover The Field*. Hence the heavy reading load. Sometimes you just have to learn stuff. So here, we'll be covering, in depth, some literature about mediation and embodiment (although obviously, we're not exhausting it). But you don't cover the field just because. You cover the field in order to be able to *Produce An Opening*. Which is to say, part of the thrust of this course is both extremely conceptual and extremely pragmatic. Producing an opening is another way of saying "how you do theoretical research." How to be in a room with a question for a bunch of weeks. How to live with the frustration of not-knowing. If you're "doing theory," then the conceptual and the pragmatic overlap. A research method of intuition, diffuse dissatisfaction, failures to understand, alluring opacity, etc. A teacher of mine recently said, "I write about not understanding things." If I say that I want to facilitate your producing an opening, that means I want to teach you how to not understand things better and more productively.

And, of course, a large part of thinking about embodiment, and mediation (and, of course, a whole host of other things) is thinking about what lies beyond, to the side of, below, etc. understanding. And so, the form and the matter of the course aren't unrelated at all. But they're not identical, either. You will, I hope, begin to see the method to my madness as the semester unfolds.

## Course Requirements

**The most basic expectation is attentive and careful viewing of *all* films, and engaged reading of *all* required course texts.**

*Enrollment.* This is a reading-intensive, theoretically sophisticated Ph.D.-level seminar. Enrollment is limited to students enrolled in doctoral programs in CLAS. M.A. students may register with consent of the instructor after demonstrating sufficient background in theory.

*Attendance.* Attendance at all class meetings is expected. You're grownups, so I won't take attendance.

*Screenings.* The latter weeks of the course will frequently pair films with the readings. There is no set screening time for this course, and screenings are not required. I will arrange informal screenings in State 326. None of the films are particularly obscure, and

should be readily available through Netflix or otherwise. You are, of course, responsible for seeing the films if you do not come to screening.

*On intensity.* Some of the material we will see in this class will likely be difficult for some students (most especially Cooper's *The Sluts*, which includes graphic descriptions of violent S/M sex). You will still be responsible for this material. If you have categorical objections to frank discussions and graphic depictions of sex or violence (or violent sex), you very probably should not take this course.

*Class participation.* While your final grade will largely be determined by your final papers, class participation can and probably will be a significant "fudge factor." Please come to class ready to engage in thoughtful, spirited discussion.

*In-class presentation.* Over the course of the term, each student will be expected to prepare an in-class presentation. We will talk about this more a bit into the semester, but the best way to think about this presentation is halfway between "journal club" and research workshop. You should choose a text that has some relevance or impact on your research project for the course. Think of the presentation as cutting in both directions: general interest and specific research project.

*Discussion.* You learned everything you need to know about this in kindergarten: basic golden rule stuff. Class discussion should always be respectful and considerate, even (and especially) when it's spirited. We will be dealing with some very challenging theoretical texts, and sometimes quite disturbing imagery this semester. Please treat your colleagues, and their opinions, experiences, and even (especially) their ignorance, with the care and respect they deserve. Please also be considerate of the project of learning: before you offer an opinion or (especially) your personal reaction, ask yourself what you would like to teach the class with, about, or by it.

By the same token, please do not IM, text, or surf the web during class. Or at least, keep it to a minimum. It's quite distracting. And it's fantastically disrespectful of your peers.

## Coursework, or Research

Your only written work this semester will be a final research paper of 20–30 pages (article-length). You should already have a sense of the kind of thing you would like to work on. If you do not, find one soon (& I'm here to help). It does not need to be wholly formed yet; in fact, it is better if you have interest but also perplexity. A large part of this course is learning (better, more) how to do theoretical research on film and media. Research projects should have some sort of theoretical impact, but their interventions need not be head-on theoretical: historical work is welcome, but the conceptual work must be clear.

*Library visit.* After the first theory-binge, I will arrange a session with Diane Sybeldon, the bibliographer for arts and film here. The nuts and bolts of research on theoretical topics

will be the major thrust here. Attendance will not be required, but will be helpful even for those of you already comfortable with the research tools at Wayne.

*Discussion board.* We will be using the discussion board on the blackboard site this semester. You are expected to be a full participant in both online and in-person discussions for this course. I will be. Please feel free to post interesting, useful, curious, or fun things to the board, too.

*Late work.* Since your only written work this semester will be a final paper, turning in work late will largely mean taking an incomplete. This can be a useful safety-valve, and some of the most productive papers I wrote in graduate school took me more than a year to finish. That said, for personal and institutional reasons, this can be a dangerous affair. If you think you wish or must take an I, you should start negotiating with me at least two weeks before the end of the semester.

NB: The University's policy on incompletes is as follows: "The mark of I—Incomplete, is given to either an undergraduate or a graduate student when he/she has not completed all of the course work as planned for the term and when there is, **in the judgment of the instructor, a reasonable probability that the student can complete the course successfully without again attending regular class sessions.** The student should be passing at the time the grade of 'I' is given. A written contract specifying the work to be completed should be signed by the student and instructor. Responsibility for completing all course work rests with the student" (2009-2011 WSU Undergraduate Bulletin, 40; emphasis added). (I think this doesn't quite apply to you, but I think it's valid for graduate students.)

*Grading.* As explained earlier, the vast majority of your final grade will rest on your final paper. Participation can be a significant fudge-factor, however—usually (but not exclusively) in the "better grade" direction.

## Other Housekeeping

*Email.* I will generally respond to emails within 24 hours. I will always respond to emails within 48 hours. Do not expect or rely on a response before then, especially if it is a time-sensitive manner (e.g. asking for an extension).

***I do not tolerate plagiarism.*** I should not have to say this, and you should not have to hear me say this. But: any plagiarism of any kind at any point in the course will result in the following: (a) a failing grade for the course, and (b) I will report you to the department.

The College's regulations on plagiarism reads: "The principle of honesty is recognized as fundamental to a scholarly community. Students are expected to honor this principle and instructors are expected to take appropriate action when instances of academic dishonesty are discovered. An instructor, on discovering such an instance, may give a failing grade on the assignment or for the course. The instructor has the responsibility of notifying the student of the alleged violation and the action being taken. Both the student and the instructor are entitled to academic due process in all such cases. Acts of dishonesty

may lead to suspension or exclusion. Information on procedures is available in the Office of the Dean.”

*Withdrawing.* You may withdraw from the class until four weeks before the final paper is due with the grade of WP (given regular attendance, good participation, etc.). After that, I expect you to complete the work you start, and take an I.

*Writing center information (courtesy of the department).* The Writing Center (2nd floor, UGL) provides individual tutoring consultations free of charge for students at Wayne State University. Undergraduate students in General Education courses, including composition courses, receive priority for tutoring appointments. The Writing Center serves as a resource for writers, providing tutoring sessions on the range of activities in the writing process – considering the audience, analyzing the assignment or genre, brainstorming, researching, writing drafts, revising, editing, and preparing documentation. The Writing Center is *not* an editing or proofreading service; rather, students are guided as they engage collaboratively in the process of academic writing, from developing an idea to editing for grammar and mechanics. To make an appointment, consult the Writing Center website: <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/writing/>

To submit material for online tutoring, consult the Writing Center HOOT website (Hypertext One-on-One Tutoring): <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/unit-inner.asp?WebPageID=1330>.

Instructors may require individual students to attend the Writing Center to receive tutoring on a specific assignment, skill, or aspect of the writing process. Instructors may also require individual students to attend the Writing Center to receive instruction in grammar and mechanics. Instructors may *not* require entire classes to attend the Writing Center.

For more information about the Writing Center, please contact the Director, Jule Wallis (phone: 7-2544; email: [au1145@wayne.edu](mailto:au1145@wayne.edu)).

*For students with disabilities (courtesy of the department).* If you feel that you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please feel free to contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Additionally, the Student Disabilities Services Office coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. The Office is located in 1600 David Adamany Undergraduate Library, phone: 313-577-1851/577-3365 (TTY). <http://studentdisability.wayne.edu>

## Course Readings and Screenings

Required texts (available from Marwil Bookstore, on Warren Avenue):

*Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

*The Visible and the Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

*Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault

*The History of Sexuality, Vol I: The Will to Knowledge*, Michel Foucault

*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Marshall McLuhan

*Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media*, Mark Hansen

*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben

*The Sluts*, Dennis Cooper

*Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes

All other readings will be available in the "Course Content" section of the blackboard site.

On reading load: While not unreasonable for a doctoral seminar, this is a very significant amount of reading. Do try to get through all of it. That said, I will give you a brief forward-looking tour of the following week's reading at the end of every class. Part of that will include a certain amount of priority-setting.

On screenings: You are responsible for all the films on the syllabus, even if you cannot come to the screenings.

## The Course

### Unit 1: Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, or Two Aspects of the Body

Week 1: January 11: The Polarized Field of the Body

Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body"

Giorgio Agamben, "Genius," from *Profanations*

Michel Foucault, introduction to Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception"

Week 2: January 18: Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, through page 282

Week 3: January 25: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology

Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Chapters 1 and 4, and selected Working Notes

Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind"

Week 4: February 1: Foucault's Disciplined Bodies

Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Societies of Control"

Week 5: February 8: Foucault's Invested and Biopolitical Bodies  
Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I: The Will to Knowledge*  
Foucault, introduction to *The History of Sexuality, Vol II: The Use of Pleasure*

## Unit 2: Mediation of the Body

Week 6: February 15: Extensions  
Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, Part I and selections from Part II  
Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, 2nd Version"  
Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics"  
SCREENING: *Koyaanisqatsi*, Godfrey Reggio, 1983

Week 7: February 22: Psychoanalysis  
Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, entry on "Anaclisis" in *The Language of Psycho-analysis*  
Laplanche, "The Order of Life and the Genesis of Human Sexuality" in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*  
Jacques Lacan, "Mirror Stage" essay  
Judith Butler, "On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'" and "Bodies that Matter" from *Bodies that Matter*  
SCREENING: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, John Cameron Mitchell, 2002

Week 8: March 1: Technicity and Flesh  
Mark Hansen, "Media Theory"  
Hansen, introduction, "Toward a Technics of the Flesh," and "Digitizing the Racialized Body" in *Bodies in Code*  
SCREENING: *Zidane*, Douglas Gordon, 2006

## Unit 3: Mediation and Biopolitics

Week 9: March 8: Bare Life  
Agamben, introduction and Part I in *Homo Sacer*  
Eugene Thacker, "What is Biomedica?" from *Biomedica*  
SCREENING: *District 9*, Neill Blomkamp, 2009

Week 10: March 22: Race, Population, Control  
Foucault, "Governmentality"  
Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics"  
Foucault, Chapter 11 from *Society Must Be Defended*  
Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies" from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*  
Dorothy Roberts, introduction, "The Dark Side of Birth Control," and "Race and the New Reproduction" from *Killing the Black Body*  
SCREENING: *Precious*, Lee Daniels, 2009

## Unit 4: Normativity

Week 11: March 29: Cruel Optimism

Lauren Berlant, "Starved"

Berlant, "Cruel Optimism"

Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness" from *Black Skin, White Masks*

Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl" and "Pregnant Embodiment," from *On Female Body Experience*

SCREENING: *The Girlfriend Experience*, Steven Soderbergh, 2009

Week 12: April 5: Coming Undone

Dennis Cooper, *The Sluts*

Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?"

Leo Bersani, "Shame on You" from *Intimacies*

Elizabeth Grosz, "The Future of Female Sexuality"

Alphonso Lingis, "Quadrille" from *Body Transformations*

Week 13: April 12: Queer/Phenomenology

Sara Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology"

Vivian Sobchack, "The Semiotic Structure of Camera Movement"

Sobchack, "Film's Body" from *The Address of the Eye*

SCREENING: *My Life on Ice*, Jacques Martineau and Olivier Ducastel, 2002

## Unit 5: Objects

Week 14: April 19: Photography

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Sobchack, "The Passion of the Matierial"

Dossier: Jeff Wall installations and Robert Mapplethorpe's early Polaroids

**ASSIGNMENT DUE April 26:** Final paper due by email AND via Blackboard before midnight.