An Introduction to Electronic Art Through the Teaching of Jacques Lacan

Strangest Thing

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INTRODUCTION

I began this book by asking some simple questions: How can one understand works of electronic art? Do they rely on the same aesthetics as traditional art? If so, how? If not, what are the implications of its new media elements such as computers, software applications, and the Web; how can one consider these technologies as elements of art? How can one understand the various kinds of sounds and noises in these works? Is it possible to respond emotionally to electronic art? Is there any historical, philosophical, or theoretical perspective that can help us understand electronic art?

Current scholarship helps answer some of these questions. Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More* provides a theory of voice that explores the spaces between sound and signification in a wide variety of contexts; Dolar's work is a beginning step in the development of a theory of sound art. But Dolar offers no musical-theoretical evidence in sound or music to support his claims.[1] Mark Hansen's *New Philosophy for New Media* situates new media among the contemporary media and communications discourses in the modernist traditions; this book is quite helpful in exploring ways of perceiving works of new media that are visual as reflections of these discursive practices (Hansen 2006). But Hansen says little about the acoustic dimension. Hal Foster's *The Return of the Real* is a psychoanalytic reading of new media art in its infancy in the early 1990s.

I write *An Introduction to Electronic Art through the Teaching of Jacques Lacan* seeking adjacency with these three books. Like Dolar, I hope to contribute to a general theory of music and sound art from a psychoanalytic point of view; unlike Dolar, I invite readers to learn to explore some technical details of sound and music. I hope that this will be empowering and exciting to readers, as I help them use a few very simple tools to hear and understand much more in works than they might ever have thought possible. Like Hansen, I will explore a large body of works and suggest ways of apprehending them based on existing, scholarly traditions; unlike Hansen, I will emphasize a single approach—Lacanian psychoanalysis. Like Foster, I will approach new media through Lacan; unlike Foster, I will theorize the present as it manifests itself at the present writing, and I will support my claims directly through citations of English translations of Lacan's major works.

My approach is Lacanian because I have a history of inquiring into art from a Lacanian point of view. More importantly. I find Lacan particularly applicable to electronic art of the current era. The reason has to do with the kinetic nature of Lacan's account of the psyche and its effects in culture. For me, everything in Lacan is about what comes into view as thresholds are crossed and enunciated, from the subject, to the signifier, to language in social space, to art, and to history. For the past few decades. I have approached Lacan through his interpreter, Slavoj Žižek. The advantage of such an approach is that one reaches the thought of the difficult master through a writer who makes Lacan accessible and very clear: the disadvantage of such an approach (as it occurs to me now) is that one misses the precision of the language of the master himself.

Reading Lacan has been, at times, exciting. difficult. and exasperating. Lacan is famously difficult to read, and I ask the reader to join me in exploring the meanings that I cite throughout this book from translations of his original sources—the seminars he gave in Paris in the mid twentieth century. Here are four reasons why Lacan is difficult to read:

1. Lacan implicitly knows that we can have no direct access to experience. For him, meanings emerge in the margins of thought, in the unstated assumptions we make when we speak, in the ways in which we mis-understand the world and our experience in it, in the transformations that consciousness undergoes in dreams (after Freud), and in the language we use to negotiate the world. In short. Lacan looks at the world awry (to borrow that term from one of Žižek's books).[2] And looking, listening, thinking awry is one of the central metaphors of this book. By looking at, listening to, and thinking about electronic art awry. and by grounding that approach in the writings of Lacan, we can gain access to new ways of experiencing and understanding electronic art.

   Since Lacan thinks awry. he rarely defines anything in a straightforward manner. Instead, his language strikes glancing blows at ideas; he much prefers to approach and then veer around an idea rather than expound on a conventional rhetorical definition or exposition. For me, Lacan's writing oscillates between two poles: it is either elliptical. allusive, and evasive, or (usually toward the ends of his seminars) it narrows in an almost pre-Socratic intensity to concise, poetic, and packed sentences that compress several terms and approaches into one epigrammatic utterance. Just as the expansive, evasive, and allusive language veers around an idea and is therefore quite difficult, so, too, are the sentences of compressed and multi-layered definitions.

2. Many of Lacan's seminars have not been published and, of those that have been published, not all have been translated into English. A few have claimed that to really understand Lacan, one must read him in French. And while translators have taken great care to discuss how translation

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from French to English has affected Lacan's thought, not reading him in French is a liability. Lacan loves word play, homonyms, and puns. For him, they bring out the arbitrary nature of the signifier and its over-determined status. There are certain quirks of the French/English translation that additionally put up a barrier to an apprehension of Lacan. To take just one example, the word "regard" has been translated as "look" and as "gaze"—a binary opposition that has had enormous influence in criticism. It would certainly be illuminating to read Lacan in French and read "regard" as both "look" and "gaze," depending on the context.

3. Lacan's famous return to Freud was motivated by a desire to get away from the positivism of ego psychology that was popular in the mid twentieth century. With his desire to return to the kinetic and asymmetrical structures of the psyche described by Freud, Lacan also implicitly sought to avoid simplistic one-to-one correspondences that put discourse into neat packages.

4. His audience was members of the French psychoanalytic society, those sympathetic to his work, as well as those less sympathetic to it, in addition to psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, academics, and scholars either attending his seminars regularly, or dropping in as guests. His tone in addressing this audience is one of the master, at times affectionate, at times humorous, at times poetic, at times crusty.

It is not my intent to offer a complete reading of Lacan, to assure the reader that every aspect of every key issue in Lacan will be touched upon at some point in this book. And yet, I hope that through reading this book, the reader will gain a clearer sense of many of Lacan's crucial contributions to psychoanalysis and culture. Specifically, I hope the reader will emerge from this book with a clearer sense of the triad Imaginary/Symbolic/Real, the difference between reality and the Real, the acoustic mirror stage and its relation to the (visual) mirror stage, the relationship between the signifier and the subject, of speech (the fides and the feint), of the body and its relationship with signification, the distinctions between look and gaze, the nature of *jouissance*, the *objet petit a*, the relationship between the other and the Other, the relationship between symptom and sublimation, the relationship between metaphor and metonymy, and much more.

I also cannot claim always to offer an account of a direct, immediate, and unmediated experience of the works under examination. There is something fleeting about these works of art, and their temporary status may remind some of Fluxus. Many of these works are Fluxus-like in that their contours are fluid; the images, sounds, information may come and go depending on user input, environmental conditions, or other factors. Many of these works are assembled for exhibition and then taken down, to survive in pieces in studios, basements, archives, as traces left on audio-visual documentation online. And since the writer of this book lives in one place in America and the works are/were/will

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be in locations all over the world, access to them can occur only through vestiges of documentation that exist online. Referring to still shots, reproduced in black and white, from online sources, provides a sober reminder of just how mediated scholarship can be. To refer to a dynamically-generated work of electronic art through such a remove seems not only to see the world as through a glass darkly, but to barely see at all. Still, I offer these analyses as a first step toward a Lacanian understanding of electronic art in general, and an introduction to the works themselves. I have no doubt that readers who are able to experience some of these works "live" may have a far different, more nuanced sense of the work than I have been able to offer here. Still, with the reader's indulgence, I hope to offer a mode of understanding these works that can be enriched through direct, immanent experience. I know that this is possible. To give one example, I began working on the last work in this book, Bill Viola's *The Greeting*, from online resources. Then, I realized the work was on permanent display at the nearby Fort Worth Museum of Modern Art. At the museum, watching the work for almost an hour, I noticed the embedded "little theater" that I write about. That portion of the work is invisible in online documentation, and had I limited my discussion to the online documentation itself, I would have missed it. So be it. I invite readers to experience as many of these and other works of electronic art "live" in order to deepen your understanding of the various registers at which they signify.

Throughout the book, I make connections between works of art (with which I always begin), and Lacan (and others). Sometimes, this connection is logical (an aspect of an electronic mirror is connected to Lacan's mirror stage, for example); sometimes, this connection is associative (an installation rendering speeches of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Roosevelt leads to a discussion of speech in Lacan, for example). I ask the reader to let me make these connections freely along a continuum of the clearly logical, on the one hand, and the more associative, on the other. Having introduced a work and made a connection (logical or associative) with Lacan, I will cite a passage or two, with some commentary, analysis, and synthesis.

By "Strangest Thing," I mean to acknowledge the oddity of many of these works and the materials of their construction. But aside from writing about strange objects, I seek, in fact, to defamiliarize familiar objects and to make objects that might seem normal seem strange. This is a variant on looking, listening, thinking awry that I mentioned above. I like to find things strange because it is precisely through strange seeing, strange listening, and strange thinking that new objects and new attributes of familiar objects can appear. "Strangest Thing" also refers to a very common phrase that people say when they experience something as in déjà vu—a memory that almost comes clear, a sensation at once familiar and unfamiliar. This suggests another metaphor that underwrites this entire book and its method—the uncanny.

Psychoanalysis, particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis, assumes that what we experience as adults piggybacks in ways to which we barely have access

to early childhood experiences, of our own body formation, of our positions with regards to siblings and parents, to the primal scene, to the ways in which we acquire language, to the ways in which we interpellate ourselves as subjects in social space. The uncanny is one particular modality of barely remembering something—at once unfamiliar and familiar.

I write this book for those interested in the arts and humanities, with perhaps some academic study and/or interest in music, the visual arts, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, new media, and developments in contemporary philosophy. I am particularly interested in reaching readers who love and/or are interested in music but who may have little or no formal training in music. From those readers who are well versed in elementary matters of music theory, I beg indulgence; for those readers who have no training in music theory, I beg patience; I will throughout this book explain in terms as clear and straight-forward as I can make them some basic concepts of sound, noise, and music. I ask that readers who are well versed in such matters let themselves pass through such discussions to ponder the implications of the examples at hand beyond the terms I have used to describe them. I ask that readers who may have little or no formal training in music theory attempt to grasp the concepts, the sounds that I am describing in the hopes that the discussion can close the gap between the relative silence of signifiers such as these that you are reading right now, and the sounds to which they can sometimes point.

A word about the phrase "electronic art." Without trying to define this term in any sort of permanent way, I would like to suggest that at the present writing, there seem to me to be two kinds of works that can be understood to be works of "electronic art": (1) works that are aesthetic objects; and (2) applications (software) and devices (hardware) that are primarily (attached to, applied to) consumer commodities. Partly because of my background (son of a painter), and education (student of English, Comparative Literature, Music Theory, German, and Interactive Telecommunications), I write in this book about works in that first category—works that are aesthetic objects.

The book superimposes works of art with passages from (mostly but not exclusively) Lacan. I provide little information on the artists, on the genesis of the works under discussion, and most pointedly, nothing whatsoever on the technology involved. Readers may find this odd; these are, after all (overwhelmingly), works of electronic art. And the technologies upon which they are based surely have cultural and aesthetic importance. Absolutely. But I have often seen that the public reception of works of electronic art can get stuck with questions such as "How did he/she do that?" or "What software did he/she use to do such-and-such?" or "How much did that piece of hardware cost?"

Most of the works of art under discussion rely on electronic circuitry, computation, chips, sensors, software, and hardware of various kinds. A few of the works do not, and I beg the reader's indulgence for my including them. I do not sense a hard and fast boundary separating electronic works from more

traditional forms of art. and I hope that readers will apply some of the connections I make throughout the book to a wide variety of art works and experiences of the social space(s) of the early twenty-first century.

Images have been provided by the artists under discussion with credits provided in accordance with their wishes; all musical examples and sketches (unless otherwise noted) have been constructed by the author in Finale 2010, Adobe Illustrator CS4, and/or Photoshop CS4.

Overview of the Chapters

The chapters of this book very roughly parallel in their linear progression developing subjectivity; I begin with "Bodies" (evocative of the earliest stages of subjectivity in which we find ourselves in our own flesh), followed by "Voices" (evocative of the sonorous envelope and acoustic mirror stage), followed by "Eyes" (evocative of the (visual) mirror stage), followed by "Signifiers" (evocative of language acquisition). I will elaborate on the implications of these parenthetical phrases in due course. This characterization of the linear progression of chapters and developing subjectivity is more true than false, but it is also misleading. The very explanation above concerning the linear progression of developing subjectivity is a retrospective fantasy from the position of language acquisition; pre-linguistic stages of developing subjectivity can be apprehended, at best, as through a glass darkly. So it is perhaps better to imagine the progression of chapters as at once running along a left-to-right progressive chain of phases of developing subjectivity, and at the same time to imagine that the chapters significantly overlap with one another.

In the first chapter. "Bodies." I explore four works in connection with the abject: *Putto8 2X2X2X2X* by Michael Rees. 2002–2003; *Anima* by Paula Gaetano-Adi. 2009; *Hippy Dialectics* by Nathaniel Mellors. 2010; and *Model 5* by GranularSynthesis (Kurt Hentschläger and Ulf Langheinrich). 1994–1995. The abject is that category of experience in which something has been rejected, expelled, cast off.[3] The abject often signifies bodily function in general and women in particular. References in the critical literature are from Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille.[4]

I will then explore three works about (dis)pleasure: *Red no. 3* by Minjun Yue, 2000; *Untitled (L'Origine)* by Yael Kanarek. 2008; and *Cluster* by Kurt Hentschläger, 2009–2010. Pleasure in these contexts will range from the pleasure principle in Freud to more ambivalent forms of enjoyment in Lacan and others.[5]

I will then discuss two works that deal with violations of bodily integrity: *The Killing Machine* by Janet Cardiff and Georg Bures Miller, 2007; and *Rainbow* by Xu Zhen, 1998. These violations take the forms of corporal punishment, forced exile, and sadomasochistic enjoyment. The theoretical support for the discussion of these works will come mainly from the writings

of Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan.[6] I conclude the chapter with a look at three works that evoke the body in very different ways: *Synaptitron for Exposed Circuit Board and Other Electronics* by Martin Back, 2011, in which the skin of a performer touches exposed circuitry to generate sound; *Natural History of the Enigma* by Eduardo Kac, 2003–2008, focusing on ethical and psychoanalytical issues concerning technological interventions into biological organisms; and *Black Wires* by Richard Beaudoin, 2009—a work of music that recomposes a performance of a work by Chopin as articulation of the body, awry.

Abjection, (dis)pleasure, boundary breach, and the nature of flesh itself; these are the dimensions of the body explored in this chapter.

In the second chapter, "Voices," I begin with two works that embody the sonorous envelope of early childhood subjectivity: *Zee* by Kurt Hentschläger, 2008; and *Acousmatorium* by Hans-Joachim Roedelius, 2008. I then discuss two works that deal with the cry: *Deaf-Mute Chorus* by Oksana Chepelyk, 1998–2004; and *Vena Cava* by Diamanda Galás, 1993. I then examine two works that suggest a mutual interdependence between the body and how it processes sound: *a spatial asyndeton* by Seth Cluett, 2009; and *Acoustical Visions of Venice* by Bill Fontana, 1999.

I then discuss four works that deal with feedback loops, noise, and voices: *Rumour* by Seth Cluett, 2009; *Inside-the-Oscillator* by Edo Paulus, 2004–2006; *NoiseFold* by Cory Metcalf and David Stout, 2010; and *Babel Series* by Candice Breitz, 1999.

I conclude the chapter with three works that deal with three different kinds of music as raw material: *Hilo Noon* by Ed Osborn, 2003 (on a popular song recorded originally on a wax cylinder); *Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on "Ode to Joy" for a Prepared Piano* by Allora and Calzadilla, 2008 (a performance piece based on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony); and *Lowlands* by Susan Philipsz, 2008–2010 (an installation based on a Scottish folk song).

The sonorous envelope, the acoustic mirror, noise, feedback, and music; these are the dimensions of sound explored in this chapter.[7]

In the third chapter, "Eyes," I begin by discussing two works that invite the reader to question what we see as images become transformed before our every eyes; the subtitle for this section of the chapter is a question mark: *Still Life (Vanitas)* by Jason Salavon, 2009; and *Portrait of a Man* by Birthe Blauth, 2007.

I then move on to eight works that can be understood as mirror fantasies; this portion of the chapter is subtitled "What Mirrors See and Show." The first few of these works are literal mirrors; they become subsequently more figurative, interactive, and transformational. I begin with *Wooden Mirror* by Daniel Rozin, 1999. The more figurative, interactive, and transformational works include: *The Company of Colors* by Raphael Lozano-Hemmer, 2009; *Eyecode* by Golan Levin, 2007; *Reface* by Golan Levin and Zachary Lieberman, 2007; *Blow Up* by Raphael Lozano-Hemmer, 2007; *Make Out* by

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Raphael Lozano-Hemmer, 2008; *Surface Tension* by Raphael Lozano-Hemmer, 1992; and *External Measures* by Camille Utterback, 2003.

I then examine two works that deal with surveillance: *Wandering Eye Studies* by Ed Osborn, 2006; and *Your Lips are No Man's Land But Mine (Laura)* by Jenny Vogel, 2008. The theoretical support for these discussions will be from Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. I then discuss a work that evokes woman as object of desire—*Tiller Girls* by Louis-Phillipe Demers, 2009. I conclude the chapter with *Peripheral Rhythm* by Jim Campbell, 2006–present, exploring relations between the gaze and the *objet petit a*.

How an image behaves in slowly evolving animation, how images appear in mirrors, and surveillance; these are the dimensions of seeing that are explored in this chapter.

In the fourth chapter, "Signifiers." I begin by discussing three works that deal with the signifier in relation to the subject: *Drawing Machine 3.1415926* by Fernando Orellana, 2000; *Temporary Printing Machine/MK1* by Random International, 2006; and *The Directives* by Jill Magid, 2008–2009. I then discuss two works that represent layers of signifiers: *Firebirds* by Paul DeMarinis, 2004; and *Love Letter* by Yael Kanarek, 2010. I then explore the signifier as glitch in four works: *Moviestorm Machinima Audition Tape* by jonCates, 2010; *mimicking lofi aesthetics* by Rosa Menkman, 2011; *Nothing Further Happens* by Rebeca Méndez, 2011; and *Friendly Fire 2.0* by Shane Mecklenburger, 2010. I then examine five works that represent the signifier at the edge of the Real: *Pica* by Paula Gaetano-Adi, 2009–ongoing; *Organ2/ASLSP* by John Cage, 2001–2640; *Still Life at the Speed of Sunrise* by Jason Salavon, 2005; *Moving Objects/no. 485* by pe lang, 2010; and *Empire* by Claudia Hart, 2010. I then discuss *My Little Violin* by Arthur Ganson, 2009; and *Machine with Concrete* by Arthur Ganson. 1992, in which machines embody drive. I conclude the chapter with a look at two works: *Caress* by Claudia Hart, 2011, from the point of view of *jouissance*: and *The Greeting* by Bill Viola. 1995, which articulates a threshold between the Symbolic and the Real.

The signifier and the subject, layers of signifiers. glitch, signifiers at the edge of the Real, and *jouissance*; these are the approaches I explore in this chapter from the point of the view of the Lacanian Symbolic.

And now a reader's guide to the three registers. or "orders" that form the core of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The Imaginary (Order)

Lacan discusses throughout his career the mirror stage as a quintessential component of the Imaginary.[8] The mirror stage occurs in children from around six months of age to about a year and a half; it would be a mistake to think that thereafter the mirror stage disappears. It certainly does not; it becomes

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transformed and subsumed by the Symbolic, becoming in fact its core, like the initial ring of a tree around which other rings grow. For Lacan:

> It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context *as an identification* in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes . . . an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, "imago."
>
> (Lacan 2006: 76, original emphasis)

The quintessential moment of the mirror stage is holding a small child up to a mirror or the face of the (m)other and seeing his or her extraordinarily delightful pleasure. For Lacan, that pleasure is one of assuming an image as one's own, and it is at the heart of our ego formation through which we at once identify with an ideal image of the other and begin to form a sense of ourselves as independent of that other.

For Lacan, it is crucial for human subjectivity that the jubilation of this assumption of the image of the other involves misrecognition:

> For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it.
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> (Lacan 2006: 76)

This means that we enter the mirror stage and experience its jubilation at a stage of human development in which the prematurity of our birth is manifest. Once we learn to stand up and begin to master the movements of which our bodies are capable, we realize that what we had thought was our ideal image in the mirror of the other was simply a flat, two-dimensional mirage. Thus, for Lacan, there is an inherent ambivalence to the mirror stage as it resonates through our entire psychic development and maturity; there is, as it were, a tain in the mirror that will never go away.

To summarize: the Imaginary is the world of mutually exclusive, one-to-one binary oppositions of visual, acoustic, tactile, and corporal identifications with the other. The other (with a lower-case "o") is that strange replica of ourselves that we see in the world, at first the mother, other adults and siblings, and then others as we meet, imagine, remember, and project them.

The Symbolic (Order)

For Lacan:

> We have here nothing more than an illuminating insight into the
> entrance of the individual into an order whose mass supports him
> and welcomes him in the form of language, and superimposes
> determination by the signifier onto determination by the signified in
> both diachrony and synchrony.
>
> (Lacan 2006: 35)[9]

In other words, we are human as we speak language. Lacan knows that children
babble and that language develops throughout the Imaginary in terms of the
acoustic mirror, its cries, and the developing orientation of the self as an entity
inside a body that both contains, emits, and receives sound. Lacan focuses in
the citation above and elsewhere, in the signifying chain set in motion by the
signifier. The Symbolic with its quintessential feature of language acquisition
grows out of and grows around, as it were, the Imaginary. It can be seen as
an answer to the gradual flattening of the mirror and the misrecognition it
brings to the developing subject. That is, the mutually exclusive binary
opposition of presence and absence, plenitude and lack, of "black" and "white"
becomes mediated through a world of "gray" in which we never have the
object of desire completely, but we always have something incompletely—
the signifier. Freud discovered precisely the same thing in his *fort-da* game
that he observed his nephew playing. For Freud (the peekaboo game in English
is an equivalent), when a child plays at tossing away a toy (*fort*) and then
pulling it back (*da*), he or she has already made the crucial leap into language
and the essence of culture—the ability to actively master through language
an experience of loss that all children experience passively—the loss of the
ubiquity and permanence of the mother's presence (Freud 1961: 13–17).

For Lacan:

> Founding speech, which envelopes the subject, is everything that has
> constituted him, his parents, his neighbours, the whole structure of
> the community, and not only constituted him as symbol, but
> constituted him in his being. The laws of nomenclature are what
> determine . . . and channel the alliances from within which human
> beings copulate with one another and end up by creating, not only
> other symbols, but also real beings, who, coming into the world, right
> away have that little tag which is their name.
>
> (Lacan 1991b: 20)

The Symbolic is the world of language, of law, of social convention, and
the names we have not only for things and ideas, but for each other. And just

as names are given to us at birth, we are born into the Symbolic and acquire the means to circulate in social space from it.

The Symbolic changes our relations with others. We relate to the other with a lower-case "o" as other in the Imaginary; we relate to this other in mutually exclusive binary oppositions of presence/absence, plenitude/lack, black/white. It is a point-to-point system of binaries. We relate to the Other with an upper-case "O" as Other in the Symbolic; we respond to the call of the Other in ideological interpellation in which we are hailed into a wide array of social institutions; we enter into the world of speech with the Other.[10] We speak the language of the Other as bits in a random coin toss form patterns:

> One can grasp in its very emergence the overdetermination that is the only kind of overdetermination at stake in Freud's apperception of the symbolic function. Simply connoting with (+) and (−) a series playing on the sole fundamental alternative of presence and absence allows us to demonstrate how the strictest symbolic determinations accommodate a succession of coin tosses whose reality is strictly distributed "by chance."
>
> (Lacan 2006: 35)[11]

The (+) stands for a signifier; the (−) stands for the difference between one signifier and another in a signifying chain. I introduce this potentially confusing example to make a point, and that has to do with the nature of binaries in the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

To summarize: in the Imaginary, binaries are one-to-one forms of identification; in the Symbolic, binaries are one-to-many signifiers distributed in punctuated series (plural). The Imaginary with its quintessential mirror stage inaugurates the developing subject into mutually exclusive binary identifications of presence/absence, connection/separation through senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and seeing in which the developing subject locates its being within a gradually forming boundary of skin, enclosing his or her body. As the Imaginary wanes, as the developing subject seeks relief from its relentless and unforgiving binaries, we enter the Symbolic in which we embrace the language into which we were born, hear ourselves in the call of the Other, and find ourselves in a network of signifiers.

The (Lacanian) Real

Throughout his writings, Lacan sometimes refers to the real, to reality, as we might refer intuitively to situations, conditions of experience that are actual and to which we need to accustom ourselves in order to function; he does this particularly in reference to the reality of the therapeutic situation in which one must, whether patient or analyst, deal with transference. Elsewhere, in his writings, he refers to the real much more in the special meaning it has

acquired. I will refer to this meaning as the Real with an upper-case "R" to distinguish it from the more anecdotal reality with which we are more or less familiar. In reference to Freud's dream of Fliess giving his patient Irma an injection, Lacan suggests the following:

> There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands par excellence, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety. identification of anxiety, the final revelation of *you are this—You are this which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness.*
>
> (Lacan 1991b: 154–155. original emphasis)

The Real is associated with the pulp thingness that supports Imaginary and Symbolic; we see, hear, feel, taste, and smell in registers of Imaginary binaries; we speak and respond to the call of the Other in the Symbolic. and as we do so the Real lurks just out of reach, beneath. For Lacan, the Imaginary always flips its binary identifications that range from jubilant assumption of images to feelings of abject abandonment; the Symbolic is a network of perpetually sliding signifiers; the Real, on the other hand, "is that which is always in the same place" (Lacan 1997b: 70).

To summarize: the Lacanian Real is rather like the Kantian sublime—a pure thingness that underlies experience and surpasses our ability to describe or name it. It is the absolute. irreducible kernel of substance that supports everything we know. It is absolutely never seen. heard. tasted. smelled, touched, felt, or named in any way. By looking at the world and our experience awry, we sometimes get a glimpse of it. as Imaginary and/or Symbolic components of our experience are under sufficient strain. One can glimpse the Real as the Freudian uncanny, a sense that an experience. sensation, thought has been there before, displacing the epistemological security of things being where, when, how they should be, both in experience and in memory. If the Imaginary is the world of the other (with a lower-case "o") and the Symbolic is the world of the Other (with an upper-case "O"). then the Real is the world of alterity writ large as such that supports the two.

Notes

1. Brian Kane offers an introduction to discourses of sound art based on a comparison of distinctions between "sound art" and "music" in two recent books (Kim-Cohen 2009; Voegelin 2010). For Kane, Kim-Cohen is interested in non-cochlear sound art (a gloss on Duchamp's "non-retinal art," according to Kane) that embraces what might be bracketed off—the "extramusical," whether the listener him or herself, the modes of a work's production and reproduction. For Kane, Kim-

Cohen's history of sound art (from Pierre Schaeffer, to John Cage, to Muddy Waters) reads sounds in close connection with their conceptual underpinnings. For Kane, Voegelin, on the other hand, focuses on the phenomenology of listening to the sound itself with a bracketing-off of the visual. For Kane, Voegelin listens from and through the body as it engages with the world from a position of uncertainty (Kane 2012).

2. See Žižek (1992b).

3. See *Oxford English Dictionary* online at http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:4283/view/Entry/335? rskey=yEUt8Y&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed June 18, 2011).

4. See Kristeva (1982) and Bataille (1985).

5. See Freud (1961); and for an introduction to various concepts related to pleasure (enjoyment, *jouissance*, for example), see Evans (1996).

6. See also Agamben (2004, 2005).

7. For a detailed exploration of various registers of meaning in pre-symbolic space, see Ettinger (2005).

8. It is customary to refer to the "Imaginary Order" as simply the "Imaginary" and the "Symbolic Order" as the "Symbolic"; accordingly, I will refer to these categories as the "Imaginary" and "Symbolic," respectively. For the third category, the "Real," there is no understood "Order" following the term. A point of confusion that I address in due course is the relationship between "reality" and the (Lacanian) "Real." When I refer to the Lacanian Real, the single word "Real" will be written as one word with upper-case "R."

9. For an elementary description of the basic semiotics upon which the Symbolic depends, see Saussure (1959).

10. For a detailed account of hailing, see Althusser (1971). See also Žižek (1994: 54–61).

11. For a helpful explanation of how Lacan's coin toss can be seen to underwrite the Symbolic, see Fink (1995: 179, note 6).

3

EYES

?

Jason Salavon did a work entitled *Still Life (Vanitas)*; see Figure 3.1.[1]

I will approach this work by Salavon by first discussing the look in Lacan and then moving to anamorphotic art. Lacan has very little to say about the look, reserving much more commentary for the gaze, to which I will turn shortly.[2] But even with a specular structure of such elemental simplicity as the look, there is nothing ontologically given, no epistemology that one can simply take for granted:

> There always has to be a lens, in effect, since the naked eye contains one. It is because the lens comes to occupy the place from which the subject can look, and alights on the object-holder that is in fact focused
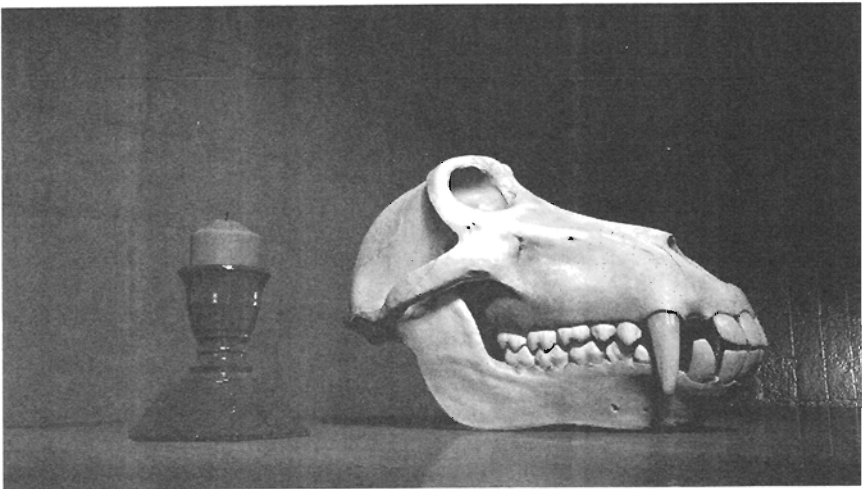

Figure 3.1 Still Life (Vanitas) by Jason Salavon, 2009. Custom Software and Industrial LCD Panel. 12" × 22" × 3". 4 hour 17 minute Continuous Loop. Ed. 5 + 2 APs. Used with Permission.

on there when the subject looks from elsewhere, that he superimposes himself, to the great detriment of the whole, on what can come to be ogled there.

<div align="right">(Lacan 2006: 560)</div>

So even in the look there is a split in the Imaginary ideal subject who looks at his image in the mirror (or face of the (m)other) as he or she assumes with jubilation that identification. The flesh of the eye, the naked eye, is always/already mediated in what it sees as it sees through its lens.

The still life as a genre has shown how artists see at particular moments throughout Western culture. Salavon refers in his online documentation to seventeenth-century Dutch technique as a source for his imagery.

Salavon's work, of course, is anything but still; the images change over four hours. The skull changes shape from human to various animal shapes; the candle shrinks, expands, and seems to show signs of having burned in reverse. There is no flame, but the wax is shown to have melted as if the candle has burned, but the motion suggests that the candle shape moves from short and having burned, to tall and about to burn. Salavon is thus playing with various temporalities, not just a slowed-down left-to-right diachronic motion of time. The changes in shape of the skull have nothing to do with a fantasy of left-to-right evolution, as, for example, might have been evoked if he had begun with a primal, animal shape that gradually becomes human. On the contrary, the skull is already a hybrid at the outset; it gradually turns human in the middle portion of the installation and then becomes transformed into various animal skulls. Similarly, the candle shrinks, expands, seems to have burned, but cause and effect, as well as left-to-right diachronic time, have become transformed. For me, the work evokes a temporality that is not along a left-to-right or even right-to-left "line" of progressive or regressive motion; it is more along some inscrutable third axis of nonlinear transformations.

The more obvious connection between seventeenth-century Dutch painting and Salavon (aside from the black background and light illuminating objects from an off-frame source as in a camera lucida) is the skull. For me, the skull and particularly the transformations it undergoes in Salavon's work echo another famous skull in art history—the anamorphotic skull in *The Ambassadors* by Hans Holbein the Younger.

Anamorphosis lies at the heart of the basic approach of this very book; it is a form of looking, listening, thinking awry. For me, and I would risk saying most, if not all, Lacanians, experience reveals very little about itself, its representations, viewed head-on as if any of it had ontological priority, consistency, or permanence, as if any of it were self-evident. Viewed awry, however, a network of contingent relations begins to appear; the anamorphotic tradition in art captures a visual correlate of this premise. Images were painted in such a way as to seem distorted when viewed "head-on"; when viewed from a certain angle, however, a recognizable object suddenly appears as

<div align="center">85</div>

correct and clear.[3] In his discussion of the painting by Hans Holbein the Younger above, Lacan refers to a study of:

> that painting [*The Ambassadors*] and of the skull that emerges when, having passed in front of it, you leave the room by a door located so that you see it in its sinister truth, at the very moment when you turn around to look at it for the first time . . . Thus . . . the interest of anamorphosis is described as a turning point when the artist completely reverses the use of that illusion of space, when he forces it to enter into the original goal, that is to transform it into the support of the hidden reality—it being understood that, to a certain extent, a work of art always involves encircling the Thing.
>
> (Lacan 1997b: 140–141)

The Thing is, for Lacan, something hidden, forgotten, and found again in the Real:

> If the Thing were not fundamentally veiled, we wouldn't be in the kind of relationship to it that obliges us, as the whole of psychic life is obliged, to encircle it or bypass it in order to conceive it . . . The object is by nature a refound object. That it was lost is a consequent of that—but after the fact. It is thus refound without our knowledge, except through the refinding, that it was ever lost.
>
> (Lacan 1997b: 118)

There is nothing inherently anamorphotic about the skull as subject matter. But the constant shifting of shapes in *Still Life (Vanitas)* does suggest an even more kinetic activation of the shift of specular awareness at the heart of anamophosis. There is neither a moment of illusion (obvious in anamorphotic art when one sees the distortion as distortion), nor a moment of rightness when, having assumed a certain perspective, or looking in just the right angle awry, the object suddenly becomes clear. Salavon's art is a *perpetuum mobile* of anamorphosis.

Birthe Blauth did a work that also involves very slow, incremental change. In *Portrait of a Man* (2007), four video loops show slowly changing features of a close-up shot of a man. In the example below, two stills from the work, separated by several minutes, show the kinds of transformations that take place before the viewers' eyes; see Figure 3.2.[4]

During the process of watching this work, the viewer is meant not only to notice incremental shifts in the structure of the face of the shot subject, but he or she is invited to feel and to be aware of a shift in affect toward the face as its features become transformed before our very eyes. Just to take one personal example, I felt more threatened, more monitored by the face as it presented itself on the right than the face as it presented itself on the left. The
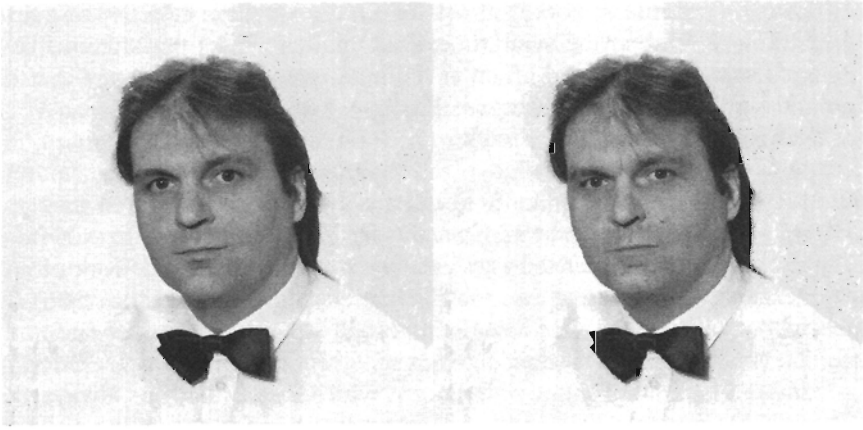
Figure 3.2 Portrait of a Man by Birthe Blauth, 2007. Four Channel Video Loop, 2:03 (1:29, 2:01, 3:11). Used with Permission.

face on the right has a mouth that is smaller in width, tighter, and there is a vertical crease of scrutiny on his forehead between the eyes. Throughout the video documentation of this work, there are countless such moments as minute changes in features shift one's affective response to the face. I will speak in much greater detail below about the mirror stage and its various effects and aftereffects for subjectivity; for now, I would like to consider Blauth's *Portrait of a Man* a kind of affective mirror in which the viewer sees on an initial level the gradually transformed face of a man. On another level, the affective mirror shows less a gradually changing face than the reactions in a viewer in response to those transformations. For myself, while the changes to facial elements in the image are gradual, the changes in affective response crossed thresholds I could feel. Like colors on a spectrum, there is not a gradual transformation from one color to another. At some point, one no longer sees one color and sees another instead. This is like some form of visual snapping in which a field under pressure suddenly shifts its orientation.[5]

I have thought over the years that the difference between emotion and affect is that emotion is a feeling (represented in some way) and affect is a response in a subject in a binary relation with either another subject or an object in which a certain form of enunciation takes shape; that taking shape is affect. So, for example, the feeling of sadness (emotion) at the minor mode in standard repertoire classical music produces sadness (affect) as the result of a mark that a certain dissonance produces—at once in the musical text at hand (a minor tonic sonority), the nature of sound in a gravitational field (the subtle clash that always occurs between a minor third and the major third that the overtone series gives us for free) and the mind and a listener upon whose skin, ear, and body this dissonance registers.

There is a paradox at work in affect. One at once feels an affective response to a stimulus; and, at the same time. the stimulus causes the affective response. Lacan has theorized affect as a similar paradoxical structure that he grounds in the Fibonacci series; see Figure 3.3.

Reading this sketch, Lacan says:

> A romanticism still continues to call this the golden number and goes astray in finding it on the surface of everything that has been possible to paint or draw over the ages . . . One only has to open a work of aesthetics that makes a case for this reference in order to realize that, while it may be possible to superimpose it. it is certainly not because the painter had drawn the diagonals in advance, but because there is in effect a kind of intuitive harmony, which means that it is always this that sings most sweetly . . . Except that there is something else . . . By taking each of these terms and starting to calculate from the bottom up [or from the left to the right of the series], you will quickly see that you are dealing with 1/2, then 2/3, next with 3/5. You will thus find the numbers the sequence of which constitutes the Fibonacci series, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 . . . each being the sum of the two preceding numbers . . . If we now take this proportion as an image of what affect is, insofar as there is repetition of this "I am one" on the next line, this retroactively results in what causes it—the affect.
>
> (Lacan 2007: 156)

First, an explanation of the Lacanian algebra from which he derives the Fibonacci series. I beg the reader's indulgence; for those who either understand the math or do not trust the numbers, please skip the next paragraph.

When Lacan says to "start from the bottom" of his sketch, he means to take the number 1 and divide it by 1, which gives you the first 1 in the lower right-hand corner. You then add 1 and that makes 2; you then divide 1 by that number and you get 1/2 or 1, 2 in the series. You then add 1 to 1/2 and you get 1.5; you divide 1 over 1.5 and you get .66666667 or approximately 2/3, or 2, 3 in the series. You then add 1 to .66666667 and you get 1.66666667. You divide 1 by 1.66666667 and you get .59999999 or approximately 3/5 or 3, 5 in the series. You add 1 to .59999999 and you get 1.59999999; you divide

$$\cfrac{1}{1+1+\cfrac{1}{1+1+\cfrac{1}{1+1}}} = \gamma$$

Figure 3.3

1 by 1.59999999 and you get .625 or 5/8 or 5, 8 in the series. You add 1 to .625 and you get 1.625; you divide 1 by 1.625 and you get .61538462 or 8/13 or 8, 13 in the series (and so on).

What powers the equation above is the reciprocal relation or $1/x$; a reciprocal of a number is that which multiplied to the number itself produces 1. What fascinates Lacan is that the number 1 is in both positions—the $1/x$ and the 1 that is produced in the reciprocal relation. For him, that is an analogy to the paradox of affect in which the cause determines the effect and effect determines the cause—a 1 in both positions of self and other. This is helpful in (re)considering the affective shifts that occur (as I claim across thresholds) in affect as one watches the transformations of Blauth's *Portrait of a Man*. The affective responses are at once of the image and of the viewing subject.

What Mirrors See and What They Show

Daniel Rozin has made a career out of making various forms of interactive mirrors; his *Wooden Mirror* is the first of a series of mechanical/interactive electronic mirrors; see Figure 3.4.[6]

When the subject appears before Rozin's *Wooden Mirror*, sensors pick up his or her presence, and, like little bits, the small, wooden pieces that reflect his or her body flip. If you walk past the work, you hear a wash of sounds like ocean stones being swept by waves on the coast of Maine. For me, the work has an ambivalent charge at once soothing and at once oddly disembodied. Each bit of information in the mirror reflection of oneself is blank in itself; and the image of oneself in the mirror is hardly ideal. The image in the mirror is simply the sum of a frame of bits that flip.

As such, *Wooden Mirror* is very much all about the alterity inherent in the mirror. For Lacan:

> The relation of the subject to his *Urbild*, his *Idealich*, through which he enters into the imaginary function and learns to recognize himself as a form, can always see-saw. Each time the subject apprehends himself as form and as ego, each time that he constitutes himself in his status, in his stature, in his static, his desire is projected outside. From whence arises the impossibility of all human coexistence.
>
> (Lacan 1991a: 171)

The see-saw of the Imaginary refers to the mutually exclusive bit flipping that occurs throughout the Imaginary register—from fullness to emptiness, presence to absence, attracting to repulsion. This see-saw, of course, maps on to the large-scale narrative of the mirror stage, which begins with a jubilant assumption of the ideal self's image, to a sense that the ideal self is actually just a two-dimensional form. But the key phrase here is "projected from the outside"; Rozin's *Wooden Mirror* embodies this alterity at the heart of the
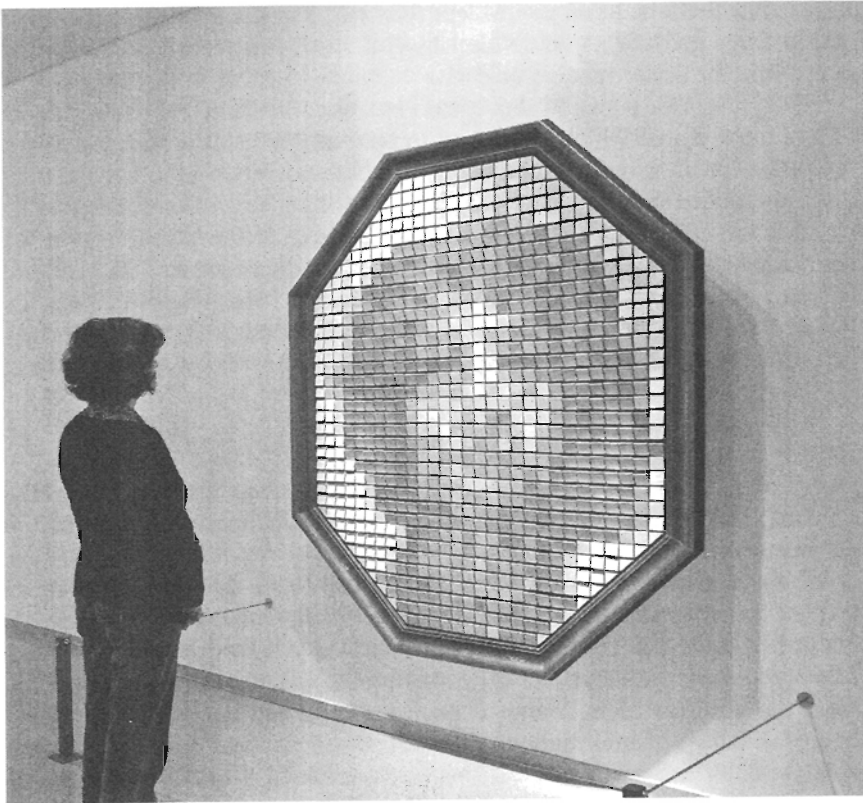
Figure 3.4 Wooden Mirror by Daniel Rozin, 1999. 830 square pieces of wood. 830 servo motors, control electronics, video camera, computer, wood frame. 67" × 80" × 10". Used with Permission.

subject's ideal ego, as each blank, wooden bit simply flips it into its place.[7] But much more than that, the ambivalent affect for me rides precisely this threshold between a positive and negative charge. With each swath of sound and image of the ideal self in the mirror, there is also a sense of the machinery of the other, which sets that very ideal self into motion.

Raphael Lozano-Hemmer did a work *The Company of Colors*; see Figure 3.5.[8]

In this work, the subject views her image reflected in rectangular screens in which the outlines of the face, figure, and features suggest verisimilitude; the colors within those outlines point to the alterity of the ideal ego reflected (or misreflected, as it were) in the mirror. Ferdinand de Saussure has famously pointed out the arbitrary status of the signifier in his linguistic theory.[9] The arbitrary status of the signifier resides in the fact that it points to a conception
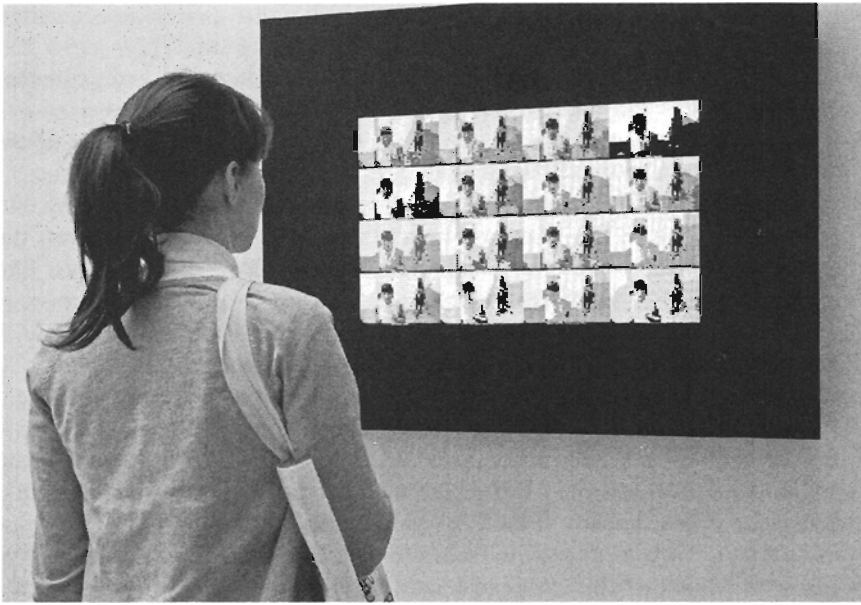
Figure 3.5 Company of Colors, Shadow Box 9, by Raphael Lozano-Hemmer, 2009.
High Resolution Interactive Display with Built-in Computerized
Surveillance System. 104.5 cm × 80 cm × 12 cm. Used with Permission.

of an object or idea in the mind of a member of a community, not to any
ontologically given object. In his seminar of "The Purloined Letter," Lacan
asserts that:

> The signifier is a unique unit of being which, by its very nature, is
> the symbol of but an absence. This is why we cannot say of the
> purloined letter that, like other objects, it must be *or* not be somewhere
> but rather that, unlike them, it will be *and* will not be where it is
> wherever it goes.

> (Lacan 2006: 17, original emphasis)

The subject in this work will see herself reflected strangely in its mirror.
Each frame contains at once a single image in which she can feel captured,
in which she can say "that's me"; and yet they are all different, and comprise
signifiers that could move into a structure of infinite regress of (mis)recognition.

In the blank, wooden bits of Rozin's *Wooden Mirror*, in the grid of signifiers
in Lozano-Hemmer's *The Company of Colors*, the subject can see alterity
writ large on screen. For Lacan: "alienation constitutes the subject as such.

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In a field of objects, no relationship is conceivable that engenders alienation apart from the relationship with the signifier" (Lacan 2006: 712).

Golan Levin's *Eyecode* presents the viewer with an uncanny screen of quivering eyes.[10] The application works by capturing a clip of each viewer's eyes and adding them to the grid; each shot lasts as long as the eyes of the viewer are open between blinks; see Figure 3.6.[11]

I would like to discuss *Eyecode* from the point of view of the uncanny, but first, I would like to mention the blinking of the users' eyes that mark the beginnings and endings of the captured images; for me, blinks are like delimiters—unconscious open-and-close brackets that articulate what we see. Levin has piggybacked the opening and closing delimiters of his capture with the opening and closing delimiters of his viewers' blinks.[12] Levin shows to each viewer a snapshot of his or her look—an uninterrupted look of a certain span of time. And each viewer is placed in the field of the other in a diachronic displacement of a synchronic event. By synchronic in this case, I mean simultaneous; by diachronic, I mean sequential. One person looking at another takes place synchronically (I look at you as you look at me); in *Eyecode*, one person looks; the look is captured and shown back exactly as you would have been seen (I look at you and then I see you looking back at me) in inverted form.

If there is a logical reason I referred to this experience as uncanny, it can only be because it seems distantly familiar. According to Freud, "the uncanny

Figure 3.6 Eyecode by Golan Levin, 2007. Used with Permission.

is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud 1958: 123–124). The German word for the uncanny is *unheimlich*, and Freud understands a certain familiarity (*heimlich*) to be nested inside the *unheimlich* as a distant, repressed memory. In his exhaustive look at the various meanings of uncanny in various languages, Freud discovers that the meanings of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* often converge; he discovers that the meanings can be interchangeable:

> Among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich* . . . In general we are reminded that the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight.
>
> (Freud 1958: 129)

"Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*" (Freud 1958: 131).

In general, a premise of this entire book is that the uncanny underwrites much of the experience of electronic art in early twenty-first-century social space; but there is a much more precise cultural resonance to feeling the uncanny in Golan Levin's *Eyecode*. As Freud mentions in his essay, quite often "the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes" (Freud 1958: 136).[13]

I would like to return to something I mentioned above—the look of the viewer that is presented back to him or her in inverted form. There are two sources of this inversion: (1) the image of the self that is reflected back in inverted form in the mirror stage; and (2) the inversion that occurs in our access to the Other when the ego confronts Lacan's well-known "wall of language." I would like for now to begin this exploration of the visual field in Lacan with the mirror stage and its visual inversions. I will return at a later time to the second inversion having to do with the subject's constitutive inversion as it hits the wall of language both separating and connecting the imaginary ego with the Other.[14]

Most of us know the mirror stage as the experience of holding a small child up to a mirror (or in front of one's own face) and watching a child imitate smiles of jubilation either in the reflected image in a mirror or in the histrionics of one's own facial gestures. The mirror stage begins in most children around six months of age and wanes when the child is about a year and a half.[15] For Lacan, "the human child, at an age when he is for a short while, but for a while nevertheless, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence,

can already recognize his own image as such in a mirror" (Lacan 2006: 75). The prematurity of human birth is absolutely essential to Lacan's thesis for a crucial shift in perception that occurs from the initial jubilation described above to a readiness to exit the Imaginary and enter the Symbolic. Early in the mirror stage, the child is captivated by the image of the ideal other; once he or she gains motor capacity, the ideal other wanes, seems like the flat two-dimensional image that it is:

> For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it.
>
> (Lacan 2006: 76)

We will return to the implications of the end of the mirror stage later. For now, I would like to focus on the reversing effect, the inversion of the image that occurs in the passage quoted above, and in Levin's work. For one thing, there is a reversing effect in the mirror itself; Lacan points out that "[w]e note that the image in the mirror is reversed, and we may see in this at least a metaphorical representation of the structural reversal we have demonstrated in the ego as the individual's psychical reality" (Lacan 1953: 15).

One aspect of inversion is an otherness—a flipping along a binary axis. One can invert an image and make up/down and down/up; one can invert a melody, making ascending intervals descend and descending intervals ascend. In image inversion, two things happen: (1) right becomes left and left becomes right; and (2) a spatial "hereness" becomes a "thereness"—there is a movement, a transposition, a displacement. Levin's work relies on a representation of both, with reversed and disembodied eyes, joining others' eyes in a quivering grid that silently counts each captured look.

Golan Levin collaborated with Zach Lieberman in *Reface*; see Figure 3.7.[16]

As in *Eyecode*, *Reface* uses the blinks of the user to change video clips taken not only of the viewer's eyes, but his or her noses and mouths as well—an interactive, electronic version (as the online documentation states) of the exquisite corpse game.[17] *Reface* vividly recreates a sense of fragmentation upon which the mirror stage relies:

> The mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipi-tously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an "orthopedic" form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of

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Figure 3.7 Reface (Portrait Sequencer) by Golan Levin and Zachary Lieberman, 2007. Used with Permission.

an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. Thus the shattering of the *Innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle gives rise to an inexhaustible squaring of the ego's audits.

(Lacan 2006: 78)

From *Eyecode* to *Reface*, the fragmentation ante is raised substantially; in *Reface,* the viewer sees whole faces but the wholeness is made up of heterogeneous parts. In *Eyecode*, each clip of disembodied eyes that looks back at the viewer does so implicitly from a position of having been members of a single, whole face. In *Reface*, each video clip of eyes is impossibly combined with video clips of noses and mouths that slide back and forth to form impossible faces. For me, the affect projected from these impossible faces represents/embodies a primitive aggressivity out of which the mirror stage develops. But the aggressiveness is not only due to the fragmentation of the subject after birth and before the mirror stage, it is also a product of the very alienating effect that the mirror stage inaugurates:

[The] ego . . . is frustration in its very essence. Not frustration of one of the subject's desires, but frustration of an object in which his desire is alienated; and the more developed this object becomes, the more profoundly the subject becomes alienated from his jouissance. It is thus a frustration at one remove, a frustration that the subject—even were he to reduce its form in his discourse to the passivating image by which the subject makes himself an object by displaying himself before the mirror—could not be satisfied with, since even if he achieved the most perfect resemblance to that image, it would still be the other's jouissance that he would have gotten recognized there.

(Lacan 2006: 208)

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In *Reface*, parts of the subject's face are grafted onto the facial parts of the other, right before his or her eyes. The ways in which these captured body parts shift and find alignment despite their radical alterity to each other represents/embodies the radical alterity inherent in subject formation through mirror identification. How is frustration, aggression, alienation indexed into the affect involved in using, viewing, confronting the fragmentation, particularly in light of my claims implying a negative, threatening response, and the obvious sense of playfulness that one sees in online documentation of the works (*Eyecode* as well as *Reface*)?

I would like to suggest that the playful affect of a user/viewer/subject triggering the fragments of these works derives from their interactivity. What is happening here is a transformation of an experience based on passivity gaining power (retrospectively) through active representation. Having laid out the basic dynamic of the fort-da game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud asks himself: "How then does his repetition [of the fort-da gesture] of this distressing experience as a game [of enacting the absence of the mother] fit in with the pleasure principle?" (Freud 1961: 15). And Freud answers himself:

> On an unprejudiced view one gets an impression that the child turned his experience into a game from another motive. At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasureable though it was, as a game, he took on an active part.
>
> (Freud 1961: 15, original emphasis)

For me, art with an interactive component can increase the subject's sense of mastery of archaic memories of fragmentation and alienation that we all, necessarily, experienced in passivity. And Freud follows this perception with a striking addendum:

> But still another interpretation may be attempted. Throwing away the object [the child's "fort"] so that it was "gone" might satisfy an impulse of the child's, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him.
>
> (Freud 1961: 15)

In *Reface*, part of the glee that the users in online documentation feel may piggyback on this archaic memory of destruction—brought out by the artists in the blinks of the eyes that slash faces apart on the screen.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer did a work entitled *Blow Up* in which an image of a subject is captured and reproduced in 2,400 miniature frames; see Figure 3.8.[18]

Seeing one's image fragmented, duplicated, and projected back in so many small screens embodies the irreducible disruption latent in the mirror stage.
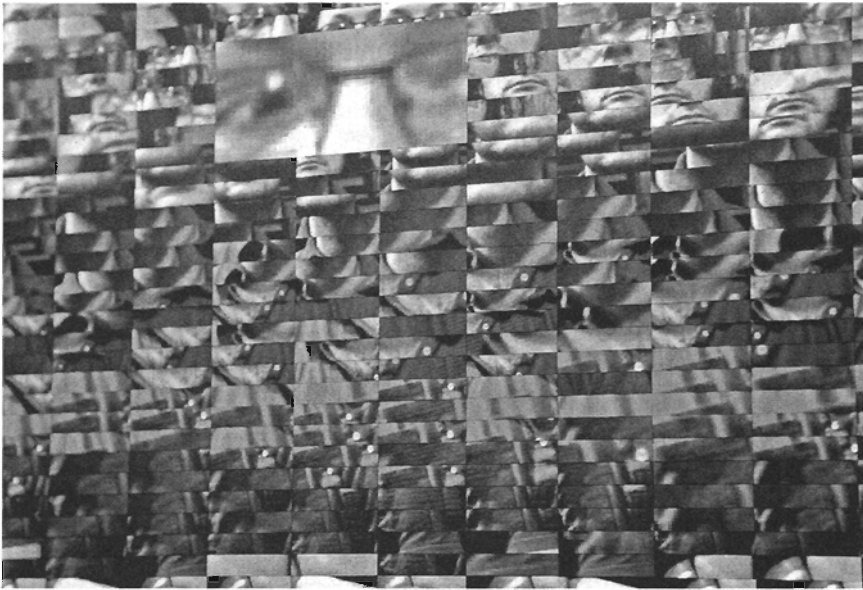
Figure 3.8 Blow Up (Shadow Box 4), by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, 2007. Photo by Antimodular Research. Used with Permission.

And at this edge of the (mis)recognition inherent in the mirror stage, we can take a peek at the Real. For Lacan:

> The real is apprehended beyond all mediation, be it imaginary or symbolic. In short, one could say that such privileged experiences, and especially it would seem in a dream, are characterized by the relation which is established with an absolute other, I mean an other beyond all intersubjectivity. This beyond of the intersubjective relation is attained most especially on the imaginary level. What's at issue is an essential alien . . . who is neither the supplement, nor the complement of the fellow being . . . who is the very image of dislocation, of the essential tearing apart of the subject.
>
> (Lacan 1991b: 177)

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's alien is no vicious tearing apart; it is a precise, controlled, and automatic reproduction of an image. It is the Real of a specular mechanism that has no internal consistency other than capture, miniaturization, reproduction, and repetition of images. These 2,400 reflections of the self are indeed neither supplements nor complements of the self; the grid could extend infinitely along an x and y axis. It would be a mistake to say that all mechanical devices are Real, that all computer programs that run with loops are Real; the

Lacanian Real is evoked in this case with a form of mechanical reproduction linked to an element of the imaginary at a limit—the limit of the self to grasp its own Imaginary (mis)recognition in the specular identification of the other as lure and as refuge from fragmentation.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer did a work entitled *Make Out*; see Figure 3.9.[19]

In this mirror fantasy, the reflection of the subject in the mirror triggers each image/pixel to show a couple kissing.[20] The reflection of the subject in a mirror is like a shadow cast upon the screen made up of hundreds of tiny screens/pixels. Lacan simplifies his sense of the essence of the mirror stage in the following:

> In the same way as you don't need the entire surface of a mirror . . . for you to be aware of the content of a field or a room, in the same way as you obtain the same result by using a tiny little bit, so any small portion of the *area striata* can be put to the same use, and behaves like a mirror. All sorts of things in the world behave like mirrors. All that's needed is that the conditions be such that to one point of reality there should correspond an effect at another point, that a bi-univocal correspondence occurs between two points in real space.
>
> (Lacan 1991b: 49)

First, a reminder that the word *real* in the above passage refers to reality, not the Lacanian Real. Next, the point-to-point "bi-univocal correspondence" is crucial. For Lacan, the Imaginary is precisely the register of such mutually exclusive binaries between a subject and its reflection in a mirror, or in its one-to-one correspondence with a point in real space (space that is a component of reality because it has been selected, marked, chosen). If I may return briefly to the distinction between reality and the Real, the former is like a dramatis personae of a psychic formation—a list of the actors who will appear on stage, a description of how the stage will be set up, lighted, articulated in relation to its audience; the Lacanian Real can be thought of as the brute, material support of everything that supports reality.
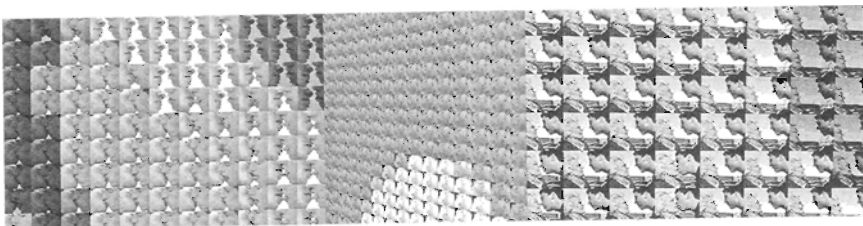

Figure 3.9 Make Out by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, 2008. OMR Gallery, Mexico, 2012. Photo by Marco Casado. Used with Permission.

Both *Blow Up* and *Make Out* draw attention to Lacan's point-to-point structure inherent in the Imaginary and embodied in the mirror stage explicitly. Not only is the subject captivated by his or her reflection, he or she is captivated by precise points in the mirror at which his or her image is grounded. The nature of this grounding is radically different in these two works, however. As opposed to the miniature reflections of the *self* that the subject sees in *Blow Up*, in *Make Out*, the subject sees not only the *other*, but the other as a couple kissing. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer has embodied two stages in a mirror fantasy of infinite regression (a subject sees a couple, sees a couple, sees a couple . . .).

It would be both true and false to claim that kissing resides in the Imaginary. It would be false since kissing is a highly charged gesture that resides in the Symbolic, in various forms in courtly love traditions, polite exchanges in social spaces, some forms appropriate in some contexts, in some cultures, others not. It would be true since kissing involves a point-to-point, bi-univocal representation in which the subject finds him or herself reflected in the Imaginary other. So in order to do justice to this polyvalence of signification and to acknowledge the Imaginary dimension of kissing, let me simply say that the imaginary dimension of the kiss is nested within the larger-scale mirror fantasy in this work in which the subject sees him or herself reflected in this shadow of animated clips of the other as kissing couple.

But these kisses do not span the range of kisses; they are all erotic (no polite peck on the cheek of an elderly, respected aunt or uncle). They are mostly homoerotic and all are highly charged. I cannot help thinking that the subject faced with such an array might feel oddly left out. After all, it is not only that the subject is left out (that the reflection is of the other and not the self), but that his or her presence has triggered the enjoyment of the other. The subject will be reminded by this triggering at every moment; as the shadow of his or her reflection moves across the screen, kissing couples are stilled and kissing couples are animated as they recede from and fall within its boundaries. For Lacan, this is key to enjoyment: "the jouissance of which the subject is . . . deprived is transferred to the imaginary other who assumes . . . it like the jouissance of a spectacle namely, the spectacle offered by the subject in a cage" (Lacan 2006: 378).

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer did a work entitled *Surface Tension* in which a subject walks into a darkened space; there is a large spotlight in the middle of the space similar to a spotlight that would illuminate a performer on stage. A very large eye appears on the screen and watches the subject as he or she moves around the space; if the subject is too low, the large eye closes; see Figure 3.10.[21]

The documentation of this work references surveillance, and surveillance will figure largely in some of the discussions that follow. But is *Surface Tension* about the look or the gaze, and upon what basis might one make such a distinction? If the work is simply a representation of a look with spatial
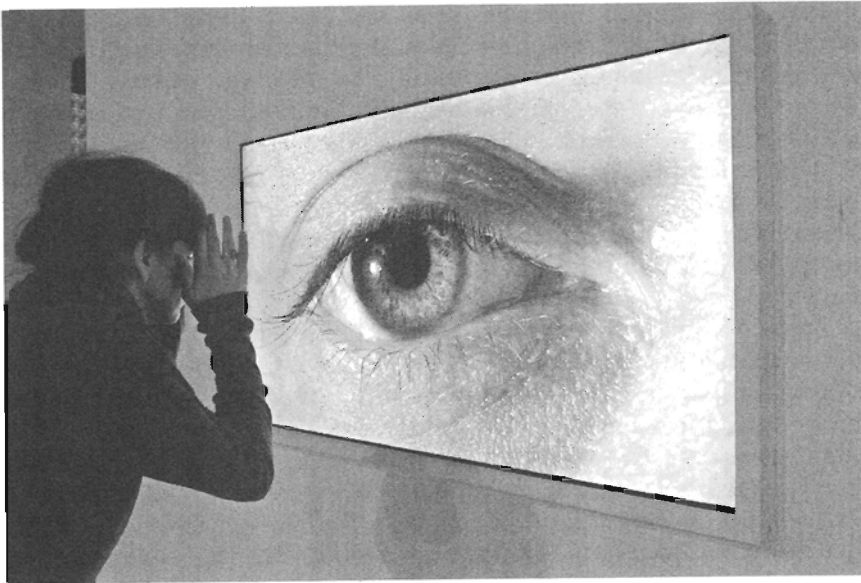
Figure 3.10 Surface Tension by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, 1992. "Detectores" Fundaciōon Telefónica, Buenos Aires, 2012. Photo by Antimodular Research. Used with Permission.

distortion, it is as if either the subject is a miniature and the eye of the imaginary other is normal sized and looking in on the little one, or the subject is at normal human scale, and the eye is the eye of a giant (a curious Lilliputian fantasy). As a representation of look, *Surface Tension* reveals the vulnerability of the naked eye of the other (though gigantic) as it returns the look of the subject. But this is surely not a representation/embodiment of a specular exchange between a subject and an Imaginary other; there is a much greater power difference in the economy of specularity upon which the gaze depends, as I will suggest below. And, as I will show below, the source of the gaze is most often and crucially hidden, dispersed, transposed, and ubiquitous.

Where the source of the gaze is seen, Lacan finds an implied and necessary third person:

> [In the gaze] I see that the other sees me, and that any intervening third party sees me being seen. There is never a simple duplicity of terms. It is not only that I see the other. I see him seeing me, which implicates the third term, namely, that he knows that I see him. The circle is closed. There are always three terms in the structure, even if these three terms are not explicitly present.
>
> (Lacan 1991a: 218)

For me, this is less a circle than a spiral, as in "I see him see me see him see me . . ." *Surface Tension* represents/embodies such a spiral of infinite regress as the viewer stands in for the crucial third term who sees seeing in the gaze.

Camille Utterback did a work entitled *External Measures*; see Figure 3.11.[22]

In the absence of anyone in the installation space, curving lines move around a screen and saturate it; once the presence of someone in the installation space is registered, an empty space (or hole) that mirrors the outline of the person's body opens up in the visual field on screen. As the person moves, the space/hole moves as well, and after the person has left, the space/hole fills up once again with the slowly moving lines and shapes as before.[23] The screen of this work registers images of people as absent space as long as the person is there before it, either moving or still. For me, this is an evocation of the Lacanian subject.

For Lacan, "the subject turns out to be—and this is only true for speaking beings—a being whose being is always elsewhere, as the predicate shows. The subject is never more than fleeting and vanishing, for it is a subject only by a signifier and to another signifier" (Lacan 1998: 142). The end of this passage echoes Lacan's well-known idea that "a signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier" (Lacan 2006: 694). I will explore the signifier in greater detail in the next chapter. But for now, this is meant to displace the
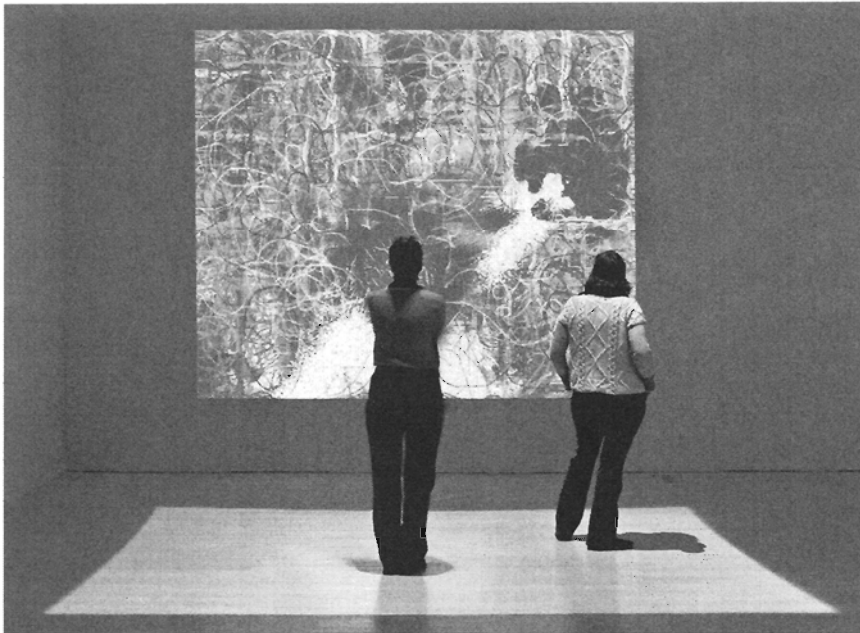

Figure 3.11 External Measures by Camille Utterback, 2003. Used with Permission.

Saussurian signified from a closed, one-to-one relationship to the signifier in the well-known illustration of the semiotics of the tree (with the signifier "t-r-e-e" above a horizontal bar as signifier and an image of a tree beneath it as signified). Instead, Lacan suggests that the elementary structure of the sign involves a door with "ladies" written on one and the word "gentlemen" written on the other. That is, the signifier "gentleman" represents a subject for the signifier "ladies" and the signifier "ladies" represents a subject for the signifier "gentleman"; crucially, that subject is fleeting and comes into view only in relation to the chain of signification (Lacan 2006: 416). The subject is an effect of the signifier: "[t]he subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers, whether he knows which signifier he is the effect of or not. That effect—the subject—is the intermediary effect between what characterizes a signifier and another signifier, namely, the fact that each of them is an element" (Lacan 1998: 50).

Utterback's work registers the signifier of the subject as a mark of absence, and it is not just a mark in relation to the body whose hole/space it originates; that signifier reacts as well to each other signifier as hole/space registered of every other person within the specular range of the screen. For Lacan, as soon as the subject emerges as an effect of the signifying chain, the subject is divided. In the following passage, upper-case "S" with subscript 1 refers to the master signifier, which, in the dominant position (upper left-hand corner of the quartet of signifiers that determine the four discourses) points to the discourse of the master:

> At the very instant at which S_1 intervenes in the already constituted field of the other signifiers, insofar as they are already articulated with one another as such, that, by intervening in another system, this S [with a bar through it], which I have called the subject as divided, emerges.
>
> (Lacan 2007: 15)[24]

In Utterback's work, the bar that designates the subject, divided, displaced along the signifying chain is made visible by the absent spaces/holes that open and close in the visual field on screen. Although I will explore the signifier more fully in the next chapter, I have included the discussion in this chapter on "eyes" to show the grounding of the subject in the binaries of the Imaginary Order. For Lacan, such images:

> will take on their meaning in a wider discourse, in which the entire history of the subject is integrated. The subject is as such historicized from one end to the other. This is where analysis is played out—on the frontier between the symbolic and the imaginary.
>
> (Lacan 1991b: 255)

In short, the subject takes its place precisely at this threshold, as a signifier that registers in the Imaginary, becoming Symbolic as it represents the subject for another signifier. There is, of course, an all-at-onceness and always-alreadyness to what happens at this threshold. In *External Measures*, it is as if Utterback has been able to make this threshold visible.

Surveillance

Ed Osborn did a piece entitled *Wandering Eye Studies*; see Figure 3.12.[25]

The work shows a wide variety of highly mediated video clips as from surveillance cameras. I will first address surveillance, then explore at greater length the gaze upon which it relies (in connection with mediation) and conclude with an account of the music and its relations with the visuals in the video documentation provided online.[26]

One of the best-known documents on the history and structure of surveillance in the modern era is Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, introduced in the first chapter. From medieval forms of public humiliation, corporal punishment, and executions, the Enlightenment reforms gathered criminals instead together under the steady gaze of the panopticon and its architectural embodiment—the modern prison designed and theorized by the eighteenth-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham. From a single viewpoint, all prisoners

Figure 3.12 Wandering Eye Studies by Ed Osborn, 2006. Still from Three-Channel Installation. Image courtesy of the Artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco. Used with Permission.

could be watched, monitored, and controlled. The brilliance of this design relied less on the fact of observation than its internalized potential in the imagination of the prisoner:

> [i]t is obvious that, in all these instances, the more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose . . . of the establishment have been attained. Ideal perfection . . . would require that each person should actually be in that predicament, during every instant of time. This being impossible. the next thing to be wished for is, that, at every instant, seeing reason to believe as much, and not being able to satisfy himself to the contrary, he should *conceive* himself to be so.
>
> (Bentham n.d., original emphasis)[27]

The essence of the psychoanalytic gaze is this internalized specularity. I have begun to discuss the look/gaze binary elsewhere, but let me reiterate an essential difference between the two: the look is a specular exchange between a subject and an Imaginary other; for me, it is helpful to remind myself that looks are exchanged in psychoanalytic adjacency, such as two people of more or less the same power relations with one another in contemporary social space, two characters who function at more or less parallel levels in a plot in a novel. The gaze is less a specular exchange than an agency of the Other pinning a subject to a point in space. The source of the gaze is quintessentially hidden; it is not only that the gaze of the Other is internalized and imagined, it is often impossible. The very impossibility of the gaze displaces its power onto an inscrutable alterity from which there can be no escape (think of cavernous buildings and the uncanny sense of the Other watching, or the gaze of a blind man, or an object that seems to be looking at you).

There may be shots of crowds in Osborn's work, but, for me, there is something typical about the shots of individuals; it seems to me that one effect of surveillance is isolating, marking off, delimiting the subject. In his discussion of the treatment of that prototypical paranoic, Daniel Paul Schreber, Lacan refers to "being no longer amongst" and the surveillance under which the patient was placed in hospital:

> From the phenomenological point of view, and remaining cautious, we can admit that there is a state here that can be described as the twilight of the world. He is no longer amongst real beings—this *being no longer amongst* is typical, for he is amongst other much more burdensome elements. Suffering is the dominant strain in his relations with them, which involve the loss of his autonomy. This profound, intolerable disturbance of his existence motivates in him all sorts of behaviour of which he can only give us a hazy indication, but of

which we get an indication by the way he is treated—he is placed under surveillance.

<div align="right">(Lacan 1997a: 107, original emphasis)</div>

Although the passage above describes a very precise and famous pathology that has been at the heart of psychoanalytic writings on paranoia, for me, this phrase "being no longer amongst" is suggestive for the effects of surveillance and the gaze upon which it depends.[28] Surveillance cameras in public spaces such as those used in Osborn's work seem intended to track individuals, to watch for transgressions, to keep tabs. More precisely:

> What counts is not that the other sees where I am, but that he sees where I am going, that is to say, quite precisely, that he sees where I am not. In every analysis of the intersubjective relation, what is essential is not what is there, what is seen. What structures it is what is not there.

<div align="right">(Lacan 1991a: 224)</div>

What is not there is, for one thing, the site of transgression that keeping tabs will prevent. But what is not there is also a constitutive blind spot inherent in the gaze:

> But what is the gaze? I shall set out from this first point of annihilation in which is marked, in the field of the reduction of the subject, a break—which warns us of the need to introduce another reference, that which analysis in reducing the privileges of the consciousness. Psycho-analysis regards the consciousness as irremediably limited, and institutes it as a principle, not only of idealization, but of *méconnaissance*, as—using a term that takes on new value by being referred to a visible domain—*scotoma*.

<div align="right">(Lacan 1981: 82–83)</div>

A *scotoma* is literally a shimmering that presents itself in the field of vision—a kind of disrupting light, often taking on shapes of waves, or zig-zags in an occurrence of deep migraine disturbance.[29]

For me, the essence of Osborn's work is a bringing to light of the *scotoma* at the heart of the gaze. In *Wandering Eye Studies*, there are inversions of light and dark, illuminations of outlines of objects, a flattening of the luminosity of the visual field, unsteady flickerings in the resolutions of moving images. Osborn's gaze isolates individuals, keeping tabs, but it does so as basic material for an art that points to its own blind spot—the materiality of the *scotoma* at the core of electronic processing of visual information.

The music to *Wandering Eye Studies* complements the visuals; see Figure 3.13.
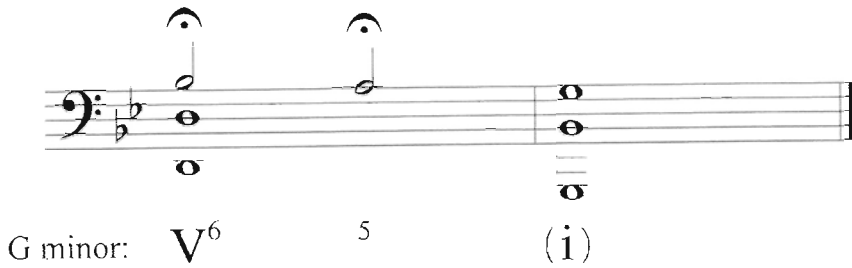
Figure 3.13

What we hear is notated in simple musical notation; we hear octave D-naturals with a B-flat above that moves to an A-natural, in the registers shown. The Roman numerals underneath are my interpretation. One could hear the D-natural as the root of a D major or minor triad with the B-flat as a neighbor note to the A-natural. The triad defining perfect fifth D/A would then enclose a tonic D major triad if the missing note were an F-sharp or a tonic D minor triad if the missing note were an F-natural. But D major would probably win out since the overtone series gives open fifths the major internal third for free. I do not think this is a very musical interpretation, though it is possible. I hear the entire music to *Wandering Eye Studies* as an unresolved dominant that points to, but crucially never reaches, G minor. I hear the D-natural octaves not as tonic, but dominant, with the B-flat to A-natural motion a conventional unresolved fragment of voice-leading; the B-flat/A-natural motion "wants" to complete its descent to G. In the example, I show the resolution of the dominant with its melodic 6-5 motion as it seeks to resolve to G minor—minor because the mode is inherently flat through the B-flat; if the motion had been B-natural/A-natural, then one would hear the missing tonic harmony toward which the progression moves as G major.

The constant, unresolved dominant harmony complements the visuals that are blocked from fully realized, clear resolution of images. But the example above is misleading in the sense that it presents very clear, equal-tempered pitches that could be played on the piano. On the one hand, these pitches are clearly audible in the music; on the other, the pitches "wobble" quite a bit and are highly "noisy."[30] Sometimes, the "note" (such as a B-flat) has an inner beat—the result of two pitches only a few cents apart being played at the same time. Sometimes, the notes bleed into one another; there are several B-flat/A-natural motions that sound more like acoustic smears than clear stepwise motions.[31] Thus, there are two levels of acoustic blurrings that complement the visuals: (1) the large-scale prolongation of an unresolved dominant of G minor; and (2) each note within that large-scale prolongation of an unresolved dominant of G minor beating against its own inner dissonance, noise, and smearing effects.[32]

Figure 3.14 Your Lips are No Man's Land But Mine (red hair) by Jenny Vogel,
2008. Digital C-print. 30" × 40". Used with Permission.

Jenny Vogel did a series of works entitled *Your Lips are No Man's Land
But Mine (Laura)* (2008); see Figure 3.14.[33]

In this work, Vogel has captured a still taken from a webcam. There are
implications of this practice for surveillance, the gaze, and the *objet petit a*.
The webcam is becoming more and more a common feature of early twenty-
first-century ubiquitous surveillance. With the exception of classified military
installations, the surfaces of social spaces across the globe are increasingly
being made available for common viewing. On the one hand, this is the
endpoint of Bentham's panopticon, with surveillance reaching us all, all of
the time; on the other hand, the ubiquity of the gaze of the Other leaves us
more alone than ever before. There were certainly lonely people before the
webcam, but we never saw that loneliness in its pervasive and immanent clarity
quite as well before the webcam with which Jenny Vogel made this work.

But Vogel's subject chose to let herself be seen by her webcam; is then
this image not in the same logical class as an image of a model who consents

to have her image painted? While we clearly have the choice to either have our images seen by webcams on our computers or not, I do believe there is something to a forced choice at work. Here is how this would work. In the traditional model of Althusserian ideological interpellation, the subject turns to meet the gaze of the policeman who shouts "Hey You!" from behind. The 180-degree turn inscribes the subject in the social order by submitting to the gaze and by embodying his or her status as subject of the state by transposing the "you" of the other's address (in the name of the Other) as "I"—the newly articulated grammatical and ideological subject. There is a choice, technically, but if you refuse you are an outlaw—a suspect and not a subject. We must let ourselves be hailed by the language, the law of the Other, in order to function as social subjects. That is the forced choice. It is like the Other's false choice version of "your money, or your life"; for the Other, it is "subject yourself or else!" In the traditional model of ideological interpellation, such hails pervade social spaces, from singing national anthems at sporting events, to watching speeches of one's leaders, to speech acts that acknowledge membership in organizations, schools of thought, even critical approaches to texts.

In Althusser's account, the effect of ideological interpellation is, of course, fleeting; the interests of the State are obviously not the same as those of the subject; the State could actually care less for fleeting fantasies of plenitude that the subject feels in moments of hailing; and though the subject may feel moments of imaginary plenitude in the hail, such moments always fade. Thus, the endless reiterations of hails throughout particularly the mid twentieth century, from fascist rallies, to American sporting events. Allowing for cultural differences among nations and cultures, I still believe that Althusser's model applies to the foundational features of subject formation in Western social spaces through the twentieth century. Toward the end of the twentieth century and into the current twenty-first century, something new is being added to the model of Althusserian ideological interpellation and that is global communication through the Internet and social networking. I believe that alongside the traditional, Althusserian hail, a new form of ideological interpellation is with us—being logged on, being connected, through e-mail, chat forums, and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. For me, the effects of social networking on ideological interpellation are twofold: (1) social activism can and has reached a new level of immediacy and power (witness the transformations in politics in the Middle East throughout the spring of 2011); and (2) some subjects are at the same time more isolated than ever before. The Althusserian model of ideological interpellation takes/took place in grand, public gatherings; the moments of imaginary plenitude at the Nürnberg rally (to take one example) must have been overwhelmingly powerful and immediate. Users of social media, however, are increasingly using smaller and smaller machines with an increasing decrease in visceral power leading to the text message as quintessential hail of the early twenty-first century. For me, it is this kind of isolation that Vogel's work has captured. And the forced choice of early

twenty-first-century connectivity-hail is "Connect, or else!" Or it is simply "Submit!" So, yes, the subjects of Vogel's work have agreed to let themselves be seen on their webcams, but I would argue that in doing so, they have simply agreed with the new imperative of the Other.

So these subjects are online; their webcams are on; and Vogel has captured images at which the interactivity has wound down to near zero. For me, this is a representation/embodiment of not just loneliness, not just isolation, but a zero degree of specular drive—a limit. For me, this work evokes the elusive *objet petit a* of Lacan's algebra. For Lacan, the *objet petit a* is most closely associated with the gaze and voice, and I will return to it from time to time in connection with those registers. Recall the figure introduced in the first chapter of the cyclical block with *objet petit a* at its limit. The *objet petit a* stands for the other (*autre*), related to the breast, the voice of the mother, feces, etc. But it is misleading to think of the *objet petit a* as an object with internal, material consistency, color, substance, surface, dimensions; it is better to think of it as the articulation of a threshold as a limit is about to be crossed but blocked, in terms of sensations coming into or out of focus, of a connection with an imaginary other about to be lost. Lacan refers to the *objet petit a* in a wide variety of contexts throughout his work. For now, in relation to a sketch of his "net," Lacan points out that "[w]e can conceive of the closing of the unconscious through the effect of something that plays the role of obdurator— the *objet a*, sucked, breathed, into the orifice of the net" (Lacan 1981: 144–145). The *objet a* in Vogel's work resides at the threshold of the limit of forced choice of early twenty-first-century connectivity-hail and the radical isolation of its subjects.

Louis-Phillippe Demers did a work entitled *The Tiller Girls*; the work involves a performance of twelve autonomous robots, whose actions mimic, in a variety of ways, the synchronized motions of a line of "Tiller Girls" whose live performances originated in Britian in the late nineteenth century and became a popular form of entertainment in subsequent decades throughout Europe and America; see Figure 3.15.[34]

Demers' robots are autonomous; they each have their own power source and they are capable of executing a small number of motions as a response to wireless communications. The performance strikes me as a comment on both robotics and mainstream, male, heterosexual desire—particularly various traditions of courtly love and an either explicit or implicit evocation of woman as object of desire as a machine. I will explore Demers' work as an embodiment of courtly love from the point of view of anamorphosis.

In his discussion of Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (referred to above in connection with Salavon's work), Lacan connects anamorphosis with castration:

> [a]ll of this shows that at the very heart of the period in which the subject emerged and geometrical optics was an object of research,
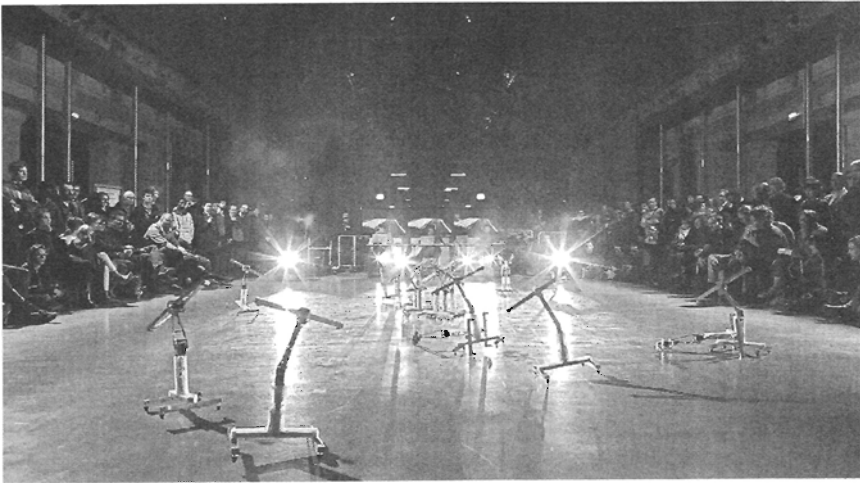
Figure 3.15 Tiller Girls by Louis-Phillippe Demers, 2009. Used with Permission.

> Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject
> as annihilated—annihilated in the form that is, strictly speaking, the
> imaged embodiment of the minus-phi . . . of castration, which for
> us, centres the whole organization of the desires through the frame-
> work of the fundamental drives.
>
> (Lacan 1981: 88–89)

Of course, it is important not to think of castration literally, as powerful as
that intellectual gravitational pull may be; rather, castration shows us our desire.
Or, as Lacan puts it: "[b]eing deprived of woman—this, expressed in terms
of the failure of discourse, is what castration means" (Lacan 2007: 154).

It is precisely such a removal of woman that creates a connection between
Demers' *The Tiller Girls* and the traditions of courtly love. For Lacan:

> The object involved, the feminine object [within the courtly love
> tradition], is introduced oddly enough through the door of privation
> or of inaccessibility . . . this Lady is presented with depersonalized
> characteristics. As a result, writers have noted that all poets seem to
> be addressing the same person.
>
> (Lacan 1997b: 149)

The Lady is not simply generic in her unattainability, she embodies a limit
within mirror stage identification:

> You are aware that the mirror function . . . is defined in the narcissistic
> relation. And the element of idealizing exaltation that is expressly

sought out in the ideology of courtly love has certainly been demonstrated; it is fundamentally narcissistic in character. Well now, the little image represented for us by this anamorphosis permits me to show you which mirror function is involved . . . The mirror may on occasion imply the mechanisms of narcissism, and especially the diminution of destruction or aggression that we will encounter subsequently. But it also fulfills another role, a role as limit. It is that which cannot be crossed.

(Lacan 1997b: 151)

Far then from suggesting a titillating scenario of seduction, domination, and pleasure of which the interested, male, heterosexual gaze might fantasize when contemplating this work, Lacan offers the possibility instead that it simultaneously evokes the object of desire as Thing, as castration, that, were it to appear unmasked, would emerge in the visual field of the work and reveal a single, large X. Demers unmasks precisely this dimension of mainstream, male, heterosexual desire whose underlying machinery he lays bare.

Jim Campbell did a work entitled *Peripheral Rhythm*; see Figure 3.16.[35]

Figure 3.16 Peripheral Rhythm by Jim Campbell, 2006–present. Cast Glass Chair. 2 Video Projectors. LEDs. Glass Screen. DVD Player. Custom Electronics. Used with Permission.

The chair in the foreground of the space is made of glass; there is a play of light as shapes on the low-resolution screen appear synchronized with the light as it appears on and through the translucent material of the chair. I will discuss this work as gaze and *objet petit a*.

A participant in this installation will see a representation of a blurred, low-resolution street scene; his or her attention is thus immediately blocked, the low-resolution images intervening in the specular event, slowing it down, making it palpable. We are immediately looking at looking and therein lies an entrance to the gaze:

> You will see that the ways through which he [Merleau-Ponty] will lead you are not only of the order of visual phenomenology, since they set out to rediscover . . . the dependence of the visible on that which places us under the eye of the seer. But this is going too far, for that eye is only the metaphor of something that I would prefer to call the seer's "shoot" . . . something prior to his eye. What we have to circumscribe, by means of the path he indicates for us, the pre-existence of a gaze—I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.
>
> (Lacan 1981: 72)

Campbell's work embodies gaze as multiple impossible, simultaneous points of view:

> In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call gaze.
>
> (Lacan 1981: 73)

Campbell simultaneously illuminates the gaze through a metaphorical substitution: instead of a chair made of wood and a lens made of glass, there is a chair made of glass. The literal support of the body of the viewer (the chair) becomes an impossible lens through which light passes as the light on the low-resolution images on the screen. But what precisely is the nature of this impossibility?

For one thing, the gaze reveals something hidden about specularity. In reference to a note in Merleau-Ponty, Lacan says:

> [r]ead, for example, the note concerning what he calls the turning inside-out of the finger of a glove, in as much as it seems to appear there—note the way in which the leather envelopes the fur in a winter glove—that consciousness, in its illusion of *seeing itself seeing itself*, finds its basis in the inside-out structure of the gaze.
>
> (Lacan 1981: 82, original emphasis)

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But the gaze is not simply the undoing, the inversion, the unfolding of a specularity whose internal consistency would otherwise be smooth, perfect, and coherent; rather, specularity gains access to gaze through an inherent blemish. To revisit a passage cited above: "[p]sycho-analysis regards the consciousness as irremediably limited, and institutes it as a principle, not only of idealization, but of *méconnaissance*, as—using a term that takes on new value by being referred to a visible domain—*scotoma*" (Lacan 1981: 83). *Scotoma*, as we have seen before, is the blind spot at the heart of specularity. One can think of the blind spot on an elementary level as that dimension of corporality that paradoxically both enables and blocks perception. Our eyes are physical organs in our heads through which we see, but it is precisely our eyes that keep us from seeing the world in anything resembling totality. Consider that we can only focus on one object at a time; consider that we cannot tell through perceptual evidence that two straight railroad tracks do not touch though they seem to touch at the horizon; consider that we cannot look to the vanishing point of two opposing mirrors (one in front of us and one in the back) precisely because our heads are in the way. We have constitutive blinds spots like this for all of our sensations.

But the blind spot also pertains to the psychic apparatus as such, as the site of our separation that is both the cause and effect of subjectivity:

> It is here that I propose that the interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it—namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real [the Lacanian Real], whose name, in our algebra, is the *objet* [*petit*] *a*.
>
> (Lacan 1981: 83)

Rather than an entity with abiding attributes, the *objet petit a* suggests a residual charge of energy at those places of the body at which separation both tears us away from, and connects us to, the other:

> [i]t is the recognition of the drive that enables us to construct, the greatest certainty, the functioning that I call the functioning of the division of the subject, or alienation. And how has the drive itself been recognized? It has been recognized in this that, far from the dialectic of what occurs in the subject's unconscious being able to be limited to the reference to the field of *Lust*, to the images of beneficent, favourable objects, we have found a certain type of objects which, in the final resort, can serve no function. These are the *objet* [*petit*] *a*—the breasts, the faeces, the gaze, the voice.
>
> (Lacan 1981: 242)

The breast, feces, gaze, and voice—rims of flesh at which our separation from and connection to the other are all at once paradoxically articulated. In

Campbell's work, the viewer stands at a remove from the chair of the material support from the body. And that chair's support is not the brute thingness of wood, but the very stuff of specularity itself—light.

Another element of specular impossibility embodied in Campbell's work is the distinct, uncanny simultaneity with which light changes appear on the low-resolution screen and on the chair. In a rereading of the well-known passage from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which Freud illustrates *fort-da*, Lacan understands a crucial role of the *objet petit a* and the particular form of binary oppositions characteristic of the Symbolic Order:

> If it is true that the signifier is the first mark of the subject, how can we fail to recognize here—from the very fact that this game [*fort-da*] is accompanied by one of the first oppositions to appear—that it is in the object to which the opposition is applied in act, the reel, that we must designate the subject. To this object we will give the name it bears in the Lacanian algebra—the [*objet*] *petit a*. The activity as a whole symbolizes repetition, but not at all that of some need that might demand the return of the mother and which would be expressed quite simply in a cry. It is the repetition of the mother's departure as cause of a *Spaltung* in the subject—overcome by the alternating game, *fort-da*, which is a *here* or *there*, and whose aim, in its alternation, is simply that of being the *fort* of a *da*, and the *da* of a *fort*.
>
> (Lacan 1981: 62–63, original emphasis)

This last phrase captures the sense of a Lacanian signifier as in part that which points to an absence; the last phrase also embodies the essence of binary oppositions in the Symbolic. In the Imaginary, binaries are mutually exclusive forms of identification; they are one-to-one; in the Symbolic, binaries take their place in series of signifiers; they are one-to-many (like a chain of coin tosses; each "0" is a "0" for a "1" and each "1" is a "1" for a "0").

For Lacan, the reel (the object in Freud that his nephew tosses away and gathers back to himself by a thread) is not so much *objet petit a* in a one-to-one series of attributes as an indication of that place of the body at which separation and symbolic connection are fused—the child's eye. In the *fort-da* game, as in the American peekaboo equivalent, there is a series of gestures that correspond to a "here" and a "there" as in a series of coin tosses. That series belies an always-already simultaneity of connection and separation upon which the *objet petit a* depends; and that simultaneity is rendered visible in Campbell's work, in the impossible simultaneity of light as it appears at once on the translucent materiality of the chair and in the blurred light of the screen.

Notes

1. In the online documentation of this work, the colors are extremely muted, but one can see that the image is not black and white; the candle, for example, does suggest

a very muted yellow/brown. The rest of the picture plane looks almost indistinguishable from black and white.

2. The French word for both "look" and "gaze" in French is *regard*; when I say that Lacan has little to say about "look," I mean that his use of the word *regard* signifies mostly what we understand as "gaze."

3. I first encountered this idea in Žižek (1992b: 89–90); for a collection of works of anamorphotic art, see Massey (2007).

4. For online documentation of Blauth's work, see www.bblauth.de/HOME_E.html (accessed May 19, 2011).

5. In the online documentation, the picture has nuanced colors; the skin of the man's face, for example, is a flesh tone.

6. For online documentation of Rozin's work, see www.smoothware.com/danny/ (accessed May 21, 2011). The work has a wooden hue in each of its details and its impression of the whole.

7. For me, the pleasure of *Wooden Mirror* derives from an aspect of the work that is not explicitly mirror-like; the pleasure of seeing one's actions reflected are also like the marks of ourselves that we leave upon the world—like toes dragging along wet sand on the beach, or hands on old velvet making dark patches as you stroke it against the grain of the fabric.

8. For online documentation, see www.lozano-hemmer.com/the_company_of_colours.php (accessed May 23, 2011). In online documentation, various sections of the subject's face and figure are present in different colors. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *The Company of Colours*, *Shadow Box 9*, 2010. Galerie Max Estrella, ARCO, Madrid, Spain. Photo by Antimodular Research. Used with Permission.

9. See Saussure (1959). For an introduction to Saussure and his place in early twentieth-century thought, see Culler (1986).

10. For online documentation of Levin's work, see www.flong.com/ (accessed May 8, 2011).

11. In the online documentation of this work, the eyes are an anti-naturalistic yellow/gold suggesting a metallic yellow rather than a hue that would suggest human beings.

12. "Perhaps the more interesting thing about blinking is that we do it more frequently than is necessary to cleanse and moisten the cornea. Infants, for example, blink once every minute or so, but adults blink an average of 10 to 15 times a minute. This has lead scientists to discover other, more psychologically influenced reasons for blinking as frequently as we do. Research has shown that when information acquisition is important, we actively inhibit blinking. We blink more often when we are not taking in and processing information. In this way, blinks are like punctuation marks of the mind, signalling a pause in the activity in your head." See www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3076704 (accessed May 8, 2011).

13. Freud connects this fear of losing one's eyes with castration anxiety; another common motive in the uncanny is the image of the double—a powerful and popular theme in early nineteenth-century literature and music. For Freud, the double represents an early stage of ego-formation. For a musical setting of a poem involving a double, see Franz Schubert, "Doppelgänger." In Schubert's setting of Heine's poem, the music in B minor has both a diatonic mediant (D major) and a chromatic mediant (D-sharp minor)—the music's uncanny double.

14. This inversion resides in Lacan's Schema L (Lacan 1991b: 243–247).

15. One can think of Freud's *fort-da* game as a product of the waning of the mirror stage. Once the child is no longer so completely captivated by the image in the mirror, he or she will seek a means of mediating imaginary loss. See Freud (1961: 12–17).

16. In the online documentation, the background is black and the flesh tones naturalistic.
17. For online documentation of Zachary Lieberman's work, see http://thesystemis. com/ (accessed May 10, 2011). The exquisite corpse technique derives from a kind of automatic writing formulated by the surrealists: "Among Surrealist techniques exploiting the mystique of accident was a kind of collective collage of words or images called the *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse). Based on an old parlor game, it was played by several people, each of whom would write a phrase on a sheet of paper, fold the paper to conceal part of it, and pass it on to the next player for his contribution" (Rubin n.d.). There are versions of the exquisite corpse in painting and literature.
18. For online documentation, see www.lozano-hemmer.com/ (accessed May 10, 2011). In the online documentation, the faces are quite reddish.
19. In the online documentation, the flesh tones of the bodies towards the left are quite reddish; the objects towards the right are pale white.
20. According to online documentation, 50% of the couples kissing are women/women; 30% are men/men; 20% are men/women—an apparently accurate representation of how couples are presented kissing online: see http://lozano-hemmer.com/videos/ makeout_hd.mov (accessed May 23, 2011).
21. In online documentation, the colors and lighting of the exhibition space are dark and muted; the eye looks like a naturalistic close-up of a human eye.
22. In the online documentation, there are vivid orange, blue, and yellow lines.
23. For online documentation of Camille Utterback's work, see http://camilleutterback. com/projects/external-measures-2003/ (accessed August 16, 2011).
24. Lacan's Seminar VII presents discussions of the four discourses; each discourse has the same four elements in different positions. What determines the discourse in question (master, university, hysteric, analytic) is the position of each of the four elements in relation to each other (they rotate counter-clockwise from one to the next discourse). The four elements are: (1) upper-case "S" with subscript 1—the master signifier or the signifier that intervenes in the signifying chain; (2) upper-case "S" with a subscript 2—knowledge; (3) lower-case italicized "a"— the *objet petit a*—that thing with just a little bit of otherness; and (4) the upper-case "S" with a diagonal bar (running from the upper right of the letter to the lower left)—the barred subject. The upper left-hand position is "command" (Lacan 2007: 43); the lower left-hand position is "truth" (Lacan 2007: 102); the upper right-hand corner is "master" (Lacan 2007: 129); and the lower right-hand corner is the "place of production" (Lacan 2007: 176).
25. The online documentation is black and white.
26. For online documentation of Ed Osborn's work, see www.roving.net/ (accessed May 12, 2011).
27. See Bentham (n.d.).
28. See Freud (1911: 9–82); see also Lacan (1997a). For a reading of the Schreber case that is sharply critical of Freud and Lacan, see Schreber (1955).
29. See www.thefreedictionary.com/scotoma (accessed May 12, 2011). As the definition here suggests, the literal blind spot has acquired a secondary, metaphorical meaning indicating a conceptual block, inhibition, or restriction.
30. There are no clear criteria of audibility in this case. Most people are probably able or not able to hear above or below certain frequencies; but the present discussion has to do with pitches surrounded by noise. Training, skill, temperament, and practice will make some people able to sing notes that are surrounded by noise (as in Osborn's piece), while others might say that the sounds are simply noisy.
31. The techniques of analysis I am using are from classical music theory; sound art both relies on and departs significantly from standard, classical musical materials.

Conventional techniques of musical analysis can be helpful in discussing pitch structure, such as here. For explorations of other parameters such as texture and timbre, other techniques are perhaps more appropriate, such as sonogram mappings and other graphic techniques used by software programs.

32. To be precise, beats such as this can be produced quite easily in software environments. For instance, if you can produce an A-natural to which orchestras tune (A-440) and then also play an A-450, you will hear the tension between the two notes as a subtle beating sound like a bird flapping its wings. If you gradually bring the two notes closer together, for example by having the A-450 descend through 449, 448, 447, etc., the beating will quicken. What happens when the two notes get so close you no longer hear beats is that you get a sense of a single, thicker note. This is precisely what happens on piano notes in the lower register. Look inside a piano and notice that many notes that sound like "one" have two or three strings. Pluck them and you may hear the slightest differences among them. These differences determine the "fatness" of the sound.

33. Digital c-print, 30" × 40". For online documentation, see www.jennyvogel.net/yourlips.html (accessed May 16, 2011). The original print is black and white.

34. The online documentation shows metal parts that are black and white with occasional red pieces; the stage floor is gray.

35. The online documentation shows a screen that is very bright with white light and a chair of apparently translucent glass.