Embodying Art:  
The Spectator and the Inner Body

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Abstract  Embodied approaches to art history concerned with empathic projection can be reinforced by introducing empirical research that corroborates experiential observations about a spectator’s bodily responses and by a more nuanced repertoire of bodily focused viewing. To reinforce existing scholarship, I examine a study exemplary in its analysis of embodied experience, Michael Fried’s *Menzel’s Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (2002), proposing that the author’s reported empathic experiences of Adolph Menzel’s painting *Rear Courtyard and House* can be understood through concepts of sensorimotor imaging, hypnosis, and interoception. To expand the range and nuance of embodied responses, I first counterpoint Fried’s two interpretations of the painting *Balcony Window*, offering a gendered reading and a taxonomy of three sensory modes of looking at art. Second, I shift to a micro level to explore how the spectator’s breathing interacts with this painting and how these respiratory interactions create a mnemonic overlay that operates over time. Although these analyses focus on a nineteenth-century realist painting, the concepts and practices can be applied to diverse genres and media.

Parts of this essay were conceived during a 2003–2004 fellowship at the Italian Academy for Advanced Study in America at Columbia University and presented at the Seminar on Art and Science at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in 2005 and to the Brain and Culture Group of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 2007. At *Poetics Today*, I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers and, in particular, to Meir Sternberg for his challenging commentaries.

1. Brief Intersections of Empathy Theory, Scientific Research, and Art History

Belief in the power and profundity of the human body has been central to religions, philosophies, and artistic credos throughout the centuries. The Greek veneration of athletic beauty, the corporeal instantiation of the Hindu gods, the sensual poetry of the *Kama Sutra*, and the Christian sacrament of Transfiguration all involve the body as a primary locus for experience of the human and the divine. In recent years this understanding of the body as a fundamental standpoint has been invigorated by research in the neurosciences and other empirically based disciplines as well as by work within interdisciplinary fields in the humanities. Together, this research has given rise to a thesis about human embodiment that challenges the long-standing dichotomy between the realms of mind and body. The thesis is that the physical body, as it develops within a social world, shapes our emotions, thoughts, concepts, and beliefs—which we ordinarily characterize as mental—and serves as a necessary starting point for understanding all human processes and activities.¹ Embodiment-driven empirical research has been applied to diverse areas of human experiences that were once defined, in spirit and method, as antithetical to the hard sciences—gambling, spiritual exercise, love, creativity.

One might expect that art history would be a discipline amenable to this new line of scientific inquiry, for it picks up on a major research theme from its own nineteenth-century history. This was a time when humanists and scientists theorized that spectators respond to art and architecture through their bodies, projecting themselves into material objects and animating them with their own bodily life. In 1873 Robert Vischer coined a term to designate this process—*empathy*, translated from the German *Einfühlung*, or feeling in. Drawing on psychoanalytic theories of the dream and on existing philosophical theories of the symbol, Vischer proposed a multi-leveled schema of how spectators project their bodily forms, their emotions, their selves, and their souls into objects they perceive. Explaining that lower levels of projection involve various types of bodily responses, Vischer (1994 [1873]: 98) argued that an artwork can stimulate all parts of a viewer’s body: “We can often observe in ourselves the curious fact that the visual stimulus is experienced not so much with our eyes as with a different sense in another part of our body.” Empathy, the highest level of projec-

¹ Numerous discussions of embodiment from various disciplinary perspectives have emerged in recent years. To note just a few: Damasio 1994, 1999; Gallagher 2005; Gibbs 2005; Johnson 2007; Lakoff and Johnson 1999.
tion, involves the projection of the self and the soul. When this happens, Vischer (ibid.: 104) claims, “I am mysteriously transplanted and magically transformed into this Other.”

Although Vischer’s notion of empathy was eventually rejected for its transcendental, Romantic orientation, the same interest in explaining how things in the world seem animated by our projection of bodily sensations and emotions was shared by nineteenth-century scientists (notably Theodor Lipps [1903]) as well as by other humanists. Art historians of the time regarded empathic projection as central to the aesthetic experience: among them, Heinrich Wölfflin (1994 [1886]), who wrote of imitative reactions in observers that correspond to bodily qualities they share with architectural forms, and Aby Warburg (discussed in Michaud 2004), who argued that spectators animate Renaissance paintings by actively projecting into them their own bodily motion.

At the turn of the twentieth century, however, multiple challenges arose to the premise that empathy, in any of its various forms, was a necessary means of experiencing the aesthetic qualities of artworks and architecture. Among the scientific challenges, the research of the British psychologist Edward Bullough (1921) demonstrated substantial differences in the empathic capabilities of different individuals—and even differences within the same individual for the same object. This undermined the general assumption that empathy was a universal experience.²

Furthermore, the influential art critic Wilhelm Worringer (1908) identified two fundamental principles of creative impulse: empathy and abstraction, arguing that “the urge to empathy” was not an appropriate response to the emerging abstract art of the time. Influenced by Worringer’s ambitious argument, other artists and critics of the early twentieth century came to regard empathy as a comfortable, multisensory response to naturalistic depictions and to associate empathy with passive, feminine, imitative forms of art making (Koss 2006). Abstraction, on the other hand, was understood to be a sheerly optical response appropriate to avant-garde abstract art and was associated with experiences of estrangement and discomfort and with active, masculine modes of authentic creativity. Characterized in this way, empathy had little to offer proponents of the burgeoning modernism, with its abstractions and its ethos of alienation.

Although the concept of empathy has been continually reformulated from its inception to the present day, reflecting the various scientific and

intellectual cultures that defined it, it has never regained its previous stature among art historians.\(^3\) However, this is not to say that matters pertaining to embodiment have been wholly absent from contemporary art scholarship or that scientific research has not addressed subjects pertinent to the visual arts. Since the 1960s the primary theorist whose investigations of the body have held the interest of art historians and artists is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His phenomenological psychology (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1964; Merleau-Ponty and Lefort 1968) has been used to ground the interpretive criticism of art historians like Michael Fried (2002), Alexander Nemerov (2001), Susan Sidlauskas (2000), and Richard Shiff (1997), whose concerns range from eighteenth-century realistic painting to twentieth-century minimalist sculpture.

For artists since the middle of the twentieth century, the human body has become a compelling topic of investigation. They have often used scientific theories, technical apparatuses, and empirical data (Warr and Jones 2000) to explore themes pertaining to the visceral dimensions of human experience (Serrano 2001), to pose questions about cyborgs through prosthetic constructions (Stellarc 1990), and to conduct laboratory experiments on DNA coding (Kac 1999). Finally, art historians have not ignored the impact of scientific research or related issues of embodiment and emotion (see Cernuschi 1997; Crary 2001; Freedberg 1989; Gombrich 1960), nor have scientists neglected the visual arts, as some have provided invaluable research on the visual perception of artwork (Arnheim 1954), the preferences of spectators (Berylne 1974), and the neural structure of the visual brain (Zeki 1999).

Given this history and the current intellectual trajectory, what I find striking is that few studies in art criticism, history, and aesthetics seek to deepen our awareness of embodied experiences and that current scientific research has not been used more extensively to reconceive a more vital concept of empathy and embodiment for the visual arts. In this article I pursue two purposes. One is to use scientific research to strengthen existing scholarship that deploys the concept of empathy as a particular kind of embodied spectatorship. To this end, I introduce various items of empirical research in conjunction with close descriptions of embodied experiences to make it clear that such experiences are not simply vague, romantic turns of phrase.\(^4\) Although I bring science to the table, it is not to characterize

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3. The intellectual history of empathy is so complex that portions of it are studies unto themselves (Koss 2006; Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994; Olin 1992).

4. I will speak of close descriptions rather than phenomenological descriptions, as I am not undertaking the traditional phenomenological task of identifying the invariant structures of experience.
it as the master discipline, the ultimate authority about what is true or false, valuable or worthless. Rather, by juxtaposing scientific and humanist approaches, I intend to offer complementary descriptions of embodiment that converge, more clearly illuminating a common phenomenon that either could treat separately.

I pursue this purpose in section 2 by responding to an exemplary work of art history that engages questions of empathy and embodiment, Fried’s *Menzel’s Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth Century Berlin* (2002). I have selected Fried’s work because it, more than any other scholarly study I know, reflects relentlessly and with compelling clarity on numerous interactions between an actual spectator, Fried, and particular works of art. In part it is Fried’s explicit effort to describe the effects of Adolph Menzel’s work on his own body, effects that he takes as a reflection of Menzel’s bodily experiences, and in part his own self-questioning and direct address to the reader about the uncertainties of rendering such embodiment effects that give Fried’s *Menzel’s Realism* the sense of inviting, even provoking conversation with a reader. Admittedly, these are rhetorical strategies deployed by Fried to create a sense of honest communication, which makes readers receptive to his proposals and even entices them into acts of embodiment. Nonetheless, his stratagems succeed in bringing this reader/spectator into a dialogue with a superb analyst of his own imaginative projections. Given my focus on *Menzel’s Realism*, it would be reasonable to assume that my study pertains to empathic projection that operates for a particular kind of realistic nineteenth-century painting—and it does. However, my central concepts have broader application, for I am attempting to illuminate a way of using our bodies that can occur when we look at artworks that lie outside of the tradition in which Menzel paints: for example, Mark Rothko’s field paintings, Jackson Pollock’s action drawings, Andres Serrano’s photographs of bodily fluids, or Dan Flavin’s light constructions.

My second purpose is to begin developing a more nuanced repertoire of body-centered approaches that we can bring to critical interpretations of art, artists, and artistic genres. Focusing on touch, I initiate a close description of bodily experience in section 3 by counterpointing one of Fried’s interpretations of a painting by Menzel with a more gender-inflected embodied reading. In section 4 I augment these reflections on touch by exploring a type of embodied response that is little discussed, breath, and its effects on the spectator’s experience of the work over time. In contrast to section 3, which integrates a discussion of embodied touch responses into an interpretation of a Menzel painting, here I work at a more rudimentary level, identifying specific ways that spectators might experience respiratory embodiment. Accordingly, this essay spans rather large terri-
tories, opening with considerations of intersubjective, empirical research and concluding with close descriptions of individual acts of viewing.

2. The Empirical Dimension of Fried’s Empathy

The subject of Fried’s study, Adolph Menzel (1815–1905), was a celebrated German illustrator and painter who treated imperial and military subjects, life in the cities, and scenes of domestic interiors. He was also a particularly short and grotesque man, which led him to avoid social company. Fried weaves this fact into his characterization of Menzel’s artwork, suggesting that Menzel’s projective mode of working may have satisfied otherwise stunted social engagements with the world (Keisch and Riemann-Reyher 1966).

Fried opens his study with a quotation from John Ruskin that invites his readers to try drawing a bookcase. Anticipating their crudely rendered sketches, Ruskin argues that this is to be expected, for drawing is intrinsically unclear and indistinct, as vision gives us things only incompletely. When drawing is clear, it is because the artist is using abstract knowledge of the world rather than maintaining an optical fidelity to the object. Fried agrees with Ruskin to a certain extent, but he asks his readers to judge if Ruskin’s notions are applicable to a carefully rendered, detailed pencil drawing by Menzel titled Dr. Puhlman’s Bookcase (1844). Noting its “extraordinarily intense feeling for books and journals,” Fried (2002: 4) suggests that Menzel’s work does not have the kind of vagueness that is intrinsic to the optically oriented approach to drawing that Ruskin describes, nor does it convey the sense of being known abstractly rather than experienced. Fried is asking readers to recognize, through reference to their own experiences, what he calls Menzel’s realism, which arises not from optical projection but from what Fried (ibid.: 13) describes as the “imaginative projection of bodily experience.”

Fried is well aware that to argue successfully for Menzel’s realism readers must be convinced that it is possible to project their own bodies empathically into works of art. He recognizes that some spectators simply will not or cannot accept the artworks’ “invitation to empathic seeing” (ibid.: 257) but endeavors to persuade others to accept his own invitation to shadow him empathically as he grapples with Menzel’s work. Reviewers of Menzel’s Realism, attentive to Fried’s rhetorical prowess, note that he uses a number of persuasive methods, and to one critic or another, each method has its own drawbacks. Stephen Melville (2004: 173), for example, identifies a technique of recurrent self-questioning, and while this creates a bond with the reader, such reflections are also identified as part of a more gen-
eral tendency toward frustrating digressions (Deshmukh 2003). Dorothy Rowe (2004: 6) characterizes Fried’s analysis as a compelling poetic discourse that sweeps you along into tentative agreement yet occasionally proves disconcerting, because you end up accepting arguments that would ordinarily be examined critically and possibly rejected. Those who make such remarks, however, do not dispute Fried’s premise that one can project the body into objects one views, and all recognize the dazzling intellectual energy and scholarly acumen of Fried’s investigation.

A more central criticism concerns the viability of the concept of empathic projection itself. Noting his unease with Fried’s argument, Christopher S. Wood (2002: 43) observes, “Fried finds a hundred different phrases for the enigma of empathy: We feel Menzel’s ‘imaginative projection of bodily experience . . . they depict bodily sensations . . . practically as vivid to us as our own.’ We know what he means, I suppose, but the accumulation of paraphrases points to a risky lack of precision, the same conceptual incompleteness that led to the demise of nineteenth-century empathy theory in the first place.” Fried’s discussion of embodiment, Wood also comments, is situated within the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, a movement that is no longer influential, owing to Jacques Derrida’s crippling critique of presence.

Wood might be one of those individuals whom Fried (2002: 256–58) describes as unresponsive to the “invitation to empathic seeing,” as suggested by Wood’s choice of the phrase “We know what he means, I suppose,” particularly the words “I suppose.” But rather than write off Wood’s criticism as the grumblings of one who is not temperamentally disposed to bodily projection, I want to draw attention to a valid point he makes—that the notion of empathy as Fried uses it might or might not be something that really happens and that its intellectual history has been clouded with enthusiasms and rejections. While I do not intend to clarify that “conceptual incompleteness” with a new theory of empathy, I do hope to make some contributions toward it.

To avoid terminological ambiguities, let me pause to explain two related terms, embodiment and empathy. In the introduction I use embodiment to refer to a thesis about a broadly conceived relationship between the mind and the body, in which the body functions as a fundamental standpoint, whereas I use empathy to refer to a particular kind of embodied operation that involves a projection of some aspect of one’s body or self into objects and others in the world. Empathy is only one kind of embodied process. For example, philosophers and psychologists often describe cognition as embodied, a claim regarding the importance of the motor system in everyday cognitive processes (Gibbs 2005), and some describe language as
embodied, an argument to the effect that the words we use, even our basic conceptions of time and space, are rooted in bodily processes (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). I mention this because Fried (2002: 13) is concerned with a particular kind of embodiment, one defined by Menzel’s artistic practice of empathic projection, which is “an enterprise . . . that involved countless acts of imaginative projection of bodily experience.” I believe the context will make it clear when I am referring to embodiment as a broad theory or as a particular kind of empathic projection.

Fried’s investigation of Menzel’s Rear Courtyard and House (figure 1) serves as the first case in point. In describing Rear Courtyard, Fried stresses the completely ordinary, seemingly accidental composition of the scene, the fact that the individual components do not add up to any kind of unity. Indeed, he links the contingency of the various elements to a kind of meaninglessness that he characterizes as a “disenchantment”: this refers to the loss of unifying, transcendent values that emerged with modernism, as articulated by C. J. Clark in his development of Max Weber’s phrase “disenchantment of the world” (ibid.: 231). Fried explains that Menzel’s vivid evocation of this disenchantment becomes a source of fascination and consequently a kind of reenchantment, to which he responds bodily. Contem-
platelike effect of the painting, Fried offers two descriptions of his own empathic responses that I will recharacterize—and extend—through concepts of contemporary science. Concerning this reenchantment, Fried (ibid.: 232) offers two explanations:

By this I mean that the very contingency, makeshiftness, and unfinishedness of the pictured scene come to exert a quasi-hypnotic appeal on the viewer, who at once begins to “penetrate” the picture space and empathically respond to its contents, finds himself (I am speaking for myself now) scarcely able to tear his eyes away from the canvas.

Or perhaps it is that the perceptual and imaginative effort that is required of the viewer in order to accomplish that work of seeing (and induce that near-hypnotic state) ends up animating, or reanimating, the pictorial field with projective energies comparable in kind if not in intensity to those that brought it into being in the first place.

The first explanation elaborates upon Fried’s previous remarks about the viewer’s sustained effort of close study: he or she is looking hard at individual elements of the work to discern what they represent, yet none seems thematically or formally related to the others, and thus the viewer moves from space to space, investigating, looking for a correlation, finding none, and moving on. As this absorbive exploration progresses, Fried suggests, the spectator starts to penetrate the representation and respond empathically to its represented entities.

Let us first consider motivation. Fried (ibid.) refers to the painting’s “inexhaustible allure,” noting “I could imagine making a pilgrimage to that rear courtyard . . . photographing it, or buying postcards of it.” These are the remarks of a spectator with a strong interest in moving toward the work in some way, penetrating it. Although he accounts for his fascination in terms of the process of disenchantment and re-enchantment, Fried’s motivations, and those of others who might also enter into the picture space but for different reasons, might be characterized at a more general level. In terms of evolutionary biology, movement toward an object as well as imagined movement might result from the primitive emotions instigating play, exploratory behavior, or social attachment to the reality of the representation (Panksepp 1998: 198). Note that being motivated to approach an object for investigation does not necessarily result in sharing its emotional state, as is conventionally associated with the concept of empathy. From a psychoanalytic perspective, movement toward an object might suggest regression to a developmentally primitive state of pleasure seeking.

Captivated by the work, Fried meticulously itemizes the particulars of *Rear Courtyard* (for example, the conjoining fences with irregular supports,
the laundry in the wind, the children coming through the gates in the far backyard) in not just one but two sections of his book. Such details, he notes, affirm his point that “simply to inventory the representational content of this picture requires a sustained effort of close looking” (Fried 2002: 76). Fried’s characterization of “close looking” as a sustained and active, effortful process is consistent with embodied approaches to visual perception, which characterize perception as an active, sensorimotor process geared to ascertaining how our bodies interact with their environment.

Embodiment theories of perception (also described, more specifically, as sensorimotor theories of perception) accord a primary role to the motor processes. According to older theories of visual perception, there are two forms of visual perception, one for identifying the visual features (color, shape) of an object (a form of processing that answers the question what) and the other for ascertaining the object’s location in space (where). More recent research, however, has indicated that the component of vision that identifies spatial location functions more generally in connection with the motor system to provide information concerning how one acts upon objects in the world.

Embodiment theories of perception hold that this action-directed mode of visual perception is actually the dominant orientation we have to the world: “perception is simulated action” (Berthoz 2000: 10). This is not to say that when you see a dog you necessarily perform the action of petting it or backing away. Such behaviors would be completed actions. Simulated actions involve motor images, which are schemata of motor activity stored in memory. There are motor images for everything from the formation of one’s hand needed for grasping a teacup to the lowering of one’s legs into a cold swimming pool. Carried along with the motor processes in the how mode of visual perception are associated sensory qualities—the smooth texture of the teacup handle you grasp and the frigidity of the water into which you plunge your reluctant legs.

A pioneer in the development of motor models, Marc Jeannerod (1994: 190), suggests that these sensory/motor images can become conscious when one’s unconscious preparations to perform them are frustrated. Extrapolating from Jeannerod’s thought, I suggest that when spectators view art they are generally in an analogous situation: they are not permitted to touch the artwork, although they are motivated to do so and their bodies are unconsciously preparing for it. By visually exploring the object, imaginatively touching it, whether it be touching the material object (the canvas), the represented world of the painting or its formal features, the viewer

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5. See Wilson 2002 for an excellent discussion of different versions of embodied cognition.
is preparing to act but not actually doing so. As a result, an unconscious sensorimotor image might appear to consciousness—the feel of the ladder, the movement of reaching into the painting—the kind of actions Fried suggests that a viewer simulates within the picture space of Rear Courtyard.

Further explanations as to how we imaginatively experience artworks can be drawn from the research into the mirror neuron system. Originally derived from experiments on macaque monkeys, the hypothesis of mirror neurons was first formulated to account for neurons within an observer that fire when the observer witnesses intentional actions being performed by another living being. When a macaque watches another living being grasp an object, within the observer a neuron fires correspondingly within the same neural circuit that would be involved in grasping an object. In this case, the neural circuitry concerns the performing of actions. Subsequent research has identified similar mirroring systems for somatosensory experience (such as touch), which occur, for instance, when spectators watch inanimate objects being touched by human beings and even when they watch inanimate objects touching other inanimate objects, such as palm tree branches moved by the wind that touch a garden chair (Ebisch et al. 2008).

While Fried does not actually describe specific acts of imaginative touching, tasting, hearing, or smelling the represented contents of Rear Courtyard, he does note the action of penetrating the picture, and his remarks in the first of the two excerpts above, as well as his discussions throughout the book, suggest there is some kind of somatic-motor response to Rear Courtyard. In fact, he even states that he responds “empathically to its contents,” which to him involves a sensory encounter. Fried is more specific about the viewer’s sensory involvement in a reference to Menzel’s Garden of Prince Albert’s Palace. There he refers to Menzel’s predilection for wind, noting that this painting must be “seen as full of the sound of the wind in the trees and also as evoking the pressure of the wind on the trees and perhaps too on the viewer’s body” (Fried 2002: 22). In regard to Rear Courtyard, Fried mentions “the bushes leaning in the wind” (ibid.: 77) and “the laundry snapping in the wind” (ibid.: 79): these, we infer, provide a tactile experience for the viewer, for Fried, and (according to Fried) most certainly for

6. Although investigators of the mirroring system have advanced hypotheses as to its role in various human processes, there are also critics who find the evidence to support some of these hypotheses as yet unconvincing (Hickok 2009).
7. See Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2008 for a discussion of the history of investigations into the mirror neuron system, an area of investigation that arose from a series of experiments by Rizzolatti and others on the research team.
8. Gallese and Freedberg (2007) have used research on mirror neurons to account for various kinds of empathic experiences of visual art.
Menzel. Just as representations of a natural force like wind against the body are sensorily evocative, so manipulable objects within the painting also elicit sensorimotor activations, whether characterized as simulations (tactile images, temperature images, touch pressure images, motor images) or understood within the context of the sensorimotor mirroring system. Fried refers explicitly to such manipulable items as the ladder, the outdoor latrine, and the hand pump next to it, whose handle is prominently displayed in a detail (ibid.: 74, figure 45).

In effect, Fried’s first explanation of his response to Rear Courtyard suggests his involvement in an imitative experience. He is simulating, through a partial activation of his own bodily state, an actual interaction with the representational contents of the painting—or the painter’s act of creating them. I am using the notion of simulation, as in current theories of mind (Gordon 2004), to designate an imagined enactment of an event.

In his second explanation, Fried is also describing a simulation but one where the spectator simulates an entire bodily state rather than imitates actions.9 Here he seems to conjecture that the spectator’s perceptual and imaginative effort reanimates the pictorial field with a projective energy that is, “in kind if not [in] intensity,” like the animating energy of the painter who originally “brought it [the painting] into being.”10 To explain this with reference to a scientific concept, I propose that the projective energy that reanimates the pictorial field is the spectator’s interoceptive awareness of his or her own body.

Interoception, an unfamiliar term in art history, is a central feature of the spectator’s engagement with visual art. In contrast to exteroception, which is our perception of stimuli external to the body, interoception is our sensing of the internal milieu (Solms and Turnbull 2002: 36) or of what I also call the inner bodily state. Included in this bodily state are feelings of “pain, temperature, itch, sensual touch, muscular and visceral sensations, vasomotor activity, hunger, thirst, air, and hunger” (Craig 2003: 500), and it is our subjective evaluation of it that we respond to when answering the question “How do you feel?” (Craig 2002: 655). According to Antonio R. Damasio (1994: 152), this interocepted bodily state constitutes an emotional state that is always present as a background to consciousness, like a mood that colors our ordinary consciousness: “The background body sense is

9. Although grammar forces me to say that the spectator simulates a bodily state, this gives the impression that the spectator acts willfully and consciously. This is not the case. One might be aware of one’s bodily state, but this does not require that one consciously choose to create this bodily state.

10. “Projective energies,” according to Fried (2002: 232), belong both to the human subjects who either perceive or create and also to the canvas that is animated with this energy.
continuous, although one may hardly notice it, since it represents not a specific part of anything in the body but rather an overall state of most everything in it.” In addition to having interoceptive awareness of the entire system, we might also become aware of a specific bodily part, such as a sharp pain in the foot, and other more distinctive emotional states, like anger or joy.

If we understand Fried’s spectator to be projecting his or her own bodily interoception, then we need to ask what qualities the spectator is experiencing through this projection. I suggest that the most obvious quality we associate with our inner body is the feeling of being alive, for interoceptive awareness of the body is an awareness of that which is animate, living. Integral to being alive is the capacity for self-initiated movement. There is also a self-referential quality to interoception. When we project the inner body and a sense of ourselves that goes along with this, we might feel ourselves located, in some fundamental way, in the artwork or reconstituted as the artwork. Contemplating the question of how the present self recognizes a continuity with past selves, William James (1950 [1890]: 330–36) suggests that the bodily qualities of warmth and intimacy—feelings of the body known through interoception—refer to the self.

The interoceptive awareness that characterizes Fried’s second description of his experience of viewing *Rear Courtyard* is significant to the notion of hypnosis that he explores in both descriptions: the artwork makes “quasi-hypnotic” appeal to the viewer, and the viewer’s perceptual and imaginative effort inculcates a “near-hypnotic state.” Linking the concepts of interoception and hypnosis, even quasi- or near hypnosis, is appropriate. For decades individuals who are highly susceptible to hypnosis were believed to have greater capacities for internal awareness of autonomic responses and for imaginative experience (Hilgard 1970), and more recent research has further supported these claims (Kunzendorf et al. 1996). Although it has long been a component of clinical practice, research into hypnosis has been newly energized, for recent studies have shown that

11. Even if this overall awareness of the somatosensory system were not within our background consciousness—and in places Damasio does not reiterate the notion that it always is—I argue that the internal milieu can come into consciousness upon our inspection of the artwork. As we look at the work, the body can become aroused, and this change in bodily homeostasis constitutes a shift from the status quo, which helps draw attention to the body. See Damasio 2003: 166 for the link between background emotion and interoception.
12. Research in evolutionary biology indicates that early notions of selfhood are linked to the basic somatic motor functions. Pankepp (1998: 567) and Sheets-Johnstone (1998: 291) have argued that certain representations of the inner bodily state, as linked to the motor system, constitute the oldest representations of the self. Damasio (2003) develops a theory of a tripartite consciousness in which bodily movement and interoceptive awareness are foundational constructs.
the hypnotic state has distinct neural correlates (Kosslyn et al. 2000), and this makes hypnosis an appropriate and intriguing matter for empirical research.

Although Fried invokes the concept of hypnosis, he writes as though he is only tossing off the term loosely, characterizing the empathic experience as only quasi- or near hypnotic. This is no surprise. Gazing at a painting, after all, is not real hypnosis as practiced by a therapist. But this might not be the only reason for using these qualifiers, as another explanation would have to do with the extent to which Fried wants to characterize his empathic relationship to the painting in the most radical terms, as one involving a loss of self-determination. Hypnosis and true empathic projection, at least in Vischer’s formulation, involve a transferal of some aspect of the self into another. With hypnosis, one takes on (as one’s own) the will of the other by accepting the hypnotist’s commands; and with empathy, similarly, one takes on the directive of the artwork, which asks you to experience its world through your own bodily systems. The notion that artworks have a will that is independent of yours, that they have agency, is advanced by W. J. T. Mitchell in *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005). Fried (2002: 36–39), however, guards against making strong claims about the spectator being captivated by the will of the work. Instead, he adopts Vischer’s least controversial description of empathy and characterizes it through the familiar psychoanalytic terms *identification* and *projection*. These are terms that cast the human actor in an active role and thus assign agency to the human being rather than to the object.

At this point, some readers may wonder whether they have ever had these kinds of interoceptive experiences. Some might say that they do not experience their bodies but instead lose the sense of their bodies when becoming absorbed in an artwork, which seems to be just the opposite of what I am claiming. I suggest, however, that some spectators might be unaware of their bodies because they are experiencing them as constitutive of the art object—as projected into the object. But this explanation does not apply to all spectators, for interoceptive awareness is not uniform. Researchers find notable differences in interoceptive ability among subjects, and for some subjects the interoception of specific types of sensations is quite accurate (Cameron 2001: 704). Various methods have been used for ascertaining these differences, ranging from body perception questionnaires (Porges 1993) to brain-scanning technologies (Critchley et al. 2001; Critchley et al. 2004). We should expect further refinements of these

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results, for the topic of interoception has received increased attention in recent decades, owing to research that has demonstrated its medical (Spiegel and Spiegel 2004) and possibly evolutionary value (Harris et al. 1993; Santarcangelo and Sebastiani 2004) and to the growing interest in theories of emotion like Damasio’s, which predict that the relative ability to perceive visceral responses through interoception will influence measures of subjective affective experience (Critchley et al. 2004: 189).

This said, a more general point remains, and it becomes increasingly significant as I progress. People differ in the ways they respond bodily to art. Variations reflect not only differences in interoceptive abilities as noted but also the goals one has in perusing an artwork, one’s background training, and even the norms of one’s culture. Although I shall not argue the point here, I suggest that scholars and historians of the arts as well as aestheticians and educators begin to recognize such differences and take note of what alternative bodily responses have to offer for their own disciplines. The power of Fried’s embodied approach to illuminate Menzel’s complex body of work is reason enough to recognize the value of a nonuniversal mode of attending bodily to art.

3. Touching Balcony Room

I have proposed that two forms of embodied response characterize Fried’s analyses of Menzel’s Rear Courtyard, both involving some kind of projection. In one, the spectator penetrates the canvas, empathically responding to its contents, which would mean imagining the sensory experience that would be evoked were one actually to touch the object. The second instance is a kind of projection that is not sensorily specific and does not involve a simulation of acting upon objects in a represented world. This is a projection of what I have described as the spectator’s interoceptive bodily awareness. The next sections of this article use these two modes of embodiment as a point of departure for the analysis of a second painting. This section offers two readings of Menzel’s Balcony Room (figure 2) that parallel the two analyses Fried offers, one of them a close reading of the painting and the other a wide-ranging reflection on its epistemology. In my own parallel readings of the same painting, I foreground the gender dimension and an epistemology of the senses, respectively. Section 4

15. Differences in the extent to which viewers are aware of their interoceptive experiences might be compared to the differences in the extent to which readers create sensory-rich visual images (Esrock 1994). Both are cognitive processes that differ from individual to individual, yet such variations are not accommodated within traditional theories of spectatorship or reading.
plunges more deeply into the bodily particulars of the spectator’s response to this painting, focusing primarily on breath as a modality of embodiment that operates over time.

A note is necessary on my terms referring to the spectator. Just as Fried was careful to characterize his responses as particular to him, so I too regard what follows as a version of my own.\footnote{Although Fried (2002: 246) acknowledges that he is reporting his own experience, he also regards much of it as being normative: consider, for instance, such parenthetical}
that these responses are not strictly idiosyncratic but rather are applicable to individuals who use bodily awareness in the ways I describe. Judging from conversations and interviews with friends and colleagues and from presentations before nonacademic as well as academic audiences, I find that many individuals experience art in these ways. To capture these dual perspectives, I write both in the first person as “I” to convey a concreteness and a direct apprehension of experience and also in the third person, referring to “the spectator” and to “he or she,” particularly when framing abstractions.

To introduce the themes to which I respond throughout this section, I begin with a catalog description by Claude Keisch of an exhibition of Menzel’s works at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC:

An almost empty room in which just a few everyday items of furniture distributed according to a very equivocal law of chance arrest our gaze, the only event a slight puff of wind, and light the only protagonist: rays of light coming through the curtain—exactly at the median axis—and shining on to the ground. . . . The objects are depicted with very varying degrees of precision. Oscillating between clear, palpable expression and the summary suggestion of a phantom-like half-presence . . . [references to a sofa and rug, with two chairs facing away from one another, on each side a large mirror, which reflects a more detailed view of the room than that which is rendered]. The dimension of time is evident at two levels: in the event and in perception. . . . The meaning of the light patch on the bare wall in particular remains an enigma: a reflection of sunlight? Did the house-painter break off work there, or did Menzel himself leave his picture “unfinished”? Thus half of the picture exists without material substance: a signifier without a signified. (Keisch and Riemann-Reyher 1966: 186–88)

Balcony Room’s spirited curtain, which Keisch describes above as the only event, strongly evokes in me, as a spectator who accepts Menzel’s invitation to embodiment, the sensation of touch. This is not primarily a touching that satisfies a desire for solving the kind of puzzles that Fried locates in Menzel’s work, those that provoke the hard work of perceptual activity, nor for solving the enigma of a signifier without a signified, mentioned by Keisch. Rather, it is a touching that enjoys the feel of the material and its airy movement through the hands. This kind of pleasure is traditionally afforded through women’s activities, as it is women who generally work with the fabrics of domestic interiors and wear garments that possess more fluidity and transparency than men’s clothing.

The protruding shape of the door/frame through the fabric attracts my eye. Its vividness might be the result of two textures colliding. Elaine

remarks made after an analysis as “I am speaking for myself, but would anyone seriously dispute this?”
Scarry (1999: 12) argues that the visual (mental) images produced in reading become particularly vivid when one imagines something gauzy moving across something that is solid, and perhaps Menzel’s curtain might be a kinesthetic analogy. The slight protrusion of the wooden door frame behind the drapery, pressing softly against it yet stretching the fabric until it becomes sheer, is familiar and pleasant. Focusing on this stretch, I study and admire its form-disclosing quality, highlighted by a change in color. Yet as the door might possibly tear the fabric, creating a snag, a tiny rip, the contact point of door and fabric becomes a place of slight, though enjoyable, tension. This evokes analogous bodily experiences of putting on stockings, specifically, stretching them delicately and admiring the fine, sheer material and their contoured grip on the limb while at the same time working carefully to sheath the leg without breaking the tension of the stocking fabric. These reflections demonstrate the same sort of simulations of sensorimotor experiences (touching, reaching) that Fried describes with respect to *Rear Courtyard*.

Consider next the juxtaposition of this feminine curtain and the adjoining chair. “The sense of attentiveness I associate with the chair is . . . implicitly ‘masculine,’” (2002: 87). Fried claims, and it suggests a male/female dyad—a seated male visitor watching a woman. Nonetheless, when Fried (ibid.: 87) anticipates the possible objection that the chair’s rococo curves give it feminine qualities, he responds simply, “I have no answer to this.” My own, gender-inflected response is that the chair evokes sitting, as Fried suggests, but that it is fully feminine, sharing the femininity of the curtain described by Fried as a gown. This not only because the chair displays rococo curves and a lightness associated with the feminine but also because the curtain, in conjunction with the door/frame, evokes the sensations and actions of feminine dressing, and these engulf the neighboring, feminized chair, which is incorporated into the seated activity of sheathing one’s legs.

Although I experience the rococo chair as feminine, I agree with Fried that the chair facing away from the rococo one possesses a masculine orientation, larger, darker, less curvy. Still, note that what separates the male chair and the female rococo chair (not just female but, by association with the curtain, billowing, ethereal, nymphlike female) is a big, dark mirror. Maybe Fried and I both project an interoceptive awareness of our bodies into this mirror, which endows it with our own sense of animateness. In Fried’s (ibid.) reading, the mirror is upright, solid, and “indubitably . . . ‘masculine.’” But regard the mirror in terms of my proposed dynamics. Granted, this mirror is stately, with formal, heavy ornamentation and an unyielding sense of uprightness. However, jutting out from the flat mirror at
about two-thirds its height are two white sconces mounted high along each of its sides. If the mirror is a body, as Fried (ibid.) asserts, then these two protruding white vessels are suggestive. Although they might be regarded as slightly ornate and whimsical arms, which would tend to feminize the mirror, I take them as two large, well-supported breasts, constrained beneath a properly ornamented dark dress. When feminized, the stately mirror that separates the two chairs becomes matronly and, as I propose, motherly.

This regendered, embodied interpretation has implications for one of the most problematic features of the painting—the mirror’s reflection. The mirror casts back to the spectator the image of a clear, well-rendered, nicely kept bourgeois space with a striped sofa and decorated wall, even though the room itself does not display such qualities. Extending the proposed thematic line of analysis, I ask if this would not be such a mother’s plan for her virginal daughter—to be married and living in a nice, well-appointed house? Contrast the highly visible scenario reflected in the mirror with the balcony room as it exists: a wall of indeterminate light and shadow, no painting on the wall; a sofa of no distinct color, grayish, a two-dimensional blur that meets an indeterminate rug; a painting with an empty center, where the gaze circulates trying to find a comfortable place to roost. Keisch refers to this as a “phantom-like half-presence.”

How might the unformed, phantomlike room be related to the youthful, unformed femininity of the air fluttering through the curtains and into the room as light? Might they be allusions to one another—as unformed entities—or might this restless, unformed space be a threat to the youthful feminine? After all, the sofa is unclear and unbecoming, almost a muddy smear, a stain that makes spectators uncomfortable. The sofa is so unformed and murky that it might appear as a threat or, if that is too strong, a contrast, an alternative state to that suggested by the fresh and feminine curtain. In both readings, however, the pictorial dynamics involve a clearly rendered, clearheaded mirror/mother coming between the girl and her masculine visitor, literally and figuratively, and reflecting/projecting her own agenda—a vision of stable domesticity.

_Balcony Room_ can also be understood at a more conceptual level, again in parallel to Fried’s discussion. Raising epistemological questions related to mirroring and embodied subjectivity, Fried (ibid.: 89) offers a second interpretation that explores the viewer’s uncertainty as to where to focus his or her attention to locate an embodied subjectivity within the painting: “We

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17. As the sconces/breasts are displaced to the side of the mirror, they are not technically “constrained beneath a properly ornamented dark dress”/mirror. However, the combination of sconces-as-breasts plus mirror creates the impression of a large woman whose breasts/body is properly contained.
are forever uncertain whether or to what extent the subjectivity we are led to intuit in the picture is in any sense ‘ours.’ . . . No single motif or crux on which our attention momentarily comes to rest . . . is sufficiently dominant to still the eye and satisfy the mind even provisionally."

My concern is also with attention but, in this case, with broader matters of perception and specifically with the variability in our use of the senses when attending to works of art. I propose that Balcony Room invites its spectator, particularly a spectator with a strong bodily response to what is seen—to both the formal aspects of the painting (its richly dappled paint, its clearly marked brushstrokes) and its intriguing represented world—to serve as the medium for exploring three modes of attending to a painting.

In one mode of attending, the spectator looks into a painting. Here one gazes into the painting’s represented world but does not imaginatively enter through the bodily senses of touch and related sensations. Balcony Room’s mirror serves as its emblem of looking into, for the spectator finds no bodily access to the mirror’s reflection as such nor to the seemingly palpable object of this reflection—a well-appointed, bourgeois room—for the room that is visible to the spectator does not appear to contain the striped sofa and framed painting reflected in the mirror.

In a second mode, the spectator looks through the painting. Here the spectator enters the represented world by imaginatively experiencing it bodily through touch and related sensations. I characterize imaginative touch as the forming of mental images of touch and related sensations, which consist of tactile sensations on the body’s surface and, from deeper inside, our proprioceptive sensations, those detecting vibration and spatial position, as well as bodily movement and balance. Sensations of pain and temperature are also included among the senses associated with touch. The window and the curtain with air flowing through it are emblematic of this form of looking, as they evoke in the spectator tactile images of texture, temperature, and weight and a sense of bodily movement associated with the physical movement of air and curtain as they sweep into the room. Looking through permits physical movement through space: the spectator is like the embodied breeze that enters through a window from an outside that is not depicted by the painting and into the represented, sunlit balcony room.

In the third mode of attending, the spectator looks at the painting as an artifact, a material object that is the vehicle of a representation. In this mode, the spectator attends specifically to the physical properties of the object, such as brushstrokes, paint textures, color gradations. As these material objects occupy a physical space that coexists with the physical space of the spectator but not with the space represented in Balcony Room, a spectator could in principle touch the artifact, rub a finger across shiny
ripples of paint, grasp a bronze arm to feel its musculature, even peel off a paper layer of collage. Despite the tactile allure of these materials, spectators generally resist actually touching them and indulge instead in imaginative touch, as one does in a different context—when looking through.18

4. Breathing Balcony Room

Although the preceding sections stand within the bounds—if only at the border—of traditional art history, this section edges into less familiar territory, and so my approach changes. Although the purpose is still to expand our repertoire of body-centered interpretive practices, as begun in section 3, here I am concerned with experiences that are especially challenging to identify and verbalize. That experience can be so resistant to description comes as no surprise, for James (1950: 241), pioneer of the study of consciousness in the early twentieth century, identified language as one of the fundamental impediments to our understanding of the multisensory flow of thought: “Language works against our perception of the truth.”19 In effect, I accept Menzel’s “unmistakable invitation to approach the picture closely” (Fried 2002: 256).

My subject is breathing and, specifically, how the spectator’s breathing interacts with an artwork and how this interaction changes from one moment to the next. Although Balcony Room serves as an illustration, I do not offer an interpretation of the work as I did in the previous section but instead shift down to a micro level of investigation, where my effort is to render, in ordinary language, various felt experiences of breathing and to analyze them conceptually. Such verbalized experiences are intended to enrich the repertoire of empathic responses on which others might draw, whether for holistic interpretations of artworks, genres, or artists or for further foundational analysis.

At first thought, reflecting on one’s breath might seem odd, for while we breathe all the time, we do it automatically; it is not supposed to be noticed. However, this is not quite true, for in many situations we are highly aware of our breathing. When suffering from a cold or asthma, we feel an uncomfortable constriction of the chest as we struggle to inhale, and with

19. Although I do not claim to reveal an objective truth, I share James’s frustration that language imposes categories that mischaracterize the sense we have of our own experiences. For example, James points out that we do not describe color as it is experienced but rather as it is embodied in objects external to us—we say a yellow flower but not the experience of the yellowness of the flower.
exercise—like tennis, running, dance, weight lifting, Pilates, or yoga—we might not just be aware of our breathing but actually learn to control it. Or recall moments on frigid days, especially in childhood, when we play with our own breath, watching it curl up in icy gusts from our mouths.

I ask readers to draw upon these experiences when observing paintings and other art forms. For many people, what I describe will seem familiar, or at least believable, though maybe not something they were aware of before it was pointed out. Doubtless, there will be a few for whom my reflections will seem like counting angels on the head of a pin. I ask only that such spectators try to follow these descriptions of breathing closely, even if they do not immediately ring true. Possibly, they might eventually provoke the experiences. But even if they do not, such spectators can treat section 4 as a glimpse into the complex experiences of other people—something like going to a foreign country whose traditions one cannot share but can better understand.

To mark a path through this liminal terrain, I begin by proposing (1) that the spectator’s breathing, my own breathing, is mingled with Balcony Room and functions both as a content-rich component of the painting and as a vehicle for engaging components of the painting and (2) that we can grasp a complex dimension of this engagement if we explore how it changes from one moment to the next. Although I will occasionally use the phrase “the spectator” for purposes of generalizing, the responses are my own.

I have suggested that, while attending to the sensuous qualities of Balcony Room, my experiences of breath and the sensory properties of the curtain/wind come to feel mingled. What I mean by this is that my own breath no longer feels like something that arises from inside my body and emerges a few inches from my mouth but instead seems tethered from the inside of the body to the inside of the painting. It is a breath that incorporates the texture, weight, and temperature of the airy curtain, and thus my breath becomes a component of the painting’s representational content. Artists, musicians, and writers remark upon such transformations, where one’s body, as subjectively experienced, is projected into or incorporates something outside of itself. Mark Rothko, for example, integrates both music and color into a bodily transformation when writing of Paul Cézanne’s Red Studio: “You become that color, you become totally saturated with it. It was

20. I have not even mentioned occasions on which we are aware of holding our breath and the slight emotional tension that comes from impeded breathing.

21. Accounts of extended cognition (Clark 2008) provide a supportive ontology for my argument, as they hold that the mind is intrinsically extended into the world. Such accounts, however, are not necessary underpinnings for this study of felt experience, which might also be situated within a more traditional conception of mind, body, and world.
like music” (Chave 1989: 261); and Rainer Maria Rilke writes of a transforming experience with Cézanne’s paintings, which I will discuss later.22

I use the concept of mingling to characterize a range of attentional states that temporarily bond or pair two disparate elements, one as a subjective experience and the other as a property of an object in the world, confounding them to differing extents to the spectator.23 Although my reference to attention takes up Jonathan Crary’s (2001: 3) recommendation that we explore various attentional states of the spectator, in particular “mixed modalities,” my larger argument about the reciprocity between breath and painting, body and color/music, builds upon the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1964: 164), who conceived of the relationship between self and things as a “system of exchanges”: “Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence.” Although Merleau-Ponty’s (1962: 227) phenomenology offers a rich vocabulary for analysis—I particularly like the notion of “an atmospheric colour (Raumfarbe)” that “diffuses itself all round the object”—I have selected the word mingling to signal a slightly different approach. In contrast to Merleau-Ponty’s rather general characterization of the reversibility of body and world, I focus on identifying particular elements of the body and the world/work that participate in an exchange and more generally on the particularities of what goes broadly under the general terms embodiment, empathy, projection, and introjection. In effect, I am turning to a more fine-grained level of analysis. Furthermore, I differentiate viewers in terms of inner bodily awareness rather than assume a universal observer, as does Merleau-Ponty, and I proceed to draw attention to this mingling as a set of processes that occur over time.24

A mingling of body and other is involved in what Fried calls the “projective energies” of Rear Courtyard, which I have characterized as his own

22. In “Touching Art” (Esrock 2001) I hypothesize that spectators experience an imaginary fusion with art objects when simultaneously attending to their own somatosensory sensations, which occur inside the body, and to qualities of the artwork, which exist in the external world. At such moments, I claim, viewers reinterpret their somatosensory sensations as a quality of the artwork, and I explore the neuro-psychological possibilities for this operation. Although I call this use of the body a reinterpretation, in the present essay I characterize it as a transsomatization to avoid the suggestion that conscious self-reflection and cognition is involved in the activity.

23. There are different kinds of mingling, which range from a spectator’s full immersion in an external object, without awareness of the self, to those minglings that involve immersions of a body part, such as a hand, or full sense of the body, with an awareness of a distinct separation between what is self and what is other. Such differences were incorporated into the original theory of empathy by Vischer, who articulated complex distinctions among various types of absorptive experience.

24. In describing particular elements of the body, my approach begins to repair the neglect of bodily depth that Leder, in The Absent Body (1990), ascribes to Merleau-Ponty’s theories.
interoceptive bodily awareness within the painting. Having suggested in section 2 that a painting’s sense of aliveness might be generated through a spectator’s interoceptive awareness, I now suggest that the sense of life within Balcony Room is also created through a specific kind of attentional relationship between the spectator’s breathing, an activity rife with significations, and various content-rich components of the painting, notably the curtain with the wind rippling through it.

Shiff (1997: 187) discusses the semiotic properties of breath, “we figure our natural breath as a sign,” noting its biological property of circulating between the outside and the inside of the body. Indeed, the cultural associations of breath are rich and diverse. Anthropologists have shown that breathing has deep, systematic links with human life, and this coincides with its critical biological significance, as primitive emotions are aroused if breathing is threatened (Panksepp 1998: 166). Furthermore, breathing is regarded in many cultures as an activity of high emotional and spiritual significance. One’s intake of air into the body and its release into the open space outside the body is thought to have a spiritually transformative quality. The ancient Hebrews associated the notions of spirit, wind, and breath, and the Navajo link the ideas of awareness and air (Abram 1997). Chinese culture has a fundamental concept, Chi (or Qi), that is characterized as a spiritual breath or air, a life force that circulates within and between all things, and this concept is central to healing practices. Similarly, breathing is regarded as a conduit for emotion and consciousness in Western theories like Alexander Lowen’s psychotherapy bioenergetics (1976) and Moshé Feldenkrais’s method (1972).

The deep historical association of breath with the projection of life urges is reflected in nineteenth-century aesthetic theories. Wölfflin (1994 [1886]: 169), for instance, referring to architecture, writes of breathing that conveys the striving of life forms: “Of great interest is the relation of proportions to the rate of breathing. It cannot be doubted that very narrow proportions produce the impression of an almost breathless and hurried upward striving.” The topic also appears in contemporary art scholarship that treats issues of embodiment. For instance, Nemerov (2001: 32), concerned explicitly with the projective imagination in The Body of Raphaelle Peale, observes of a particular painting: “Blackberries simulates a person seeing his own body within the very objects into which he has blown the breath of corporeal life.” While the reference to breathing could be understood metaphorically, Nemerov’s discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology suggests a more literal reading. This same theme is taken up by Sidlauskas in her analysis of nineteenth-century interiority in Body, Place, and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting (2000).
In addition to the biological and cultural associations of breathing that bestow life on the painting, there is another property of breath that enhances this animating effect. It is movement. Breath moves. Horst Bredekamp (1995) observes that we attribute animateness to things that move on their own, and this is why creators of toys and artworks have for centuries endeavored to create a sense of lifelikeness with their products by endowing them with movement—if only intimations of movement. With Balcony Room, movement is the analogical key that unites the spectator’s breath and the artwork: both the curtained wind and the spectator’s breath move or circulate air throughout a space, and this link facilitates their transference of properties.

Breath, however, serves not only as a content component of Balcony Room but also, in connection with eye movement, as a vehicle. In defining vehicle, I draw on George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s (1999) linguistically based theories, according to which the human body, understood as a set of physiological processes that operate in the material world, is the basis for the fundamental concepts that structure the language we use and the way we understand our surroundings. They describe these fundamental concepts in terms of abstract schemata that underpin the meanings of specific concepts like time and space as well as more concrete notions like argument and war.

My reference to a vehicle alludes to their fundamental spatial relations schema of the container, which involves “an inside, a boundary, and an outside” (ibid.: 32). The container schema is used within a larger “Source-Path-Goal Schema” to convey the idea of using the container to move something from one place to another, following a specified path toward a destination (ibid.: 32–33). Although the “Source-Path-Goal Schema” can refer to operations we perform on a concrete object, such as using one’s cupped hands—a container—for transporting water, the schema also functions across different sensory modalities for things we hear, see, and physically do. Rather than using the word container, I employ a related term, vehicle, because it suggests a container for moving contents.

To illustrate how one can experience breath as a vehicle, I have excerpted several lines from an interview I conducted with a spectator standing before Edvard Munch’s lithograph The Cry at an exhibition at Boston College. Prior to this exchange, we had been discussing bodily responses to various paintings:

Q: Can you make this work connect to your own breathing?
A: Oh sure . . . breathing out takes those figures in the background away from me and breathing in brings them towards me. (February 7, 2001)
For this spectator, breathing as a vehicle moves elements of the painting closer and further from him. Moreover, breathing can also direct the spectator within the artwork. With Balcony Room, I experience breathing in coordination with eye movements as a vehicle that carries me throughout the painting. While looking at different parts of Balcony Room, I find that my eye movement from place to place seems airborne, as if coming from my own breathing. Although the vehicle effect occurs throughout my perusal of the painting, I am aware of a particularly close connection between breathing and eye movements in regard to my inspection of the flowing curtain. Fried (2002: 86) writes of the eye’s constant circulation around the room, returning to the billowing, gownlike curtains and “accelerating to the bottom of the canvas.” My own responses are similar, being attracted to the fabric of the curtain and finding my eyes repeatedly racing up and down its folds. I find that this flowing movement of the eyes up and down the curtain seems propelled by the act of breathing.

By linking breathing with eye movement up and down the curtain, I am not describing an invariant process in which both components occur synchronously. It is not the case, for example, that a spectator’s eye movement up always corresponds to an inhale and a movement down to an exhale nor that an inhale or an exhale always begins when the eyes are at the very top or the very bottom of the curtain. At some points, however, this coincidence happens, and it seems to give the eye movement a springy little push. For me, eyes and breath adhere most firmly when the eyes move down the curtain while I am also exhaling. At that point, the downward speed of the eye movement seems almost airborne—carried on the breath as when singing (recall Rothko’s reference to music)—and this downward plunge seems quicker and more fluid, airier even than when the eye moves downward without the exhalation of breath or when the eye and the breath move up the curtain. Perhaps both downward eye movement and exhalation of breath involve a kind of release, which generates a sense of speed and ease.25

Breathing also functions as a vehicle for more general eye movements throughout the image. For instance, I travel on breath through the wood

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25. Numerous factors would be likely to affect the linkage between one’s breath and an upward or downward eye movement along the surface of a represented object, among them the representational content associated with the eye movement, the emotional state of the observer, the extent to which the upward movement involves imagined effort to counter gravity. As an example of a response different from my own, one person told me that he links exhaling with movement upward, as when runners throw their heads upward to inhale deeply after finishing an exhausting race (Fallon 2009). This association of exhaling with an upward motion has to do with the particular representational content associated with breathing—in this case, vigorous exercise.
trim at the top of the adjoining walls in *Balcony Room* or circle around the large, dark mirror with its strange reflection. In such cases, breathing is not coordinated with any repetitive eye movement but is freely circulating with the eye throughout the image.\(^\text{26}\)

That a spectator’s breathing can function as a vehicle for these various kinds of movements might be the effect of several converging conditions. Motivation is relevant of course, as spectators’ interests differ. As a spectator of *Balcony Room*, I am fascinated with the painting, desiring to approach it more closely, and this makes one receptive to whatever will facilitate movement into the work. What is also influential in turning breathing into a vehicle is the spectator’s experience of breath mingled with content, such as the breeze of the painting. This creates a precedent for experiencing breathing as something other than what it is normally. In effect, utilizing one’s breath as content prepares or, to use the scientific concept, *primes* the spectator for utilizing it in a new role—in this case, as a vehicle.

Perhaps most important for transforming breath into a vehicle is the analogous rhythmic pattern between eye movement and breathing. The spectator’s eye circulates around the room, repeatedly returning to the curtain, where it travels up and down, and while this occurs, the spectator is breathing in and breathing out. Granted, a spectator generally inhales and exhales slower than his or her eyes move up and down an image, and these rhythms do not operate at the same speed. However, they have analogous rhythmic patterns—one–two, one-two—and this analogy links them.

Although I have distinguished in principle between breathing as vehicle and as content, the two functions can coexist. Breath, in its capacity as vehicle, helps the spectator navigate through the artwork and become aware of its sensory qualities, just as a fine sports car—a vehicle—gives the driver the feel of the road: its bumps, hills, curves, and surface consistency. In other words, a vehicle can not only transport us but can also function as an ambulatory prosthetic device, an extension of our own bodies, which conveys multisensory experiences of the objects whose surfaces it touches, like a blind person’s cane.\(^\text{27}\)

These reflections on breathing have not yet considered how the experi-

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26. Fried might also find that his own breathing functions sometimes like a vehicle, as he describes projecting himself into *Rear Courtyard*, which depicts a brisk wind blowing through bushes and laundry. I would not be surprised, however, if the vehicle effect for this painting were minimal for Fried, who seems to move through the work in a slow, meticulous, inch-by-inch fashion, without the kind of sweeping motions that are so analogous to breathing.

27. Clark (2008: 38–39) discusses research on macaques and humans, suggesting that when they use tools like rakes and sticks their brains register the tool within the actor’s own body schema and not as an external object.
ence of mingling that occurs at one moment changes as the spectator turns to other aspects of the painting. The spectator’s temporally extended encounters are particularly important here, for Balcony Room has been described as a work that rejects the illusion of suspended time, thematizing instead different temporal acts of perception (Keisch and Riemann-Reyher 1966: 186). Examining my own experiences, I find that the mingling created when engaging one aspect of a painting does not wholly disappear after I turn my attention to a different component, especially when deeply immersed. Rather, when my interest shifts from the curtain and window to other parts of the canvas, either through a change in retinal focus or through sheer attentional shift, my breathing and eye movements sometimes continue to carry a slight memory of their former mingling. James (1950: 255) recognized the bidirectional, temporal character of the multisensory images circulating in thought:

Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. The significance, the value of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it—or rather that is fused into one with it and has become bond of its bond and flesh of its flesh.

Whatever the psychological operations that produce this mnemonic overlay, I experience it in several ways, depending on how I focus my attention. After turning from the mingling of curtain and breathing to other aspects of the painting, I experience two kinds of memories of the mingling effect. In one case, I feel as if my breathing were actively creating a gauzy curtain over the site of representation. Breathing here carries a faint curtaining association and infuses this into various acts of breathing and viewing. At other times it is as if I were detecting something that preexists me, namely, a breathy, multisensory layer of curtain that lies above the represented reality of chairs, mirror, sofa, and rug. Both of these experiences reflect infusions of sensory memory within the temporal experience of viewing. In effect, the passage of time thickens the present, intensifying ongoing experiences with mnemonic recurrences of mingling.

There is another kind of mnemonic effect that occurs when examining an extended temporal span of experience, and it involves more tenuous recollections. This is a condition in which the spectator mingles his or her breath with the artwork but subsequently recollects only a fragment of the prior interaction. For example, at one point the spectator mingles his or her breath with a component of the painting—the curtain—yet in a subsequent moment of viewing (or recollection of the painting without
its actual presence) the spectator does not recall the specific association but feels that this breathing bears a special significance that is linked to the painting. The spectator’s breathing resonates with an unidentifiable meaningfulness and arousal. The breath is thereby felt to be more than it usually is, although what exactly it means remains undetermined. I am reminded here of Keisch’s reference to the indeterminacy of a feature of *Balcony Room*—the enigmatic light on the bare wall, which he calls a “signifier without a signified” (Keisch and Riemann-Reyher 1966: 188). The spectator’s sense that his or her breathing is significant—that it signifies—extends the mingling effect temporally, in a fragmented form. This fragmented mode of signifying augments the complexity and duration of the spectator’s experience of the artwork.

Curiously, this might be the same kind of unspecified bodily marking that Rilke (1985: 79) describes in his letter about Cézanne’s *Portrait of Madame Cézanne*:

> Even after standing with such unrelenting attention in front of the great color scheme of the woman in the red armchair, it is becoming as retrievable in my memory as a figure with very many digits. And yet I memorized it, number by number. *In my feeling, the consciousness of their presence has become a heightening which I can feel even in my sleep; my blood describes it within me, but the naming of it passes by somewhere outside and is not called in. Did I write about it?—A red, upholstered low armchair has been placed in front of an earthy-green wall.* (Emphasis added)

Judging from his letters, Rilke was highly aroused when immersed in Cézanne’s paintings, and this leads me to suggest that his interoceptive awareness of his own aroused bodily state is what he calls a “heightening” and characterizes as “my blood.” This bodily state is initially associated with the experience of the painting, but when the painting is absent, Rilke might be interoceptively reexperiencing his aroused inner body and recognizing that it is linked to something outside himself. As Rilke notes, his body—his blood—re-presents something that is absent and unnamable. Though his body—the signifier—is affectively resonant, the signified painting “passes by” unnamed, thereby leaving a signifier without a signified.

It is fitting to close with Rilke’s remarks on *Madame Cézanne*, for while they describe a subtle nonverbal bodily experience of visual art, Rilke renders it through language that neither reduces the complexity of the bodily phenomenon nor compromises the integrity of his verbal medium. Although few of us can render our states of embodiment with the verbal power of a Rilke or the visual power of a Menzel, we can become more aware of our sensory experiences of viewing and more knowledgeable
about the areas in which the biological sciences might enrich historical and critical art scholarship.

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