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The Viewing Self: A Reflection on Mirrors as Medium from the 1960s to the Present

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The Viewing Self:
A Reflection on Mirrors as Medium from the 1960s to the Present

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Arts
of Bard College

by
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Introduction

The basic idea of reflection is an optical one, and it's appropriate that we have this term in English for meditative, contemplative, deeper-than-normal thinking...it gives primacy to the role of the visual in our particular culture's approach to thinking about thinking.¹

-Susan Hiller

My personal interest in reflection began with my experience of Yayoi Kusama's *Fireflies on the Water*, an immersive mirrored environment installed for the artist's 2012 retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art (fig I-1). Ushered through a small door in an innocuous, freestanding white cube, I was awestruck by the vision of thousands of glittering lights stretching infinitely into the distance. As my eyes adjusted to the illusion produced by the mirrored walls and ceiling, I caught sight of my own reflection as it too multiplied interminably beyond. The door closed tightly behind me, signaling that my sixty seconds in the space had begun. I slowly turned in circles, darting my eyes around to meet the shifting gazes of my infinite likenesses. An odd sensation overwhelmed me: while the mirrors attuned me to my own body, I simultaneously grew disconnected from it, as though my reflections could just keep spinning off into the infinite void. But before I could analyze my confusingly concurrent break and union with myself, the space was suddenly flooded with light; my minute was up.

This piece made me think more broadly about what would later become the guiding question of this project: how mirrors are used to provoke self-reflection in viewers by drawing attention to the act of looking itself. As Susan Hiller noted in the quote above, the word reflection evokes the process of thinking about thinking. Faced

¹ Susan Hiller, "Reflections," The Townsend Lecture. University College London, London. 22 Nov. 1989. from *Thinking About Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996): 69.

with their reflections in a mirrored work of art, viewers have to look at themselves looking. An interest in drawing viewers into the work characterized much of the art of the 1960s and 70s. The mirror, once a previously unexplored medium, presented an opportunity for literally reflecting viewers within the art object itself. As the mirrored surface is not subject specific—it is a blank slate until a figure enters its field of reflection—audience interaction with a mirrored work of art is integral to the piece’s function and meaning. Mirror-art draws attention to dynamics inherent in art’s viewership, displaying spectators in their surroundings and confronting them with their own ways of seeing. This project focuses on three distinct manifestations of mirror-art from the 1960s and 70s that distort, fragment, and directly implicate their viewers to provoke self-reflection on the act of looking itself.

Each chapter of this thesis concentrates on an artwork that illustrates a different way the mirror functioned as a medium during this foundational era of its history.² While the following works are integral to my discussion of mirror-art and viewer implication, I have not set out to produce comprehensive investigations of their roles in the larger oeuvres of their creators. Instead, I utilize works by Joan Jonas, Yayoi Kusama, and Dan Graham to explore specific themes that artists of the 1960s and 70s used mirrors to articulate. As mirrors are most often associated with female vanity, I begin with Joan Jonas’ *Mirror Piece I* (1969), in which the artist unified female bodies with mirrors to reflect the viewer’s objectifying gaze back, thus displacing this vanity from the female body to the audience. Yayoi Kusama also critiqued viewer narcissism in *Narcissus*

² A comprehensive timeline of mirrors in art, film, and literature can be found on pages 67-69 of the exhibition catalogue *Mirror, Mirror: Then and Now*. The timeline begins with Robert Rauschenberg’s use of mirrors in two combines in 1954, but the first instance of mirror as a work’s central medium is Robert Morris’ *Mirrored Portal* in 1961. The timeline ends with Gerhard Richter’s first monumental mirror installation in 1981.

Garden (1966), but with a focus on the consumer culture inherent to the art world, and implicated her viewers as direct participants in this system of exchange. Like Kusama, Dan Graham used reflection to highlight the art institution as a center for exchange, but focused purely on its social dynamics by placing spectators on display in *Public Space/Two Audiences* (1976). Only activated by human presence, these pieces demand that viewers continuously question their evolving roles within the reception and perception of artworks.

While several tomes have been devoted to the mirror's history in culture, science, and art, there are no books solely devoted to the mirror as an art *medium*.³ Several exhibitions have tackled the use of mirrors in art within the past decade, but most have failed to demonstrate a strong thematic link between mirrored works beyond their common material.⁴ Fortunately, mirror-art has been the subject of two recent exhibitions whose accompanying catalogues have helped close this gap in scholarship. From 2008 to 2010, curator Timothy Long explored how mimetic structures have been used to perform cultural critique in three exhibitions entitled "Mirror Series." Though the first of these shows, *Let Me Be Your Mirror*, questioned viewers' positions before a mirror, it featured mirror-art alongside works that merely represented mirrors.⁵ Only one exhibition focused solely on mirrors as a medium for implicating audiences. In 2010 *Mirror Mirror: Then*

³ For general information about mirrors, see Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*; Mark Pendergrast, *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection*; Marilena Mosco, "Tricks from a Double World."

⁴ See Regina Coppola, *Mirror Tenses: Conflating Time and Presence*.

⁵ The other two exhibitions in this series, *Double Space* and *My Evil Twin*, focused on side-by-side video projections, and twins and doubles, respectively; thus, straying from my area of focus. Timothy Long, "Theatroclasm," from *Theatroclasm: Mirrors, Mimesis and the Place of the Viewer*. Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2009: 6.

and Now curator Ann Stephen tracked the emergence of viewer-activated mirror-art in the 1960s and 70s.⁶

The mirrored works from this era that I focus on also present a reflective surface at eye-level, engaging in a direct confrontation with the viewer. But by focusing only on mirror-art that distorts or fragments the viewer's reflection, the pieces that structure this thesis also stress the ambiguities of seeing. *Mirror Mirror* culminated in a second show, aimed toward establishing the legacy of historic mirrored works by comparing them to contemporary Australian artists also using mirrors.⁷ Beyond simply comparing the history of mirror-art to its legacy, I explore the evolution of three seminal works themselves by tracing the ways in which they have been reconfigured for contemporary institutions. In 2004, Eileen R. Doyle's dissertation analyzed four case studies of various artists in order to investigate mirrors as a material since the 1960s and relate the evolution of the mirror to concurrent trends in philosophical discourse.⁸ I also consider reflection as both a practice and medium; however, my project does not aim to scrutinize any artist's career in relation to contemporary practices. Rather, I utilize specific mirrored works to illustrate distinct conceptual approaches to implicating spectators with reflection.

Moreover, my study departs from existing scholarship by discussing later iterations of Jonas, Kusama, and Graham's mirror-art in relation to their *own* histories. In this way, I focus not only on the self-reflection provoked in mirror-art's viewers, but also on the self-reflection invoked by the artist's process of recreating artwork. Upon

⁶ This exhibition was a joint project of Institute Of Modern Art, Brisbane and University Art Gallery, University of Sydney, in association with Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide.

⁷ In 2010, "Then" featured historic mirrored art, and was displayed at University Art Gallery from January 4-May 2. "Now" placed contemporary mirror-art on view at Tin Sheds & Verge from March 25-May 1.

⁸ Eileen R. Doyle, *Art in the Mirror: Reflection in the Work of Rauschenberg, Richter, Graham and Smithson*. Dissertation, The Ohio State University. Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 2004 (Publication No. AAT 3159919.): iii.

remaking a work, an artist must reflect on his or her own changing position in art history, that particular piece's role in the trajectory of his or her career, and how best to preserve—or transform—the piece's original intentions.⁹ When that work is mirrored, the self-reflection inherent in the artist's process of recreation is also relayed to the viewer, who, upon looking at her likeness in the mirror, must reflect on the interplay between the self, the artist, and the environment.

Each core work in this thesis represents a turning point in its artist's career, after which he or she expanded on the themes and structures at play to produce the work for which he or she is most well known. Joan Jonas converted the act of mirroring into performances with live video feeds; Yayoi Kusama threw herself into Happenings that manipulated the human body to make radical statements, and later returned to mirrors to create dazzling environments; Dan Graham began constructing large-scale public pavilions using signature reflective surfaces. The breadth of the literature on these artists focuses on these eras in their careers, which is why this project presents a unique perspective on their work. By uniting these three artists in their use of mirrors and highlighting the ways they each employed their common material to provoke different forms of self-reflection in viewers, I hope to shed new light on the role of spectatorship in mirror-art.

I begin the first chapter, which focuses on a feminist approach to mirror-art, with a brief discussion of the historical association between mirrors and female vanity. This artistic legacy sheds light on Joan Jonas' 1969 performance *Mirror Piece I*, in which the artist used her own body and those of fifteen female dancers to manipulate full-length

⁹ Isla Leaver-Yap, "The Artist's Remake," *MAP 21* (Spring 2010): pub. 4 February 2010, acc. 6 November 2013. Web. <http://mapmagazine.co.uk/8971/report-the-artist-remake/>

mirrors in fluid, non-narrative choreography. By integrating, doubling, and segmenting the female body with mirrors, Jonas put the audience's perception at the forefront of the action while reflecting their gazes back out; distracting them with their own vanity and forcing them to confront themselves in the act of looking at the female form in motion. A 2010 showcase considered *Mirror Piece I*'s importance within the history of performance. However, it did not investigate the relationship between the mirror and the female body, or the mirrors' abilities to reflect simultaneously the artist's process of recreation and the audience's process of perception.¹⁰ Jonas' feminist leanings are often discussed in reference to later performance works—in which she overtly embodied emblems of femininity—but are disregarded in existing scholarship on *Mirror Piece I*.

The female body was also placed on display alongside mirrors in Yayoi Kusama's intervention at the 1966 Venice Biennale, *Narcissus Garden*, but rather than highlighting the male gaze, Kusama used the material to comment on consumer culture within the art world. My second chapter focuses on this countercultural performance, which featured a kimono-clad Kusama selling 1,500 plastic mirrored orbs for two dollars a piece to patrons of the Biennale beside a sign that read, "Your Narcissism for Sale." Putting her otherness on display at a major art world event, Kusama took control over the commodification of artwork while protesting the system of exchange occurring within the pavilions around her. When confronted with a mirror, an inherent desire to see one's own reflection emerges; Kusama played with this narcissism, asking passersby to acknowledge their own vanity as art buyers and viewers and recognize their roles within the larger socioeconomic circuit of the art fair. A retrospective of Kusama's mirrored works

¹⁰ *Mirror Piece I* was presented as part of the "Thinking Performance" symposium at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York on Thursday, June 17 2010.

travelled internationally in 2009, but the show focused primarily on the integration of the audience into the artist's oft-discussed mental state.¹¹ An emphasis on Kusama's psychological narrative mutes the overtly political *Narcissus Garden*, which in its original inception actively engaged the issue of looking and perception.

The third chapter of this project explores a mirrored work that also focused on art's consumption, but emphasized the act of looking itself rather than the actual purchasing of art. Dan Graham's *Public Space/Two Audiences*, created specifically for the 1976 Venice Biennale, is a work that is entirely reliant on viewer presence. A long, rectangular room bisected by a thick sheet of soundproof, semi-reflective glass placed occupants in a display case. The reflective interplay between this partition and the mirror that filled one of the parallel walls confronted viewers with multiple images of themselves. At once unified with one another and separated, the audience was left to navigate their own understandings of the social relations within this gallery space that offered no spectacle besides the act of looking itself. Graham explored how a viewer perceived her peers and herself by forcing her to witness her identity as one amongst a group, being seen by herself and others. Instead of looking at an object in a museum, the audience became a part of the artwork; the act of viewing was placed on display, objectified for all to see. Graham continued to manipulate reflection in his later work, such that the majority of his literature centers around the way he pushes viewers to observe the way they are seen among others. But as he moved beyond the gallery space, erecting public pavilions, scholarship tends to frame Graham's work within an

¹¹ *Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years*, exh. cat. Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2009.

architectural context and thus all social implications are tied up in the observer's relationship to her environment.¹²

In the 1960s, mirrors offered artists a new medium through which they could question perception and provoke self-reflection in their viewers. The original iterations of these three works by Jonas, Kusama, and Graham all capitalized on the essential human impulse to gaze upon oneself when faced with a reflective surface. Each artist used this to his or her own specific advantage, employing mirrors to shock viewers into reflecting on their roles as spectators of art. Yet as mirrors have saturated the art of the new millennium, contemporary audiences have grown accustomed to the phenomenon that was so destabilizing to spectators during the 1960s.

When left to their own devices, most contemporary viewers of mirror-art are quick to reach for their smartphones and snap photographs of their reflections. This phenomenon—popularly referred to as an “art selfie”—restricts the recently crowned Oxford English Dictionary word of the year 2013 to only entail self-portraits taken in reflective pieces of art.¹³ The art selfie creates an intriguing paradox, for while it interrupts viewers' deep self-consideration, it also immortalizes the act of looking itself. Not simply an image of the self in front of an artwork, or the self within an art environment, the art selfie presents the very moment of viewing art. By capturing the photographer's self-reflection, the art selfie provides accessible evidence of a viewer's active engagement with a work, and represents a step in her own self-constructed

¹² Beatriz Colomina came closest to my interpretation of *Public Space/Two Audiences*, but framed her analysis within a discussion of Graham's architectural interests and influences. This strays from my reading of the piece, which centers around the enclosure's *lack* of context. Beatriz Colomina, “Beyond Pavilions: Architecture as a Machine to See,” in *Dan Graham: Beyond*, exh. cat. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009: 191-207.

¹³ “The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2013 Is....” *OxfordWords Blog*, Oxford Dictionaries, pub. 18 November 2013, acc. 18 November 2013. Web. <http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2013/11/word-of-the-year-2013-winner>

identity. Yet by drawing the viewer's attention away from the art itself, the art selfie disrupts this prolonged self-reflection by redirecting the viewer's self-image from the mirror to the pixels on her phone. Though this reduces the artist's control over a viewer's self-perception, by highlighting the act of looking, art selfies ultimately facilitate participants'—witting or unwitting—preservation and reinvigoration of the foundational themes and intentions of 1960s and 70s conceptual mirror-art.

Chapter One

Joan Jonas: Reflecting the Gaze

One by one, mirror after mirror passes by your range of vision. A slice of your reflection is presented to you for a split second, before your visage jumps over to the next mirror. Once all fifteen full-length mirrors are lined up before you, their female handlers tilt them up and down at different intervals, capturing every facet of your surroundings in disjointed reflection. Your own reflection is in constant motion; as the formation breaks apart and the choreography commences, you hunt for your fragmented likeness amongst the reflections of the rest of the audience. The dancers' slow, methodical movements become hypnotizing as their mirrors refract light across the floor, destabilizing your vision as your image is thrust into a dizzying sea of faces. As you track your image in the movements of a single mirror, a man interrupts your reverie by lifting the female body that controls your reflector, and relocating her to a new position in the performance space. Your reflection is under her power, but her agency is manipulated by a male presence. Even the artist's own body is at the mercy of male control, as her stiff, horizontal form only moves about the space when lifted by the two male performers.

Yet the gender dynamics at play in these opening moments of Joan Jonas' work of performance, *Mirror Piece I* (fig 1-1), are complicated by Jonas' role as its creator. Performed three times in 1969, *Mirror Piece I* came at a radical time for women in the art world. In the late 1960s and early 70s, female artists turned to the fledgling practices of performance and body art to express specifically feminine issues while eschewing prevailing artistic customs, such as abstract painting, which were largely dominated by

men.¹⁴ Video and performance art were largely unexplored territory in this era, and thus tended to be viewed as radical, but these media have since become standard in artmaking. Female artists have also become more accepted and better represented in the mainstream art world, a belief that Jonas herself asserts.¹⁵ Jonas, whose practice is extremely self-reflexive and constantly evolving, took these cultural changes into consideration when recreating this seminal piece for contemporary audiences.

Staged over four decades after its original iteration, *Mirror Piece I: Reconfigured* placed greater emphasis on Jonas' creative authority than in 1969. Instead of using her body to symbolize a manipulated female identity, in this recent iteration Jonas briefly reentered the performance at its close, guiding two dancers through seemingly improvised choreography. The two women's mirrors reflected Jonas in the act of performing, and as their actions mimicked the artist's, while following a half step behind, Jonas' directorial position was emphasized. The subtle changes made to this piece over time all seem to indicate the growing agency of female artists in the medium of performance since the 1960s.

Asserting her artistic control more overtly than she did in 1969, Jonas confronted viewers with the intentionality of this potentially illusive, hypnotic work. Beyond the work's optical effects, I will investigate the ways Jonas uses subtle signifiers throughout *Mirror Piece I* to challenge conventional notions of femaleness and call attention to gendered ways of seeing. When discussing the influence of performance on his early sculptural development, Richard Serra cited Jonas, saying, "Joan's was really about the

¹⁴ Lucy R. Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: Women's Body Art," *Art in America*, vol. 100, no. 11 (December 2012): 131.

¹⁵ Jonas, Joan and Priscilla Frank, "Video Art Pioneer Joan Jonas On Her Upcoming Performa Piece, YouTube, Cooking And Bees," *The Huffington Post*, 1 Nov. 2013. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

choreography of the perception of the viewer.”¹⁶ This quotation neatly sets up my approach to Jonas’ use of mirrors: by capturing viewers’ reflections in mirrors controlled by women, Jonas confronts the audience with an image of themselves as spectators of the female body, performing in a work by a female artist. Over the years since the piece’s original iteration, Jonas has been able to channel her growing notoriety and success into the transformation of several earlier works. When reimagining *Mirror Piece I*, Jonas made a more explicit commentary on the viewer’s role in the consumption of art, and in the consumption of the female form.

Private into Public

As curator Elizabeth Matheson writes, “the introduction of a mirror to a work of art immediately compounds its meaning with the presence of an image within an image...which reflects the history of its use as object and metaphor.”¹⁷ In an artwork as laden with mirrors as Jonas’, one cannot help but consider the historical associations between women and reflection in visual culture. It is a common artistic trope to depict women absorbed in a private moment of introspection with their reflections. Joan Jonas took this notion a step further in the 1960s and 70s by actively engaging with mirrors before an audience, and reclaiming their power over femininity in works of public performance. In all three iterations of *Mirror Piece I* in 1969, Jonas performed the work in alternative spaces, first at Loeb Student Center at New York University, then at Gilles Larraine’s loft at 66 Grand Street in New York City, and finally brought the work outdoors, performing on a lawn at Bard College, in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York.

¹⁶ Richard Serra from Joan Simon, “Joan Jonas: An Image is Never Fixed,” *Art-Press*, vol. 400 (May 2013): 37.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Matheson, “Let Me Be Your Mirror,” from *Theatroclasm*, exh. cat. (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2009): 30.

Other female artists in the 70s used the mirror as a prop in public performances, but in more explicitly feminist pieces, such as the 1972 performance *Lea's Room* (fig 1-2) by Karen LeCocq and Nancy Youdelman. As part of the feminist exhibition "Womanhouse", LeCocq sat down at a vanity in an antique-filled room as the character Lea. Twice a week for the one month duration of the open, free exhibit, Lea scrutinized her reflection while applying layer after layer of makeup, acting out the torment the artists felt women go through to present an acceptable face to the world.

By placing this mirror ritual on display, LeCocq and Youdelman attempted to regain control of the female self-image, and reveal the damaging nature of culturally ingrained obsessions with female appearance. In 1954 Norman Rockwell painted a young girl sitting before a mirror, an open magazine in her lap revealing the image of a female celebrity whose appearance she appears to emulate while contemplating her own reflection. Her childhood doll discarded in favor of a pile of beauty tools at her feet, *Girl at the Mirror* (fig 1-3) highlights the social expectations for beauty imposed on young girls, and the pressure to attain an ideal feminine identity. Like *Mirror Piece I*, these works allow the public into a private experience of self-reflection, but their mirrors serve a different purpose. The female subjects of *Lea's Room* and *Girl at the Mirror* draw out negative connotations of the mirror, highlighting its role as a tool for female oppression. Jonas takes a distinct approach to the mirror by affording her performers a sense of self-awareness when interacting with their reflections that creates radically active female subjects.

In *Mirror Piece I*, Jonas places the female body behind the mirror, not before it. Each of the fifteen female performers carries a full-length mirror in front of her, shielding

her body from the audience's collective gaze. As the performance progresses, the women slowly shift through a sequence of movements while angling the mirrors backward and forward, upright and sideways (fig 1-4). Each performer plays with different ways to carry and wrap her body around the mirror, whether extending a single limb before the reflective surface or drawing herself entirely behind it, so only her fingertips intermingle with viewers' reflections. The interactions between performers also vary throughout the piece; at times they spread out and move independently, to a more chaotic effect, before coming together in neat circular or linear formations, all the while continuing to manipulate and shift the mirrors to reflect one another in a fragmented web (fig 1-5). Significantly, while all of this is underway, every movement of a female body is echoed by its mirrored partner (fig 1-6). When a performer lies down on her side, she tilts her mirror horizontally, facing the audience, and when she rolls onto her back, the mirror moves with her, resting flat atop her stomach. When the woman leans forward towards the audience, the mirror tilts downward, and the viewers' reflections travel up the reflective façade until their faces are obscured, or their bodies completely disappear.

This unification of the female body with the mirror is deeply symbolic when considered within the context of feminist art works in the early 1970s. Though early, the themes at play in *Mirror Piece I* relate to the trends in feminist performance that followed. As Lucy Lippard points out, when women began to use their own faces and bodies in photography, performance, film, and video, rather than merely appearing as props in pieces by male artists, body works by women were perceived as radical.¹⁸

Mirror Piece I, however, does not blatantly engage in feminist issues but rather is far more subtle in its engagement in a historical dialogue with female identity. This subtlety

¹⁸ Lippard, 2012: 131.

seems to account for the lack of discussion of Jonas' early works like *Mirror Piece I*—the third documented piece in her career—in the context of other feminist performance pieces of this era. Many scholars choose to highlight the illusionism of Jonas' early mirrored pieces, focusing on the ways she works to define and confuse the space in which she performs.¹⁹ They acknowledge her implication of the viewer but only in the context of questioning spectatorship in general, without alluding to specifically gendered ways of seeing. Paling in the shadow of Jonas' later, more overtly feminist performance pieces, these early mirrored works tend to be portrayed as mere steps in the development of Jonas' interests in themes of doubling, illusion, and identity, which she later expanded on with live video feeds.

In *Mirror Piece I*, for example, it is feasible that the manipulations of full-length mirrors by performers could simply be understood as hypnotic, illusive actions that distort the space around them and directly engage an audience in the action of the piece. However, Jonas' subtle implication of art history adds much greater meaning to the union of the female body and the mirror. Jonas, who has an academic background in art history and sculpture, would have been aware of the long-standing association between the vertical plane and the figure.²⁰ Vertically oriented landscape paintings of mountains evoke portraiture, and minimalist sculptures of monolithic columns suggest a human presence. The body is the essential material in performance art, and when united with a reflective surface that not only mimics the movements of a figure but also her form, it does in fact seem to make a radical statement about the female body under scrutiny. The historical association between women and mirrors, and its emphasis on female vanity,

¹⁹ Like Judith Rodenbeck, Anne M. Wagner, Carla Liss.

²⁰ Carla Liss and Joan Jonas. "Show Me Your Dances....Joan Jonas and Simone Forti Talk with Carla Liss." *Art & Artists*, vol. 8 (October 1973): 15.

plays a role in *Mirror Piece I*, where fifteen women become one with their reflections. As posited by John Berger, when the subject of a European nude stares at her reflection in the mirror, she joins her own spectators, who view her as devious for treating herself as a sight, for succumbing to the vanity bestowed upon her by her male creator himself.²¹ But the women in Jonas' piece have agency over their reflections, for they control their every move, and the ways in which others view them. Their mirrors serve not as symbols of their own vanity but rather as deflectors, protectors against the gaze of their audience. Through Jonas' choreography, the performers actively decide which parts of themselves to reveal, which to conceal, and when to do so. They see themselves in the context of how they are seen, and the mirror becomes a tool for conveying this power as they reflect and distort their viewers' scrutiny. They are no longer on display for viewing pleasure but rather exist in direct opposition of it.

Doubling & Vanity: The Audience in the Mirror

Questions of viewer identity emerge when the female performers in *Mirror Piece I* reflect this connoted vanity back at their spectators, forcing them to watch themselves in the act of viewing the artwork. The notion of self-reflection harkens back to another point made by John Berger, who argues in his book *Ways of Seeing* that the woman's self is essentially split in two, for she is conditioned from a young age to constantly watch herself, and thus her identity is defined as both surveyor and surveyed.²² The surveyed part of the woman's identity lives in constant insecurity, policed by the surveyor, who persistently envisions her own actions as she feels others view them.²³ The association between the female body and a reflective surface in *Mirror Piece I* can be understood

²¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. (London: Penguin Book, 1972): 50.

²² Berger, 46.

²³ Berger, 46.

within this conception of female identity. Each performer's reflection is doubled and fragmented as she interacts with her own mirror and the mirrors around her, thus lending visual expression to this phenomenon of a woman's split sense of self.

By capturing her audiences in these same reflective devices, splitting their likeness over and over, and allowing them to form brief connections with their self-image before they are ripped away, Jonas forces viewers to experience this aspect of the female psyche. The spectators' view of themselves in these mirrors are at the mercy of another's control, just as the female identity is determined by external factors in accordance with Berger's theory. Watching themselves among others, all engaged in the act of looking, viewers may begin to consider their own identities as observers of art. Directly implicated in the choreography and thrown into the interactions between mirrored surfaces, viewers must thus confront the fact that the artist is intentionally calling attention to spectatorship itself, more specifically, the way the female body is viewed within a work of art.

As early as the fifteenth century, the female nude became one of the most pervasive themes in European portraiture, thus complicating the role of the era's predominantly male spectatorship. Diego Velázquez painted *The Rokeby Venus* (fig 1-7) in 1648, depicting the Roman goddess of love in a sensual reclining pose, gazing at her nude reflection in a mirror. This painting affords the viewer a privileged position behind Venus' exposed body, while she is absorbed in a moment of vanity and seemingly disengaged from her spectator's presence. But unlike the voyeurs of seventeenth century European nudes, the spectators of *Mirror Piece I* are confronted with female subjects who are actively engaging with both their reflections and their audience. According to the early twentieth century psychologist Jacques Lacan's early work, "the human subject

oscillates between two poles: the image, which is alienating, and the real body, which is in pieces."²⁴ Similarly, Jonas provokes an experience that strips viewers of a solid, singular identity, and exposes them to a fragmented sense of self whose formation is dependent on the actions of others. The mirror, once a representation of a woman's inward gaze, is turned outward, instead capturing the gaze of her spectators. Forcing the audience to watch themselves in the act of looking, Jonas displaces the vanity traditionally associated with femininity from the female body to her viewers, who must attempt to piece together their identities as they shift through a system of reflections that is constantly in flux.

The Male Gaze: Who Gets to Look?

Unlike traditional European portraiture, in *Mirror Piece I* there is no invisible spectator, no omnipotent male gaze to exert power over the female body. The mirrored surfaces at play ask that viewers consider their role in the spectatorship of women in art and ensure that they cannot escape a confrontation with their perception of the female form. Jonas has characterized her creative process as obsessively concerned with her audience's perception of her work. In a conversation with Karin Schneider for BOMB Magazine, Jonas said, "When I'm making my pieces I constantly step in and out of them, looking to see what the audience will see."²⁵ Thus it is clear that Jonas' artistic choices are motivated by their direct effect on viewers, and that this particular confrontation with the female form is meant to elicit a specific reaction from her audience. But even though Jonas makes sure her viewers are faced with their own gendered habits of looking by drawing their images into the performance itself, the audience still maintains a privileged

²⁴ Darian Leader and Judy Groves, *Introducing Lacan*, ed. Richard Appignanesi (New York: Totem Books, 1995): 27.

²⁵ Joan Jonas and Karin Schneider, "Joan Jonas." *BOMB*, vol. 112 (Summer 2010): 65.

position in the piece. Their bodies are implicated in the mirrors, yet they remain physically removed and thus preserve their power as spectators, even if they are self-reflective ones. This dynamic is echoed in the inclusion of male performers in the piece, who exert physical dominance over the female body. As the women manipulate and control their viewers' gazes with mirrors, two male dancers interrupt the flow of their choreography, intermittently picking up a woman and depositing her elsewhere in the performance space, where she then continues her movements as though nothing had occurred (fig 1-1). Although the female body is activated in *Mirror Piece I*, its actions are still affected by the overwhelming power of the male presence. The entire piece serves to stress this pervasive state of inequality.

This theme is further emphasized by the role Jonas herself plays in the choreography. The artist enters the action of the performance when she is carried into the space by the two male dancers a third of the way into the piece. Her body remains rigid and still throughout the work; she never moves independently of the men, who periodically return to her horizontal form, lift her from the floor, and place her elsewhere in the performance space (fig 1-8). Jonas represents an extreme, a completely passive female body acted upon and defined in space entirely by male actions. This returns to Berger's point that a male's social presence depends on the promise of power he embodies, and that the object of this power—whether moral, physical, or sexual—is always exterior to the male body.²⁶ While a man's presence is defined by the power he exercises on others, a woman's is directed inwards, and expresses her own attitude toward herself, thus defining what can and cannot be done to her.²⁷ As opposed to the

²⁶ Berger, 45.

²⁷ Berger, 46.

male, whose internal power determines his external actions, the female's external actions reveal her internal self-image. When Jonas keeps her body stiff and expressionless, she symbolizes this particular female struggle of an identity at the mercy of exterior forces. As she allows the male performers to relocate her as they see fit, she embodies the female who is completely reliant on male attention, whose sense of self is determined by how others view her. Jonas is the only female performer in *Mirror Piece I* who does not manipulate a mirror, thus heightening her symbolic role in the work as a female body without any agency over the male gaze.

However Jonas complicates this symbolism because, as creator of the piece, she in fact has full control over the actions of each performer. She also goes to great lengths to distinguish her role in the piece from those of the other female performers through her physicality and costume. This dynamism suggests that while Jonas acts as a passive female figure whose self-image is dependent on male presence, her function in the piece serves to challenge John Berger's theories rather than confirm them. Berger, who completed his seminal work in 1971, was working contemporaneously with Jonas and represents a widely shared conception of gender roles during this era. By placing herself in this submissive role within her own work of art, Jonas reclaims control over these established notions of feminine self-image, for she herself was the one who choreographed the male dancers' handlings of her body. Moreover, while the other female performers wear revealing mini dresses – conventional garb during the 1960s – Jonas subverts expectations for the acquiescent female body by sheathing herself in a long, flowing kimono. Jonas' clothing both protects and distinguishes her, while

declaring her authority and intentionality in the role she fills within the piece alongside the other performers.²⁸

In the brief script for *Mirror Piece I*, written by Jonas more than a decade after the performance's original iteration, the artist indicates her authority by stating that the "women slowly move in choreographed patterns."²⁹ It is therefore possible to infer that the core structure of the piece, including with the movements of both female and male performers, are predetermined and composed by Jonas. An intriguing, reflexive dynamic is thus revealed: while Jonas' movement through the performance space is dependent on the male dancers, the men's actions are choreographed by Jonas, and so while they move Jonas, Jonas is in fact moving them. This metacritical thinking about Jonas' own agency as a female artist, simultaneously controlling and being controlled by the male body, echoes the doubling at play throughout the entirety of the piece, in which the audience is both looking at the work and being looked at. Though written in discussion of the work of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta, the follow excerpt from Amelia Jones' *Body Art:*

Performing the Subject is quite relevant to an understanding of Jonas' art:

The relation to the self, the relation to the world, the relation to the other: all are constituted through a *reversibility* of seeing and being seen, perceiving and being perceived...The body/self is simultaneously both subject and object; in the experience of dialogue (or, in our case, the production and reception of works of art), the two subjects involved (art maker, art interpreter) 'are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity.'³⁰

²⁸ Jonas' script for the performance specifically states that the female performers wear mini dresses, which hints at the intentionality behind this choice of costume. From Joan Jonas, *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968-1982*. (Irvine: University of California, 1983): 14.

²⁹ Jonas, 1983: 14.

³⁰ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 41.

Closing with a quotation by the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jones argues for the contingency of basing one's perception of the self upon the way he perceives the other. Just as Jonas' actions as an artist reflect the actions of her performers, the actions of her performers reflect their audience, and the audience is in turn woven into the action of the piece, reflecting Jonas' choreography and propelling this cyclical dynamic. Jonas, as both a symbolically passive figure in the piece and its ultimate authority, acts as the invisible force that holds all of these dualities together, and raises questions about female agency within a performative context. Jonas has described her work as "reflecting the way the brain works. We can experience different things at the same time. We can hear one thing, and see another."³¹ Just as the relationships between audience and performers within *Mirror Piece I* can be understood in multiple ways, the passive role Jonas herself fills in the piece is complicated by the active control she has as its creator.

Though the other women represent a more activated female population, taking control of their perception by the audience by reflecting and fragmenting the act of perception itself, the sporadic exertions of power by the male performers over the female bodies serve as reminders of the inescapable authority of the male presence. The men pick up and relocate the mirror-wielding women just like they move Jonas, but they also intervene in the women's movements in another way. Occasionally, when a male performer approaches a woman, she places her mirror on the ground and is swept into a slow, intense waltz (fig 1-9). Relinquishing control over her tool of empowerment, the dancer embodies the power male affection can have over women. After Jonas herself graduated college, her energy was not directed at a career in art but rather toward

³¹ Joan Jonas and Joan Simon, "Imagist." *Art in America*, vol. 98, no. 10 (December 2010): 160.

marriage and raising a family.³² After studying dance with Trisha Brown in the late 60s, Jonas began to take her work seriously, and, as she says, the women's movement "helped me in asserting and understanding my individual female content."³³ This self-reflection enabled all of Jonas' subsequent artworks, including *Mirror Piece I*.

That the female performers are so easily distracted from their radical task of instigating self-reflection shows the temptation of sacrificing personal goals in favor of fulfilling comfortable gender roles. Led astray by male attention, the women are briefly diverted from their mirrors and thus symbolically abandon their control over their self-image. Berger argues that a woman's success in life is determined by how she feels she appears to others, and thus "her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another."³⁴ These brief dances embody this notion of a woman defining herself in terms of an exterior relationship, for not only does the female performer relinquish control over her body to a man, but she discards her mirror, which provided her with power over the gaze of her audience.

When the piece comes to a close, the female dancers lie down on their backs in two rows with their mirrors flat on their chests (fig 1-10). Though their arms and heads initially stick out from around the edges, the women soon pull the mirrors up over their faces, fully obscuring their forms beneath planes of reflection. Like turtles crawling into their shells, the women are shielded from exterior influences as they symbolically become one with their self-image. Atop these female bodies, the mirrors cease to engage the audience, or capture the reflections of their handlers. Instead, they revert to being blank slates, reflecting only the environment around them. The two male performers

³² Liss and Jonas, 15.

³³ Liss and Jonas, 15.

³⁴ Berger, 46.

continue their dance behind them, waltzing with invisible partners after the women have disappeared from sight. The men's looming presence asserts their hierarchical power, until finally they drop down to the ground, concluding the piece. This moment is particularly significant when one considers that each performer's final pose is identical to the position Jonas has been in for the duration of the piece. Jonas' agency – though obscured by the symbolic role her body plays within the piece – is thus reasserted here, as even the controlling bodies of the male dancers conform to the ultimate will of the female artist.

Objectification

Just as Jonas' identity as a woman and artist is multifaceted within *Mirror Piece I*, the performers' physical forms are fragmented and divided by their props, which opens up an entirely new dialogue about the female body under scrutiny. In one particularly dramatic sequence, the female dancers lie down in one line on the floor, their feet facing the audience, with their mirrors propped upright, resting just below their hips. Perpendicular to their bodies, the mirrors segment the women neatly in two (fig 1-11). The resultant reflections multiply their legs, creating an illusion of fifteen distorted bodies, each with two pairs of legs and fragmented arms. Even though the women are in control of the mirrors, this moment in the piece directly engages with the concept of the male gaze. The mirrors completely obscure each woman's individuality by disconnecting her limbs from her face, turning her into anonymous body parts, ripe for objectification. No longer confronted with the visage of the woman before them, viewers are free to stare at the female body without concern for its feelings or identity. The women also wear short dresses, further tempting the audience to objectify them by ensuring that their

disjointed legs are viewed almost completely bare. Here, Jonas is presenting the audience with the inevitability of female objectification by breaking down the body into its parts, and removing the risk of being caught by the objectified in the act of looking.

As each woman tilts the mirrors backward and forward, there are brief moments when the depressed flesh of her thighs puckers up over the mirror's thin border, which generates a disorienting effect where both sets of legs seem to continue seamlessly into one another. This distorted view of the female body is reminiscent of the 1972 photo series *La Ventosa* by Hans Breder (fig 1-12). In what he called "body sculptures," Breder photographed the nude female form of a young Ana Mendieta, who holds a mirror that fragments and multiplies her body parts and simultaneously obscures her face.

Highlighting the historic association between women and nature, Breder shot these images out in nature, revealing disembodied limbs and private parts half submerged in the ocean.³⁵ Viewed through a male photographer's lens, these distorted, anonymous views of the female form exemplify notions of the objectifying male gaze. Breder himself states, "the performers' bodies are treated as objects. They represent nothing, stand for nothing, mean nothing; the images are merely images."³⁶ Treating the body as pure object, Breder utilizes the anonymous female form for the advancement of his own art making.

This denial of female identity once again relates back to John Berger, who writes that while men act, women appear. Men like Breder watch women, and women watch

³⁵ Throughout the history of portraiture, female sitters have been depicted with flowers, fruit, animals, or abundant greenery to heighten the impression of their femininity. This association stems from the concept of Mother Nature, and the idealization of a woman who appears to be fertile.

³⁶ Hans Breder and Robert Alexander, "Participatory Art and Body Sculptures with Mirrors." *Leonardo*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 146.

themselves being looked at, which then determines their relationship to themselves.³⁷ The objectification of the female body becomes so ingrained in the life of a woman that it defines the way she sees herself, and makes the formation of her identity dependent on factors outside herself. By using her artistic authority to bestow the power of mirrors upon female performers, who then actively manipulate these objects – traditionally associated with female vanity – to capture the reflections of their spectators, Jonas plays with societal expectations of femininity. As a female artist harnessing the mirror, Jonas reclaims control of this dynamic, and forces her audience to confront gendered ways of seeing that are so deeply rooted in visual culture.

Much like the fetishized bodies of Hans Bellmer's disfigured dolls (fig 1-13), Breder's photo series places the deconstructed, sexualized female body on display. But while Bellmer constructs these monstrous amalgamations of body parts using plaster – which allows him to rearrange and distort the female figure to a surrealist effect – Breder uses mirrors to transform the physical form of a female artist into an object. Jonas also produces an image of a defamiliarized female body, and uses mirrors to segment it, but unlike Breder or Bellmer, activates that body, and thus is able to investigate conflicting questions of the female self through objects long identified with the feminine. As Karin Schneider points out in an interview with the artist, Jonas' mirrors destroy the familiar image of a body “to construct—to de-structure—the *given* Gestalt of the body...to create new configurations out of familiar parts. It delivers a shock to the system. It is a body, but it's not the body I know.”³⁸ Jonas provokes her viewers' objectification of these disjointed female forms while simultaneously affording her performers agency, for her

³⁷ Berger, 47.

³⁸ Schneider, 61-62.

choreography allows them to manipulate the ways their bodies are observed. Though their mini dresses provoke the male gaze, the performers' ultimate command over their mirrors—their tools of empowerment—enables the reclamation of the garment as means of a woman's heightened mobility and freedom.

By denying her female dancers a whole visage, but granting them control over the mirror that segments them, Jonas forces every participant in the piece – whether performer or spectator – to actively question the way femaleness is perceived. Shielding the female body with a mirror, and thus deflecting the viewer's gaze, Jonas pushes the spectator to self-reflect on his or her instinctual objectification of a bare, feminine limb. Reflecting their spectatorship back at them, returning their gaze, Jonas' mirrors objectify the audience itself. Suddenly, the spectator is both subject and object: both participant in the making of a representation, and that which is represented. Interestingly, while each mirror is paired with a female body and duplicates its parts, there are several moments in the piece, including its final tableau, when the mirror represents the *absence* of a body. Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* series (fig 1-14) evokes the female presence through visual clues like verticality, projecting limbs, and a curving silhouette, but the body itself is either hidden or removed completely. This lack of distinct physical form serves as a challenge to the historical specularization of the female body in western representation, for the viewer is denied a recognizable entity to objectify.³⁹ But *Mirror Piece I* takes this concept a step further by replacing the body with a mirrored surface, and reflecting the viewer's gaze right back at him, which thus forces him to self-reflect, and recognize his own objectifying instincts.

³⁹ Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, exh. cat. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998: 30.

Mirror Piece I: Reconfigured – A New Agency

Just as Jonas provoked her audience's self-reflection in 1969, it seems that the artist reflected on her practice as a whole when approaching a reinvention of *Mirror Piece I* decades later. Commissioned by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum for its 2010 Thinking Performance Symposium, Jonas decided to restructure the action of the piece to incorporate elements of her other early works with mirrors. Originally performed at the Guggenheim, and then again three years later for Stockholm's Kulturhuset Stadsteatern—where it was ultimately filmed—*Mirror Piece I: Reconfigured* encapsulates Jonas' self-reflection upon recreating this work. As the lights come up, an aged Jonas comes teetering across the stage, the many thin, rectangular mirrors sewn to the hems of her black smock clink together with each step. This is the same costume Jonas wore in her 1968 film performance, *Wind* (fig 1-15), which served as her first exploration of the destabilizing effect of placing mirrors in space and under the control of the human body. In 2013, in Stockholm, Jonas approaches a microphone on stage left and begins to read from a large scroll, which bears selections from the writings of the Argentinian magical realist, Jorge Luis Borges. Just as she did in her 1970 performance of *Mirror Piece II*, Jonas opens this 2013 re-performance with a reading from Borges' *Labyrinths*, a collection of short stories that deals with mirrors, duplication, and the human condition. By combining components of her previous works with mirrors, Jonas contextualizes a self-reflexive artistic practice that explored themes of the double and female identity over the forty years that followed the original iteration of *Mirror Piece I*.

It seems that Jonas' nod to her early work is evidence of the self-reflection every artist must face when recreating a piece of her art. Every aspect of this opening recitation

seems aimed at creating a cohesive, horizontal understanding of Jonas' artistic process. As she reads off of the long scroll, the large rectangular mirrors that stretch across Jonas' belly reflect the handwritten selections from Borges, the author whom Jonas has claimed to be the major inspiration for her interest in mirrors (fig 1-16).⁴⁰ This action both formally and conceptually anticipates the visual effects of the mirrors in the performance that follows, and the symbolic nature of Jonas utilizing mirrors in a self-examination of her own artwork. When held in Jonas' hands, the scroll itself takes on a strong verticality, which is highly reminiscent of the mirrors themselves. Lines from Borges such as "As one's body moves through space, it modifies the shapes that surround it," and "I look at myself in the mirror to discover who I am,"⁴¹ illuminate Jonas' conceptual intentions for *Mirror Piece I*, which she has said were to "alter the perception of an audience in relation to the performance space."⁴² Indeed, this idea of self-recognition is even present in the artist's own form, for the mirrors sewn to the torso of Jonas' costume capture each inspirational line before she reads it. It is as though the words are so ingrained in her artistic sensibility that they have become a part of her.

The further down the parchment Jonas gets, the more text from the inside is revealed to the audience; handwritten in red pencil, some lines even contain visible corrections (fig 1-17). Here, Jonas makes the presence of her artist's hand all the more palpable and thus reasserts her role as the piece's creator. After introducing the piece with her inspirational text, Jonas gathers her props, exits the stage, and allows the performance to occur without her intervention. Though Jonas still performs in new pieces

⁴⁰ Jonas and Simon, 163. Jonas and Schneider, 112.

⁴¹ *Mirror Piece I: Reconfigured (1969/2010)*. Perf. Joan Jonas. *Vimeo*. Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, Dec. 2013. Web. 2 Feb. 2014. <www.vimeo.com/77162791>

⁴² Jonas and Schneider, 112.

to this day, it seems that in this recreation of a historic work in her oeuvre, she recognizes that her place is no longer in the heat of the action. She decides to highlight instead her directorial position. Activated and in control of the work, Jonas no longer needs to use her own body to symbolize the passive, objectified female, instead casting another woman in the role she originally played. By taking a step back, Jonas affirms her authority and asserts the growing agency and independence of all female artists since the first iteration of *Mirror Piece I*.

Even when Jonas does return to the performance space, her movements reinforce her creative control. At the piece's conclusion, Jonas reenters the action in new, more flexible garb, and lifts a discarded mirror from the ground. For the next five minutes, the two women who remain with mirrors in hand mimic Jonas' apparently improvised manipulations of the mirror, for their steps lag a few seconds behind the artist's. The pair watches Jonas diligently, as do the rest of the performers, who have gathered in the shadows at the back of the space (fig 1-18). Mimicking her verticality as they did her flatness at the conclusion of the original iteration, the performers convey deference to Jonas' creative control. This serves to highlight Jonas' importance in the conception and realization of the piece, and thus to emphasize that the destabilizing effects of the mirrors has been an intentional provocation on the part of the artist to elicit self-reflection in her viewers. But the mirrors do not only capture the audience's self-consideration; slices of Jonas' form are captured in the mirrors of these final two women because they are always positioned behind her. Reflecting Jonas in the act of performing, these mirrors take on yet another purpose: to capture the artist's reevaluation of her role as creator in this

reconfiguration. Not only does Jonas draw attention to dynamics of looking, doubling, and objectifying, but she also includes herself in this self-reflection.

Chapter Two

Yayoi Kusama: Narcissistic Consumption

Over one thousand polished mirror-balls glinted in the sunlight. Arranged tightly together around their creator, the plastic balls reflected every inch of their surroundings in distorted harmony. In 1966, the unveiling of *Narcissus Garden* by Yayoi Kusama caused quite a stir at the 33rd Venice Biennale, for the artist did not merely install her piece outside the traditional confines of the national pavilions but also sold her orbs for the minimal price of 1,200 liras, the equivalent of two dollars (fig 2-1). The moment Kusama began to sell parts of her work to passersby, her piece ceased to be an installation, instead taking on new meaning as a radical performance. Like Jonas, Kusama put the female body on display. But in a critique of the growing commercialization of the 1960s art world, Kusama took control by creating her own mirrored marketplace. Kusama's orbs reflected viewers' narcissistic urges in convex distortion, tempting passersby into participation in a mock system of exchange that implicated their direct roles in the production of artistic value.

Kusama's fractious relationship with commercial success in the early 1960s pushed her toward mechanical processes of artmaking that would eventually lead to *Narcissus Garden*. Showing alongside her white, male contemporaries but never achieving the same level of success, Kusama felt maligned by the art market during her early career in New York (fig 2-2).⁴³ However, the psychological narrative Kusama has been dictating since 1965 now undercuts all of her art, and has become seen as essential

⁴³ Midori Yamamura, "Re-Viewing Kusama, 1950-1975: Biography of Things," *Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years*, exh. cat. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2009): 84.

to its “true” understanding.⁴⁴ When confronted with one of Kusama’s many mirrored works, contemporary viewers are quick to make sense of its startling visual complexity by reasoning that it literalizes Kusama’s manic mental state. Throughout her career, Kusama used the mirror to expand her pervasive themes of repetition, obsession, and immersion. In this chapter, I only analyze Kusama’s declining mental health in light of the ways it provided a practical impetus for her adoption of the mirror as a medium.⁴⁵ As Laura Hoptman argues, it is apt to consider Kusama’s symptoms as the engine that drives her work and helps viewers understand her imagery, but not as her subjects.⁴⁶ *Narcissus Garden* exemplifies this alternative reading of Kusama’s work, for although Kusama’s feelings of marginalization by the art market drove her to create this protest, *Narcissus Garden* was not an attempt to subsume viewers into her mindset. Instead, by harnessing a mirror’s innate ability to create repetitive seriality Kusama used her orbs to implicate spectators in the endless cycle of consumption that she ascribed to the art market (fig 2-5).

Kusama’s orbs also embodied the art market’s impenetrable valuation system. Artwork chosen for display at highly regarded events such as the Venice Biennale symbolically reflects contemporary values. Yet Kusama’s mirrored balls reflect these values literally, and thus intentionally call into question the commercial circuit around them that propagates the valuation and promotion of art. Kusama’s radical action in 1966

⁴⁴ Kusama has been dictating her autobiography since 1965, emphasizing her diagnosed obsessive neurosis and hallucinations. This tactic has proved extremely successful for Kusama’s self-branding, drawing increased public interest to her work.

⁴⁵ In late 1962 Kusama was heavily medicated after a nervous breakdown over fears that Claes Oldenburg stole her soft sculpture ideas and achieved commercial success (figs 2-3, 2-4). Physically unable to complete her intricate, obsessively crafted works, Kusama was forced to expand conceptually. I will only discuss Kusama’s illness as it altered her artistic trajectory, and led her towards her use of mechanical reproduction, mirrors, and performance.

⁴⁶ Laura Hoptman, “Yayoi Kusama: A Reckoning,” from *Yayoi Kusama*, exh. cat. (London: Phaidon Press, 2000): 37.

can be understood as a market-reflexive gesture—a phenomenon coined in 2009 by Isabelle Graw in her book, *High Price: Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*. Using the term gesture because of its performative connotations, Graw distinguishes these interventions by their ability “not only to represent and symbolize, but to enter into reflexive relationship[s] with [their] surroundings.”⁴⁷ While artists performing these gestures reflect upon and try to counter market activities, they simultaneously acknowledge their own involvement in the very system they condemn. Kusama’s deep involvement in the market system was in fact the driving force of *Narcissus Garden*, for it substantiated her sense of indignation at being repeatedly overlooked for large-scale art world recognition. As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued, the art world revolves around symbolic – not economic – capital, and an artist’s reputation thus determines his or her economic value.⁴⁸ There was no apparent access point in this cyclical system, for an artist’s reputation determined the economic value of her work, which relied on symbolic value whose bestowal was based on the esteem of her reputation. *Narcissus Garden* provided Kusama with an outlet for her frustrations; as the mirror-balls formed a miniature marketplace entirely within her control, their seriality captured the reflexive nature of consumer culture against which Kusama felt so helpless.

Mirrors were thus the ideal medium for Kusama’s indictment of the art market’s commercialized flaws, for they ensured that every aspect of the equation—artist, patron, dealer, collector, curator, critic, viewer, institution—was captured in her piece, and thus implicated in the complex system of commerce that she placed under scrutiny. Citing

⁴⁷ Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009): 189.

⁴⁸ Olav Velthuis, “The Venice Effect,” *The Art Newspaper*, pub. 3 June 2011, acc. 8 November 2012. Web. <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/The-Venice-Effect/23951>

artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Yves Klein, and Damien Hirst, Graw argues that market-reflexive gestures target the commodification of art by actively engaging in the market that is under critique.⁴⁹ Selling off her mirror-balls in the center of the Venice Biennale, surrounded by the system of commerce by which she felt so maligned, Kusama subverted the corporate art market by assuming its commercial spirit. With reflective surfaces as her vehicle, Kusama questioned the relationship between art objects and their consumption by highlighting the role of her viewers in perpetuating the values and structure of the art market system around them.

As *Narcissus Garden*'s intentions—like those of all market-reflexive gestures—were so deeply rooted in its context, later iterations of the work have vastly transformed the mirror-balls' impact and meaning.⁵⁰ Since the 1960s, Kusama's carefully crafted public persona and obsessively productive artistic output has earned her a position of respect amongst the art world's elite, and her work has been fully integrated into contemporary institutions. Recent versions of *Narcissus Garden* have displayed the mirror-balls in a variety of forms, but whether floating in pools of water or filling the floor of a gallery, the piece is always installed in an institutional space (fig 2-6). Stripped of its transactional, performative context, *Narcissus Garden* is now accepted within the very market it originally stood in protest of. Yet no matter how distanced these mirrored orbs become from their creator, their self-reflexive nature ensures that they reflect the realities of their institutionalization.

If the mirror was the ideal medium for Kusama's countercultural protest, the Venice Biennale's high cultural capital established it as *Narcissus Garden*'s ideal setting.

⁴⁹ Graw, 2009: 207.

⁵⁰ A market reflexive gesture's identity is tri-fold—determined by its unique physical context, an artistic feature that references its critique, and its viewer's subjective interpretation. Graw, 2009: 190.

Though the Biennale would later try to detach itself from commerce, the connections between art fairs and economic value remained intrinsically linked.⁵¹ Walter Benjamin's notion of exchange implies that an object's worth is entirely dependent on its demand in certain locations and contexts, and thus has no intrinsic value in itself.⁵² Aware that neither she nor her art objects could determine their own distinctions as artist or non-artist, art or non-art, Kusama took control of her reception. Selling pieces of her work for such a small price transformed the orbs from precious art objects into commodities, and questioned who decided what art was worth, and what art was worthy of recognition. The mirror-balls reflected each transaction, inherently drawing attention to what was really at stake, and who was really in control. But by capturing the system of exchange in convex distortion, Kusama called attention to the corruption of exchange value, and the skewed nature of the avant-garde. This disorientation challenged the position of her viewers, who were pushed to consider their roles as consumers of art in a market system that valued reputation and profit over ingenuity. While the sea of inexpensive mirror-balls was visually enticing, passersby ultimately took notice because of the value they awarded the orbs as "art objects" at the Biennale. A work of art is therefore a unique commodity; as a cultural asset, its price is not strictly determined by the worth of its materials but rather is justified by the symbolic value bestowed upon it by society.⁵³

⁵¹ Even without the actual sale of art, mere inclusion in the Venice Biennale imbues an artist's work with an alluring quality, making his or her pieces seem more legitimate and worthy of acquisition by collectors and high-ranking dealers. Velthuis, 2011.

⁵² Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility, (Third Version)," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4 (1938-1940)*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003): 257.

⁵³ Kusama borrowed \$600 from Italian artist Lucio Fontana to manufacture the mirror-balls. If she sold each of her 1,2000 orbs for two dollars a piece, she would have made a steep profit. Thus, Kusama questioned the value of art by pricing her mirror-balls above the literal cost of their material production.

As RoseLee Goldberg writes, “performance has been a way of appealing directly to a large public, as well as shocking audiences into reassessing their own notions of art and its relation to culture.”⁵⁴ Placing herself in the center of the bustling market of the Venice Biennale, Kusama’s action achieved its goal – it was certainly noticed, and Biennale officials who felt Kusama was “sell[ing] art like hot dogs or ice cream cones” swiftly shut the performance down.⁵⁵ But this was no defeat; it merely confirmed Kusama’s social criticisms, and made the Biennale into an example of the art world’s commercialized flaws. Others too had seemingly grown weary of the partnership between art and consumerism; in 1968 a wave of protests swept the Biennale, vilifying its commodification of culture and ultimately resulting in the termination of its long-running sales office.⁵⁶ The fact that *Arts Magazine*’s prominent art critic, Norman Narotzky, began his review of the 1966 Biennale by relaying these pervasive opinions about that year’s offerings—“conservative,” “no impact,” “weak and insipid”—implies that by this point, the cultural tides were beginning to shift. He then goes on to clarify, in a footnote, that the only exception to these statements was “Kusama whose way-out exhibition of mirror-balls adorned the garden outside the Italian pavilion.”⁵⁷

Commodified and Consumed

Kusama’s initial project proposal to Biennale officials slyly hinted at the radical shape her performance would take, as she stated her desire to “reveal an important new

⁵⁴ RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Life Art 1909 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc, 1979): 6.

⁵⁵ Rachel Taylor, “Walking Piece, Narcissus Garden and Self Portraiture: 1966,” from *Yayoi Kusama*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Museum, 2012): 109.

⁵⁶ Until then, the Biennale’s sales office had assisted artists in selling their work to new clients while charging 10% commission since 1895. Velthuis, 2011.

⁵⁷ Norman Narotzky, “The Venice Biennale: Pease Porridge in the Pot Nine Days Old.” *Arts Magazine*, vol. 40 (September 1966): 42.

creative idea” that would “show the true nature of the avant-garde.”⁵⁸ Though she veiled her countercultural intent with self-confident and intriguing language, in retrospect the underhanded humor of her words shines through. It is clear that Kusama’s “important new creative idea” intended to reveal the true commercialization of contemporary art and its viewership. In a moment when the last thing avant-garde artists wanted was to be considered commercial, *Narcissus Garden* shoved the reality of art’s intrinsic ties to the market into the faces of her contemporaries by reflecting the entire exchange system in subversive, inexpensive transactions.

Offering her viewers their own reflections, Kusama highlighted the vapidness of art consumption. During the 1960s, the social importance of museum recognition and involvement took hold of not only artists but also many members of bourgeois culture.⁵⁹ *Narcissus Garden* played with these notions, poking holes in the prideful aura of self-accomplishment that came along with the social aspirations of the art world. Isabelle Graw argues that, like branded goods, artworks have an identity-forming dimension as they situate the viewer and act as “central bearers of meaning for self-positioning and outward demarcation.”⁶⁰ As passersby witnessed their visages in the orbs mingling among the community of art voyeurs and buyers around them, purchasing a mirror-ball presented viewers with an opportunity to preserve this vision of themselves as cultured art consumers. The orbs thus functioned as physical evidence, as evocation of the memory of one’s experience at the Biennale. By taking interest in these cheap, plastic mirror-balls, viewers confirmed Kusama’s assertions about the art market’s perversion of

⁵⁸ Hoptman, 2000: 63.

⁵⁹ Yamamura, 2009: 102.

⁶⁰ Kai-Uwe Hellmann, *Soziologie der Marke* (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2003): 89, from Graw, 2009: 130.

value. Though spectators were drawn to an opportunity for art ownership, the mirror-balls' repetitive seriality stressed the interminable banality of art consumption.

When passersby peered into these mass-produced objects, being sold for a minimal price, they were implicated, not as art buyers with a privileged position but as consumers. In 1968, Kusama said, "Anything mass-produced robs us of our freedom. We, not the machine, should be in control."⁶¹ Indeed, by selling off her mirror-balls on her own terms, in her own fabricated marketplace, Kusama reclaimed control over the machine, while simultaneously condemning her audience. Pointing out each purchaser's lack of freedom and blind perpetuation of the commercialized art market system, a strong sense of irony propelled the power of Kusama's intervention. As Kusama sold off her mirror-balls, her customers were unconsciously indoctrinated into her worldview, for their reflections—and thus, self-images—became serialized among the thousands of glittering orbs. By transforming her viewers into consumers, Kusama made the radical, subversive intentions of her performance clear.

Kusama heightened her own alignment with the consumed by utilizing mainstream advertising techniques for self-promotion during her performance. Passing out laudatory pamphlets and staging a photo series with the work, Kusama affiliated herself with the consumer culture of popular media and thus further subverted the expectations for high art. As Laura Hoptman argues, Kusama's complicity with the media functioned as an elaborate parody, and her self-promotion served as a "challenge to the most enduring paradox of the avant-garde from the 1960s until now: the reconciliation of the rank commercialization of contemporary art with the anti-commodity call to merge

⁶¹ Yayoi Kusama, in Hoptman, 2000: 56.

art with everyday life.”⁶² By harnessing the language and tactics of advertising, Kusama emphasized the similar function of brands and artworks. Just as brands utilize specific promotional techniques to monopolize the minds of their consumers, Kusama intentionally manipulated her viewers’ perception of her own artistic being with the subversive actions surrounding *Narcissus Garden*. More than drawing viewers in with personal associations like advertisements, Kusama’s mirrors literally made viewers see themselves in the work.

Yet with her own body at the forefront of the piece, Kusama denied the alienation that occurs between product and consumer, and between artist and viewer when works are trapped in the confines of a traditional gallery or museum space. *Narcissus Garden*, as Kusama’s first true foray into performance art, strengthened her initiative to draw connections between herself and her creations. Even in black and white photographs from the Biennale, it is clear that Kusama’s metallic gold kimono presented a similarly shiny quality as the sea of orbs around her (fig 2-7). The artist’s costume matched her objects so closely that they became integrated, leaving little distinction between inanimate and animate.⁶³ Her long black hair – cut in sharp geometric lines and falling far past her shoulders – both contrasted her outfit’s lighter tone and highlighted its rigid lines, taking on a shape akin to its drooping sleeves and further unifying body and fabric. Photographs of the artist amongst her creations further emphasized Kusama’s intention to establish connectivity between her self and her work. An double-exposure photograph of Kusama from the early 1960s literalized this merging of artist and work of art, as her obsessively detailed painting became one with Kusama’s being (fig 2-8). This concept was reinforced

⁶² Hoptman, 2000: 63.

⁶³ Goldberg, 1979: 89.

in *Narcissus Garden* as mirror recursively reflected mirror, revealing that beneath the glossy vision of the art world, both art and artist were just commodities to be negotiated over.

As Hoptman writes, Kusama's action at the Venice Biennale was as much about the artist's self-promotion through the media as it was about the "dematerialization of a sculptural object by selling off its parts."⁶⁴ The photo series that Kusama commissioned after the events of her performance immortalized this shocking incident while using popular media to promote a mysterious and alluring public image. Posing in a skin-tight, bright red body suit amongst the shimmering surfaces of her mirror-balls, her arms and eyes open wide in mysterious wonder, Kusama created images fit for a scandal (fig 2-9). Although using theatrical public appearances to achieve celebrity status was hardly a new concept, here, Kusama's self-dramatization through popular media marked the establishment of her legendary public persona.⁶⁵ This performance gave way to Kusama's complete abandonment of a gallery-oriented practice in the late 1960s, and embrace of radical, publically staged Happenings at institutionally significant locations throughout New York City, like the Museum of Modern Art and the New York Stock Exchange. As she watched contemporary art devolve into commercial products, Kusama used dark humor to purposefully exaggerate the scandal *Narcissus Garden* had become. Harnessing the consumer culture she despised to ironically promote her own artistic goals, Kusama thus staged her market-reflexive gestures within the confines of the oppressive exchange system itself.

⁶⁴ Hoptman, 2000: 63.

⁶⁵ Graw, 2009: 199.

With *Narcissus Garden*, Kusama inserted herself into art commerce through sheer entrepreneurial will, using the language of advertising—external praise and shiny objects for sale—to entice passersby into participation, hence cementing her role within the system. Once Biennale officials shut down the performative aspect of the piece, Kusama began to pass out pamphlets bearing text by renowned art critic Herbert Read, praising her “original talent.”⁶⁶ The fact that these brochures were only distributed after the transactional performance ended suggests that Kusama had anticipated the negative reaction her gesture would inspire in Biennale officials. Thus, it seems calculated that as one arm of the art world machine—which established and controlled artists’ recognition—came down on *Narcissus Garden*, Kusama was prepared with a voice of one within the system and used it to substantiate herself and her work. This indicates that Kusama may have anticipated the Biennale’s negative reaction to *Narcissus Garden*, thus confirming its intentions as a subversive action. Though once again using the establishment itself to enable her own artistic vision, with these pamphlets Kusama also engaged the idea of her own self-image, sense of self-importance, and narcissism.

Shared Narcissism

Narcissism is perhaps the most complicated theme at play within *Narcissus Garden*, for not only did Kusama confront her own but also manipulated her audience’s to achieve her desired results. One vital element of *Narcissus Garden* has yet to be discussed: beside Kusama, amongst the mirror-balls, stood a sign that read “Your narcissism for sale,” first in English, then Italian (fig 2-10). While this sign served as declaration of each orb’s price, it also announced the fact that viewers could become

⁶⁶ Rachel Taylor, “Walking Piece, Narcissus Garden and Self Portraiture: 1966,” in *Yayoi Kusama*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Museum, 2012): 109.

consumers, purchase a mirror-ball and take it home. Alluding to art historical associations between the mirror and vanity like Jonas, here Kusama snared her viewers with their own reflections. But instead of provoking consideration of her female body amongst the mirrors, Kusama focused on the draw of narcissism when provided with a mirrored object for sale. Given the high social importance placed on art ownership and viewership, Kusama's intervention offered a tempting opportunity to take a piece of art home for a minimal price, and serve as proof of one's art world experience. Herbert Read's praise, distributed in pamphlets after the performance was shut down, also worked to increase the mysterious allure of Kusama's work, and perhaps made passersby feel as though they had missed out on an opportunity. Deemed valuable by an esteemed critic, the orbs were imbued with symbolic, social value, and thus appealed more strongly to the narcissistic impulses Kusama believed to be inherent in art consumerism. By purchasing an orb, viewers wittingly or unwittingly contributed to Kusama's social criticism. But the mirror-balls, instilled with value, offered spectators the appearance of refinement, wealth, and artistic literacy, thus ensuring that their narcissistic needs were met.

Offered a chance to gaze upon themselves, participants were drawn in by their own narcissism, reflected repeatedly across the sea of glittering orbs. A decision to purchase a mirror-ball, as implied by Kusama's sign, symbolized the vanity inherent in art consumerism. Each mirror reflected a viewer's desire to "get" art—both conceptually and physically—and thus confirmed the social value placed in art viewership and ownership. Even though the objects were made of inexpensive materials, and sold for a minimal price, the viewer assigned value to the orbs because of their context at the Biennale thus were tempted to possess the social value offered by the ownership of art.

Automatically complicit upon participation, as Kusama's customers peered into their mirror-balls, they were faced with their own narcissism as art buyers. Capitalizing on the symbolic value placed on objects exhibited in the context of an art fair, Kusama made clever use of mirrors in *Narcissus Garden* by appealing to viewers' egotism, offering up status symbols that ultimately, literally, only reflected themselves. The immateriality of mirrors enables a reflective piece of art to be completely transformed as its context shifts. When a patron looked into one of Kusama's mirror-balls, he was confronted with his own visage, mingling in convex distortion with his fellow voyeurs and the infrastructure of the Biennale.

While Graw writes that a market-reflexive gesture "requires a viewer who is receptive to its message" in order for its intentions to be fulfilled, it seems that *Narcissus Garden* transcends this necessity.⁶⁷ If reading "Your narcissism for sale" outside the Italian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale struck a chord in passersby, they may have shared Kusama's frustrations with the art market or simply related to this particular association. Upon approaching the installation and recognizing the simulated commercial circuit of mass-produced objects before them, these viewers may have elected to purchase mirror-balls, and thus contribute to Kusama's countercultural message rather than support the real art market. On the other hand, Kusama's sign could have simply been intriguing or amusing to some spectators. Captivated by their own reflections, the startling kinetic effect of the mirrors' reflexivity, and Kusama's own odd, exotic presence, these viewers may have been inspired to participate in the artist's system of exchange for much more simplistic reasons. Thus the allure of retaining evidence of their cultural experience at the Biennale led many to fulfill the exact dynamic that Kusama had hoped—and expected—

⁶⁷ Graw, 2009: 190.

to draw out: the blind consumerism of the art world, driven by narcissistic urges. The unique nature of this intervention ensured that all forms of participation contributed to its market-reflexive power. Allowing each viewer to interpret the work as his individual set of associations and dissociations dictated, Kusama achieved her countercultural goals by, in the words of Jacques Rancière, using “people as props for conveying larger meaning.”⁶⁸

Kusama first used her viewers’ bodies to convey her own frustrations with the art market in early 1966, when she premiered *Kusama’s Peep Show* at Castellane Gallery: a closed-off, hexagonal mirrored room with a ceiling covered in colorful flashing lights, multiplied infinitely in a mesmerizing display (fig 2-11). Playing off of its namesake, the only way to view the “show” within was through two opposing windows. Thus Kusama ensured that each viewer observed not only herself within the mirrors, but another as well. Entrapped in infinite confrontation with herself and another, yet denied entrance to the shared space in which their likenesses mingle and merge, both viewers were forced to question what it meant to be “I” versus “Other.”⁶⁹ Simultaneously connected and yet removed, the effect of this installation evoked Kusama’s paradoxical experience of isolation while being an active participant in the avant-garde art scene.⁷⁰ With *Narcissus Garden*, Kusama brought this newfound interest in interaction between the “I” and “Other” outdoors, and enabled a new potential in direct contact with her audience.

⁶⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso Books, 2009): 14.

⁶⁹ Yamamura, 2009: 100.

⁷⁰ After arriving in New York from Japan in 1957, Kusama fluctuated between a sense of connectivity and alienation with other artists working around her. She rendered her early *Infinity Nets* paintings on large-scale canvases like action painters, but employed intricate, calculated mark-making that was the furthest possible style from Jackson Pollock’s slashes of pigment (fig 2-12). She fit in with the Pop Art movement by placing the mediocrity of the everyday material on display with collages like 1962’s *Airmail Stickers*, but arranged them in a manner that spoke to the uniquely manic, hyper-repetitive character of her oeuvre (fig 2-13). But most significantly for this investigation, Kusama utilized mirrors to trick the eyes of her viewers like kinetic artists, yet always with a distinctly social intention.

Though at first glance, it seemed that an artist selling off objects at the Venice Biennale was profiting from within the system, Kusama used many visual clues to indicate that she was in fact outside the system, subverting it. Thus while critiquing the market from the inside, Kusama went to great lengths to emphasize her otherness. First of all, she gained official permission from the Biennale bureau to participate in the exhibition independently of both her home country, Japan, and her adoptive country, America.⁷¹ Assuming clichéd roles and stereotypes, Kusama donned a traditional Japanese kimono and obi to “exaggerate and capitalize on her exoticism.”⁷² The fact that Kusama never wore a kimono while in Japan indicated that this decision was deliberate, and worked to both emphasize her outsider status at the Biennale and draw more attention to her reflective sea of commodities. Thus, while her clothing unified Kusama with her orbs, thus suggesting the commodification of not only art but also the artist, her apparel simultaneously worked to distinguish *Narcissus Garden* as an oddity.

Paradoxically, Kusama was only able to gain control over her reception when she allowed her identity to be subsumed in thousands of reflections within her mirror-balls, ultimately acknowledging her *lack* of control over her own reception. While her clothing identified her Japanese heritage, her accompanying sign bore English and Italian language, and her distributed written materials were in English. Displaced at the Biennale—a metaphor for her displacement in the art world at large—Kusama displayed different aspects of her fragmented cultural identity for all to interpret. Kusama thus set up an intricate system—shiny, appealing orbs complemented her mysterious persona; the intriguing sign conversed with her laudatory pamphlets—and let her viewers’ disparate

⁷¹ Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 49.

⁷² Hoptman, 2009: 55.

associations inform their experiences. As Kusama, her audience, invited artists, and every other participant in the Biennale's infrastructure swirled together in her reflective orbs, it grew less and less clear who was inside or outside; who was the "I" or the "Other." Connected in their mutual participation in the art market system, every person implicated on *Narcissus Garden*'s mirror-balls became, in a sense, a commodity.

A Depoliticized Garden

The recreation of *Narcissus Garden* since 1966 has replaced the work's countercultural power with exhibition value. In 1966, Kusama's intervention at the Venice Biennale featured art object and artist directly connected as outsiders to an institution that served as example of the art world's commercialized flaws. Kusama has produced ten versions of *Narcissus Garden* since the turn of the century, but many things have changed since its original conception. The mirror-balls, once plastic, are made of stainless steel, and installed on a much larger scale within the institutional setting of a major art galleries and museums. In 2002, when *Narcissus Garden* was installed for the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery, two thousand orbs floated serenely in the still water of the gallery's Watermill, serving as centerpiece to the triennial and making a bold visual impact on the space (fig 2-14). With their economic value augmented by an expensive material and their creator's growing reputation, the mirror-balls were imbued with greater symbolic importance than they had previously possessed. Originally intended as an interactive experience, these mirror-balls now sat passively on the floor, more decorative than inflammatory.

Made from durable steel and installed across the globe, the fate of *Narcissus Garden* indicates Kusama's desire to live on beyond infinity through her repetitive

works. In 1966, Kusama put the narcissism inherent in art consumption on the chopping block, and demeaned the way symbolic value determined economic value, and economic value determined recognition. But now that she has been subsumed into the establishment itself, Kusama has utilized her newfound economic value to produce and reproduce her variety of works and build a dense artistic legacy. Deserting the anti-market intentions of her original work, Kusama has fully embraced the power and support offered by her institutional acceptance, and, ultimately, confirmed her own narcissism.

Kusama's transition to commercial institutionalization was perhaps most poignantly symbolized in 1993, when she was chosen as the first artist to represent Japan at the Venice Biennale. Kusama made the most of this ironic invitation, crafting a pointed new work to show alongside a selective retrospective. *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)* featured a large mirrored cube within a room entirely obliterated with a black-on-yellow polka dot pattern (fig 2-15). A small box at the base of the cube invited viewers to peer through a single opening, which revealed a mirrored interior that reflected a cluster of ceramic yellow pumpkins in infinite repetition (fig 2-16). But, just as in 1966, Kusama then inserted herself into the installation, and transformed it into a transactional performance piece. Her long robe and pointed hat were covered with the same patterning as the walls, floor, and ceiling around her, and thus her body merged with the work just as it did in her earlier interventions (fig 2-17). But Kusama deviated from her first experience at the Biennale when she began to offer tiny pumpkins to visitors for free. It seemed as though Kusama was announcing her arrival at the pinnacle of her success; that her invitation to the Biennale was the ultimate redemption of all her struggles in the art market; that, as

Hoptman writes, Kusama no longer needed to stage “a protest and punishment of a closed and commodity-obsessed art world,” because now she was a part of it.⁷³

However, the illusive effect of the infinite pumpkins within the mirrored cube indicated far more complex dynamics of meaning were at play in this performance. Peering through the window, it appeared as though millions of pumpkins stretched out into the distance, although the art world functions on an air of exclusivity. Mass production represents the opposite of this notion, as value decreases as quantity rises. By manufacturing organic objects, painting them in her signature style, placing them in an art-viewing context, and giving them away for free, Kusama reactivated her countercultural position, using mirrors to subvert ideas of art’s economic value. As an artist invited to participate in the Venice Biennale, Kusama was officially included in this system of valuation, yet with *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)* she used her newly appointed symbolic value to support her artistic agenda. Like 1962’s *Peep Show*, viewers witnessed an object of their desire reflected infinitely, and like *Narcissus Garden* they were offered the chance to actually possess it. However, by emphasizing the seriality of that object, and giving it away for free, Kusama pushed her viewers to recognize that this treasured object was worth nothing more than the value they placed upon it. Perhaps serving as a metaphor for the triviality of her own success, with her return to the Biennale Kusama also returned to concepts of the relationship between art objects and their consumption, and by emphasizing the effect of her newfound symbolic worth, challenged the evolving economic valuation of her own work.

Although Kusama’s approach to addressing art as a commodity shifted with her institutional position over the following decades, by calling attention to art viewership

⁷³ Hoptman, 2000: 78.

itself Kusama's mirrored works remained true to an aspect of *Narcissus Garden's* original intent, for they still force a confrontation with the self. While she initially wrestled with her new exhibition value, covertly subverting it with performances like *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)*, Kusama always felt that her art deserved attention. Once she finally achieved the level of exposure and distinction she desired, Kusama had to come to terms with the economic realities that accompanied fame. Her most recent explorations in painting and sculpture have left the radical, countercultural undercurrents of her past behind, instead fully embracing the vibrant colors and obsessive pattern that have won her much acclaim. However, her work with mirrors—though equally, if not more, popular—retain their self-reflexive powers, and thus continue to capture their audience in the act of looking, both at the work and at themselves, regardless of their context.

Despite being reproduced in shiny new materials and placed within the very art institutions they once stood in protest of, the modern iterations of *Narcissus Garden* still contextualize and serialize their audiences, and thus provoke a consideration of their roles as spectators. The distorting convex surfaces of the mirror-balls simultaneously warp reality and reflect the bare truth of their environment, challenging viewers to question their institutional setting. Walter Benjamin argues that an object's unique aura withers as it is reproduced and removed further and further from its original context.⁷⁴ While this is undoubtedly true of *Narcissus Garden's* mirror-balls—which, detached from their transactional context, are in many ways rendered inert—their reflective power enables them to adapt to any environment, and instead of losing all meaning they merely take on a new one. No matter who or where their audience is or why that audience is in their presence, the orbs reflect just that: the stark reality of their surroundings. Even though

⁷⁴ Benjamin, 2003: 257.

Kusama's place in the art world has changed, the orbs remain self-reflexive, and still serve to call attention to the narcissism of their creator and viewers.

But without knowledge of *Narcissus Garden*'s history, how much will viewers truly self-reflect? In every contemporary image of the mirror-balls, the photographer is visible within the picture, reflected back in distorted reality (fig 2-18). Many photos today end up on social media applications and websites, and photographs of art often serve a particular purpose. One's existence online is predicated on constant communication.⁷⁵ So, when individuals upload a photograph of themselves, it is to update others on their whereabouts, and when that photograph takes place at a museum, it is generally for the self-affirming purpose of displaying one's cultured existence as an appreciator of art. Just as in the 1960s, dedication to art remains an activity of a certain degree of culture, reserved for the educated and well off. When an individual photographs *Narcissus Garden*, however, the mirror-balls draw attention to the very act of photographing oneself. Thus, by capturing the narcissistic impulses of looking at art, the image becomes the means of *Narcissus Garden*'s consumption now that its transactional element is gone.

The viewer is captured in this moment of narcissism, uploaded to the Internet for all to see, and yet still the work is unable to live up to its original political power. As Benjamin points out, photography increases the situational possibilities for the object's viewing, and displaces the occurrence of the original photo to convenience the viewer. These issues devalue the "here and now" of an artwork, and thus rupture the object's

⁷⁵ Phillip Vannini, Dennis Waskul, and Simon Gottschalk. *The Senses in Self, Society, and Culture: A Sociology of the Senses*. (New York: Routledge, 2012): 159.

authenticity.⁷⁶ Thus, modern spectators have greater agency than the participants in Kusama's initial social commentary, and instead of purchasing an orb to prove their cultural experience, they can simply snap a quick picture and upload it, instantaneously creating a physical imprint of the memory without spending a cent. Using photography to manipulate and customize their own reflections in the mirror-balls, modern viewers are thus able to evade the unrelenting scrutiny of the original performance, despite the mirrors' self-reflexivity. While *Narcissus Garden*'s reflective power still works to question its environment, and thus reflect the irony of its institutionalization, it is hindered in its quest of igniting self-recognition in its viewers, for Yayoi Kusama's accommodation of her own narcissistic tendencies has seemingly led her to abandon her political tendencies in favor of embracing the commercial success against which she had struggled for so long.

⁷⁶ Benjamin, 2003: 257.

Chapter Three

Dan Graham: Perception on Display

In 1976, exactly ten years after Yayoi Kusama's intervention, Dan Graham premiered a work at the Venice Biennale that again used mirrors to call attention to art consumption. Yet while *Narcissus Garden* literalized the process of exchange, Graham's *Public Space/Two Audiences* abstracted it, highlighting instead the act of viewing art itself. Capturing observers in multiple layers of complex reflection, Graham used mirrors to stress the way viewers' self-image was determined by their interactions with others. Though *Public Space/Two Audiences* stood alone as an architectural structure, once viewers entered it became a display case for the act of looking itself. Ushered in through one of two doors, viewers found themselves in a long, rectangular enclosure neatly bisected by a thick sheet of one-way glass (fig 3-1).⁷⁷ Soundproof and semi-reflective, this partition allowed viewers to simultaneously observe their own actions as well as those of the individuals on the other side of the glass but restricted their hearing to their isolated area.⁷⁸ Adding to the visual intricacy of the piece, Graham left one wall of the enclosure blank, while the other had a floor-to-ceiling mirror that illusively expanded the space. This interplay of reflection forced viewers to face multiple reflections of themselves and consider their roles within this constructed social environment that highlighted a shared experience of looking.

⁷⁷ Though this illustration indicates the inclusion of skylights, images of the completed work indicate that this feature never came to fruition. Instead, Graham used fluorescent lights to illuminate the space.

⁷⁸ One-way glass is a mirror that is partially reflective and partially transparent, also referred to as a one-way mirror or two-way glass. When one side is brightly lit, viewers can see out from the darkened side, but not vice versa. It is commonly used in storefronts, police stations, and corporate skyscrapers.

Because of the complexity of the multiple systems of reflection at play in this work, I will use the terms “Mirror Side” and “Blank Side” to refer to each side of the glass partition. Audience members on Blank Side collectively faced outwards, because the wall behind them was smoothly painted white. Staring through the glass, a Blank Side viewer was met with a shadowy reflection of herself that enveloped a smaller, crisper image in the mirror beyond (fig 3-2). Spectators on Mirror Side could also view themselves through the glass, but with the additional option of turning to the mirrored wall behind them to observe their place within the web of social relations on both sides of the divider (fig 3-3). But when a Mirror Side viewer looked out through the glass, a spectral image of both sides—partially reflected onto the glass from the mirror’s surface—filled in the blank surface of the opposite wall (fig 3-4).⁷⁹ In keeping with the environmental theme that structured the 37th Biennale, Graham used these subtle effects to draw attention to the structure of the work itself. The curator’s inclusion of *Public Space/Two Audiences* in the thematic exhibition “Ambient/Art” contextualized the piece within the development of installation art of the twentieth century.⁸⁰ However when the work was recreated for Graham’s 2009 retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Walker Art Museum, it was framed

⁷⁹ The image used to illustrate this phenomenon was taken at a recent installation of *Public Space/Two Audiences* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2009. Only one photo series was taken at the piece’s original iteration at the 37th Venice Biennale, featuring reflections of Graham himself and the photographer, Eustachy Kossakowski. While it is possible that other photographs were taken of the original installation, none besides Kossakowski’s are accessible through the public record. Though in-depth discussion of the Whitney installation will only occur at the end of this chapter, photographs from 2009 will be cited whenever suitable images from 1976 could not be found.

⁸⁰ Commissioned by the Italian government, curator Germano Celant illustrated this history, starting with El Lissitzky’s 1920s *Proun Room* and moving through Surrealist exhibitions, 1960s Happenings, and Pop art. Although critics at the time repeatedly referred to the exhibition as an exploration of environmental art, it seemed to center around what today is understood as installation art.

within the history of Graham's own artistic practice.⁸¹ In both iterations, the piece's institutional context helped Graham shape his audience's understanding of their roles within the space, but in 2009 they also hinted at the intended effects of the structure's destabilizing layers of reflection.

Graham used reflection in *Public Space/Two Audiences* to present the architectural container itself and the effects of its materials on its occupants. Instead of a constructed space made up of art objects to display art objects, this environment placed the act of looking on display. Graham, whose extensive writings on his own practice have been compiled into two books, *Rock My Religion* and *Two-Way Mirror Power*, explicitly spelled out his intentions for almost every work in his oeuvre. In 1978, he wrote that he wanted *Public Space/Two Audiences* to function doubly, both as exhibition pavilion for its own material structure and as a display case for the viewers within, who observed themselves and the architectural materials' effects on their perception.⁸² Making use of the Biennale's institutional control, Graham asked that each group of viewers agreed to remain in his environment for ten minutes.⁸³ This ensured that occupants spent enough time in this enclosure to reflect more deeply on the artist's intentions and became increasingly aware of their roles in the artwork as they interacted with the materials and the people around them.

⁸¹ *Public Space/Two Audiences* was Graham's first architectural project, sparking the development of his pavilion pieces, which have since defined his career and inspired the greatest public interest. This piece is thus frequently framed as a catalyst for the themes and forms of his later works, without deeper analysis.

⁸² Dan Graham, *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999): 155.

⁸³ There is inconsistent reporting of this time requirement: some say it was thirty minutes, while others say ten minutes. Graham's original proposal stated thirty minutes, but his later writings make no mention of it, so I have chosen to follow the more consistent claim that the time requirement was ten minutes, which is supported in the catalogue of Graham's 2009 retrospective. Beatriz Colomina, "Beyond Pavilions: Architecture as a Machine to See," in *Dan Graham: Beyond*, exh. cat. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009): 195.

Unoccupied, *Public Space/Two Audiences* could have easily been understood as a strictly formal investigation of material structure, but once the space was shared among several individuals for an extended period of time its relational goals became clear. New York-based Graham went to great lengths to distinguish his work from “West-Coast, USA” artists whose perceptual environments drew out the physiological effects of light, post-Bauhaus architectural focus on pure materials, and Minimal art environments.⁸⁴ While he acknowledged the fact that viewers would initially concentrate on his environment’s aesthetics, he wrote that with time in the space with other people viewers would come to experience the materials and structure as “controllers of psychological and social behavior.”⁸⁵ Presented with a dizzying array of the self, viewers faced a paradoxical experience of seeing their own reflections transposed into spaces that they physically could not occupy. Confounding logic, Graham gave his audience nothing more to view in the exhibition space than themselves looking at one another looking. Graham did not simply employ mirror and glass to call attention to their visual qualities; he used their reflective qualities to construct a social environment in which the act of looking became the art itself.

Drawing out the distinct reflective abilities of mirror and two-way glass, Graham manipulated his audience’s self-perception, and forced them to see themselves within the larger group, engaged in the shared experience of looking. With the control afforded by his institutional setting, Graham enforced durational restraints to trap viewers in this system of reflection and split the occupying population to present each side different ways of viewing themselves and others. By constructing these specific social

⁸⁴ Dan Graham uses these specific terms in *Two-Way Mirror Power*, 1999: 156.

⁸⁵ Dan Graham, “Public Space/Two Audiences (1976)” in *Rock My Religion: Writings and Projects 1965-1990* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994): 190.

circumstances, Graham prefigured Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics, defined in 1996 as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."⁸⁶ Instead of using his body to control his audience's experience of his work as he did in earlier performance pieces, with *Public Space/Two Audiences* Graham took a step back from the action, instead becoming, as Kyle Chayka wrote, "a conduit for social experience."⁸⁷ Chayka went on to note that unlike traditional gallery spaces, which display mimetic representations of daily life, relational art displays life as it is lived, and "takes as its subject the dynamic social environment."⁸⁸ Graham's reflective surfaces invoked the multi-relational ways viewers engage in looking by confronting them not only with their own gazes, but also with those gazing right back.

Graham also separated his environment from the traditional space of art galleries—which conceal their influence through neutral architecture—by placing the structure itself on display. Capitalizing on the associations between one-way mirrors and surveillance, corporations, and consumerism, Graham drew connections between systems of observation in the art world and everyday life. Yet Graham's focus on the perception of one's own act of looking—at herself looking at others; of others looking at her looking at them; of others looking at her viewing the art; of others looking at her looking at them viewing the art—distinguished *Public Space/Two Audiences* from anti-market gestures of the same era. Like Kusama, Graham made the consumption of art his subject, and even objectified his viewers. But instead of involving the literal purchase of art, Graham

⁸⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, (Dijon: Les Presses Du Réel, 2002): 113.

⁸⁷ Kyle Chayka, "WTF is...Relational Aesthetics?" *Hyperallergic*, pub. February 8, 2011, acc. April 13, 2014. Web.

⁸⁸ Chayka, 2011.

emphasized the act of viewing art—and its shared experience—as a form of its consumption, thus placing a social spin on a potentially political, capitalist critique of the art market.

Communal Objectification: Merging of Viewer and Viewed

Graham stressed the consumptive nature of art viewing by turning his viewers into objects. Outside of the exhibition framework, visitors of *Public Space/Two Audiences* experienced one-way glass in their daily lives as they walked past storefronts and skyscrapers or waited in hospitals and airport customs areas. The use of one-way mirrors in psychological research, advertising tests, and police interrogations was also well established in popular media vernacular.⁸⁹ Graham's selection of this particular reflective material was thus laden with symbolic energy that evoked one-way mirror's employment as a vehicle for social control. By bringing these associations into an art-viewing context, Graham asked his audience to consider the fact that while they came to the Biennale to see art, upon entering this environment they became the art being seen. Like an item in a shop window, the viewer stood behind Graham's glass partition, objectified on view for all to see.

But unlike conventional uses of one-way glass, *Public Space/Two Audiences* had no hidden observer. Instead, visitors shared the power dynamic as each simultaneously assumed the role of observer and subject of observation. Mutually confined, viewers on both sides experienced commonality with one another; separated by glass, like consumer and product, occupants took on both roles and were thus united in their communal objectification. Yet their physical isolation also instilled viewers with a sense of alienation from those opposite them, and created a sense of hyper-awareness of the self

⁸⁹ Graham, 1999: 156.

on display. Mark Francis, who experienced the piece firsthand in 1976, recounted that upon entering the space most viewers looked at one another through the glass and began mimicking actions as in a dance.⁹⁰ Immediately aware of their opposition, Francis said that “each room seems a complete space, and yet one is fully conscious of it being only half of the total environment.”⁹¹ The unique visual effects of one-way glass allowed Graham to enhance this paradoxical dynamic, for as one looked through the partition she witnessed her own image projected into the space beyond the divide (fig 3-5). Due to the semi-reflective surface of the glass, this shadowy image of the self materialized on the opposite side, equidistant from the viewer’s own relative position to the glass. Suddenly alienated from this image of herself, the viewer watched as her likeness mingled with the bodies beyond the partition despite her inability to speak or physically interact with them.

Superimposed on inaccessible space, this process of estrangement paradoxically united the viewer with the Other in a dynamic akin to the relationship between a consumer and product. Graham wrote about this issue in 1979, discussing the way the ego became confused with commodity as consumers saw their reflections in shop windows projected onto the goods displayed. A connection formed as the “glass and mirrors of the shop window beckons the potential customer by arousing doubts and desires about [her] self-image/self-identity.”⁹² This remote space thus represented an ideal identity only attainable with the coveted commodity and furthermore displaced the customer’s sense of self to forces beyond her control. The social dynamics in *Public Space/Two Audiences* functioned similarly, for while the viewer’s reflection in the glass

⁹⁰ Mark Francis, “A Public Space: Context and History,” in *Dan Graham: Beyond*, exh. cat. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009): 185.

⁹¹ Francis, 2009: 185.

⁹² Graham, 1999: 57.

appeared fractured and indistinct, the bodies with whom her likeness mingled and melded in real space were complete and whole. By confronting his viewers with self-alienation, Graham forced them to reconsider the connections between themselves and the group.

Both vantage points confronted those on Mirror Side with removed images of the self in relation to their fellow occupants. A Blank Side viewer's indistinct visage in the glass was always filled with her concrete reflection in the mirror beyond, thus contextualizing this otherwise disembodied vision of the self (fig 3-4, left). Although the Mirror Side occupant in this immediately confronted his solid reflection when he faced the same direction, the mirror picked up his shadowy likeness from the glass behind him and cast it out into the distance (fig 3-4, right). Repeatedly reflected in diminishing scale and clarity, these ghostly forms haunted the viewer's tangible image and questioned his sense of self. Moreover, when this Mirror Side viewer turned to look through the glass, he accessed the only viewpoint in the enclosure that excluded the mirrored wall. Denied any distinct reflection with which to identify, he saw only a shadowy version of himself through the partition (fig 3-5). Completely disconnected from a secure self-image, the Mirror Side viewer became hyper-aware of his objectification by the people on the other side of the glass, whose concrete forms in real space heightened the ambiguity of his reflection. Again relating this dynamic to that of consumer and commodity, Graham wrote that "the object seems imaginarily complete, while the "self" is de-totalized, lost, not graspable, except through its visual projection upon the object."⁹³ With *Public Space/Two Audiences* Graham intentionally created an enclosure that brought everyday patterns of visual consumption into an art-viewing context, thereby forcing each visitor to consider his or her experience of art as a consumptive act in itself.

⁹³ Graham, 1999: 58.

By implicating his viewers' gazes in a sparse, white cube, Graham also called attention to the gallery space as a market for art consumption. After encountering the works and theories of minimalist figures like Carl André, Sol LeWitt, and Donald Judd during the mid-1960s, Graham began to experiment with conceptual art that questioned gallery structure and practice.⁹⁴ He wrote in 1979 that a gallery directs the viewer's consciousness by placing art objects at eye-level to "conceal from the spectator any awareness of its own presence and function."⁹⁵ Instead of using artworks to guide a viewer's experience through the art space, in *Public Space/Two Audiences* Graham called attention to the gallery itself through its materials and structure. By turning a traditional white cube into a display case for nothing besides the act of looking itself, Graham subverted all traditional expectations for gallery spaces. Like Kusama, Graham critiqued a growing commercialization of the art object by drawing out associations between the art market and consumer culture, but unlike Kusama, Graham did not implicate the actual process of buying art. Instead, Graham used mirrors to investigate the social aspects of art consumption and place the universally relatable act of looking at art on display, thus perhaps even more effectively inspiring viewers to consider their own roles within the reception and experience of an artwork.

The careful balance Graham struck between recalling capitalist structures and providing a meditative space facilitated the success of this display case for consumptive behavior. Though they initially seemed simplistic, Graham's materials were purposefully arranged to provoke awareness of the self amongst others while referencing ideas of

⁹⁴ Graham exhibited these three artists, along with several others, during his time running Daniels Gallery in New York City from 1964-1965.

⁹⁵ Dan Graham, "Art in Relation to Architecture/Architecture in Relation to Art," *Artforum*, vol. 17, no. 6 (February 1979); reprinted in Graham, *Rock My Religion*, 1994: 225.

surveillance and consumerism. Graham clarified his interest in a social approach to capitalist themes by quoting sociological philosopher Herbert Marcuse within his writings on shop windows and commodities:

Capitalistic society makes all personal relations between men take the form of objective relations between things...Social relations are transformed into 'qualities of...things themselves' (commodities).⁹⁶

With *Public Space/Two Audiences*, Graham built off of the connection between social relations and consumer culture by constructing an enclosure that encouraged reflection on the impact of one's own gaze through confrontation with the gazes of others. Though Graham did create an illusively expanded space, by filling only one wall with mirror he ensured that the room did not duplicate more than once (fig 3-6). Instead of stretching infinitely into the distance between two parallel mirrors, Graham's enclosure remained sufficiently grounded in reality to allow viewers to adjust to the initially perplexing effects of the reflective system around them. While its illusory qualities transported viewers to a contemplative mindset, *Public Space/Two Audiences*' tangibility encouraged visitors both to consider the everyday uses of these reflective materials as modes of display and relate the dynamics at play within the piece to social relations in the world beyond the gallery space. Faced with their reflections, spectators had to think about the way they looked at objects, the way they were seen doing so, and conversely how they saw *others* looking. Graham thus asked his viewers to contemplate their acts of viewing art in relation to the consumptive act of viewing commodities.

The disparity in Graham's arrangement of materials also enabled multiple vantage points within the space that heightened a viewer's self-awareness and curiosity about the

⁹⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), in Graham, 1999: 57. Marcuse is quoting Karl Marx at the end of this passage.

perspectives of others. From Blank Side, a spectator watched as her shadowy visage intermingling with those opposite the glass as her reflection in the distant mirror observed the scene (fig 3-7). Her fractured likeness gave way to multiple states of consciousness as she grew further disconnected from a concrete self-image. Within the illusive space of the mirror, the glass partition appeared increasingly insubstantial, and the viewer lost sight of what divided her from the others whose space her ghostly reflection seemed to cohabit. She could observe Mirror Side viewers through the glass looking directly at her, or looking at their own reflections in the mirror behind them, or even using the mirror to see themselves among the group. Despite their physical separation, viewers thus became a unified body engaged in the communal act of looking.

As they witnessed their own acts of perception while being perceived, viewers became aware of their dual function in the space of *Public Space/Two Audiences*. As the glass reflected her image and the space behind her into the opposite room (fig 3-4), the viewer noticed her double role within this collective audience. In 1979 Graham wrote that the reflectiveness of one-way glass “allows it to be a sign signifying, at the same time, the nature of the opposition between the two spaces and their common mediation.”⁹⁷ Though physically impenetrable, the glass divider in *Public Space/Two Audiences* merged the viewer and viewed, observer and observed, consumer and consumed as it interacted with the mirror beyond. Ultimately Graham showed that in the visual consumption of art, subject and object were entirely relative and dependent on perspective. In this space, one was both viewer and viewed, and both roles were equally integral to the piece’s meaning and function.

⁹⁷ Graham, 1999: 56.

Seeing the Self, Seeing: Body as Perceiving Subject

While Graham's system of reflection drew attention to the viewer's dual function within the group as both observer and observed, it also investigated how this fragmented identity affected each visitor's sense of self. At large art exhibitions like the Venice Biennale, patrons move from one pavilion to the next in a repetitive pattern of looking that can even approach banality. But *Public Space/Two Audiences* disrupted this pattern and forced visitors to be more than detached voyeurs, as its mirrors did not allow for simple observation of the art object. Instead the work looked back, returning their gazes and increasing their social and psychological self-consciousness.⁹⁸ As the observer became aware of her body—both as subject of perception and one within a group—she grew more attuned to her own self-image. In 1979, Graham repeatedly referred to Renaissance paintings to distinguish the unique optical effects of mirror-art from the loss of self experienced while examining a traditional work of art.⁹⁹ When looking at a Renaissance painting, a viewer projects herself onto the work's subject. As she falls into the illusionistic perspectival space of the picture frame, she “not only loses awareness of...her ‘self,’ but also loses consciousness of being part of a preset, social group, located in a specific moment and social reality, occurring within the architectural frame where the work is presented.”¹⁰⁰ Conversely, the mirror starkly displays a spectator's self-image as well as the environmental and social surroundings that define her experience of looking. In the sparseness of *Public Space/Two Audiences*, Graham highlighted nothing more than dynamics of looking.

⁹⁸ Graham, 1994: 190.

⁹⁹ Graham, 1999: 58.

¹⁰⁰ Graham, 1994: 190.

Mirrors inherently align themselves with each viewer's own unique point of view and highlight her role in the space. As a Mirror Side viewer approached her reflection, the mirror expanded her vision of the space behind her while magnifying her own image. Shifting to accommodate the observer's movements, as Graham wrote, "the mirror's image connects subjectivity with the perceiver's time-space axis."¹⁰¹ Unless a Blank Side viewer turned around to face the wall behind her, the system of reflection in *Public Space/Two Audiences* insisted that its occupants confront at least one image of themselves engaged in the act of looking. The mirror maintained a sense of immediacy because it tracked the viewer's movements, highlighting the here and now of her reality and constantly provoking a hyper-awareness of her own perception.

As the interplay between the glass and mirror ensured that each viewer simultaneously observed *others* perceiving *her*, this emphasis on the observer's point of view ultimately showed that her self-image was externally determined. Mirrors have long served as metaphors for concepts of self, and as Susan Hiller said, "analogies of the mind's function as the connection between subject and object."¹⁰² In 1970 Gordon Gallup Jr. used mirrors in scientific tests of self-recognition, presenting chimpanzees with their reflections to determine the extent of their cognitive awareness.¹⁰³ When faced with a mirror, humans instinctively recognize the faces staring back as their own. But by structuring his materials so each individual's reflection interacted with those of her fellow observers, Graham established a connection between the way the viewer saw herself and

¹⁰¹ Graham, 1999: 54.

¹⁰² Hiller, 1989: 69.

¹⁰³ Gallup placed green smudges on sedated chimpanzees' foreheads, and found that when they later looked into mirrors and saw the dots, the chimps reached up to their own foreheads, instead of reaching out to wipe the smudges off of the mirror. Only chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas, elephants, and humans are able to recognize that the dots are on their own heads, not on the head of another. Orcas, dolphins, and magpies can pass a similar test. From Mark Pendergrast, *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* (New York: Basic Books, 2003): 365.

the gazes of others. A viewer's perception of others in the act of perceiving her thus influenced her own constructed sense of self within *Public Space/Two Audiences*.

Observing while being observed, their self-image literally transposed into an inaccessible space filled with inaccessible people, Graham's viewers reflected on how their interactions with others affected their own self-awareness. In interviews and his own writing, Graham has made frequent reference to the theories of Jean Paul Sartre and Jacques Lacan to explain his interest in intersubjectivity.¹⁰⁴ Lacan held that a child first established her concept of self by identifying with her reflection, an image that appears to be outside of her bodily sensations. Before this "mirror stage"—beginning around the age of two—a child would not pass Gordon Gallup's mirror test, for she would not recognize her reflection as her own. But as Claire Bishop writes, as the child gains awareness of her social reality, she begins to identify with an external self that appears coherent and concrete while she internally struggles against a sense of fragmentation.¹⁰⁵ Graham replicated this fragmentation by repeatedly reflecting his viewers in diminishing scale and clarity between the mirror and glass surfaces of *Public Space/Two Audiences* (fig 3-8). The solidity of their reflection in the full mirror, along with the bodies they viewed in real space, heightened the jarring effect of a simultaneously connection and alienation from the self. Presented with a destabilized ego determined by external, reciprocal gazes, the viewer considered not only her role with the group, but also the way these social relations contributed to her construction of self.

The glass partition's unique materiality enabled its function as a multi-faceted interface between the two divided audiences, paradoxically reinforcing a sense of both

¹⁰⁴ Examples can be found in Colin Milliard, "'I Don't Do Pavilions': Dan Graham Sets the Record Straight," *ArtInfo UK*, pub. March 20, 2012, acc. April 4, 2014. Online. And Graham, 1999: 55.

¹⁰⁵ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010): 72.

intimacy and detachment amongst its observers. While the glass' impenetrability physically and audibly isolated viewers from one another, its transparency allowed for their mutual observation as its reflectiveness implicated them on both sides of the space (fig 3-9). Whether picking up images on Mirror Side from the mirror's surface and projecting them onto the white wall beyond, or doubling the space as it expanded out from Blank Side, the one-way glass always ensured that a viewer's reflection would overlap or intersect with multiple iterations of others' likenesses or their own. Despite the inherently isolating qualities of a soundproof glass barrier, these composite reflections challenged the viewer's sense of separation from those opposite the partition, and from the artwork itself. No longer an unrelated observer, the viewer was fully subsumed into the disorienting interplay of reflection in *Public Space/Two Audiences*.

Public/Private: Collective Selves

The shared consciousness of this work's occupants established intersubjectivity in their viewing experiences. Neither side of the glass partition fulfilled associative conceptions of public or private space; when viewers on both sides assumed both roles, they effectively nullified these distinctions altogether. In the late-1970s, businesses started constructing their corporate headquarters with one-way mirrored glass to blend into their surroundings and create an aura of transparency, while in reality privileging the view points of those within.¹⁰⁶ The partition in *Public Space/Two Audiences* subverted this notion, placing occupants on equal footing within a space entirely removed from context. Graham's reflective surfaces did not blend in; they stood out. Confronting each

¹⁰⁶ This one-way glass enables a one-way gaze, for it allows occupants of the building to see out, but prevents passersby from seeing in. From Josh Thorpe, "Searching for Dan Graham: A Global Tour of the American Artist's Enigmatic Pavilions," *Canadian Art*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 88.

viewer with nothing more to see than the effects of her own sight, *Public Space/Two Audiences* distilled the art gallery's function as a space for perception.

But the conditions required to produce the work's particular social dynamics also relied on the controlled environment of its institutional setting. Beyond the Biennale's walls, Graham could not have enforced the time requirement that pushed viewers to reflect on their own roles in the space. This extended meditation also ensured that viewers' vision of their fellow occupants changed over time, observing a system of social relations in constant flux as people experimented with various viewpoints and positions. Without identical lighting schemes on both sides of the partition, Graham's divided audience would not have experienced the intersubjectivity that abolished distinctions between public and private. If disparately lit, one-way glass appears opaque to viewers on the illuminated side while those in darkness face non-reflective transparency. By evenly lighting the space, Graham maintained uniform reflectiveness on the one-way glass and thus ensured equality in viewers' experiences of looking. As Graham writes, "illumination is a controller of social behavior."¹⁰⁷ With *Public Space/Two Audiences* Graham subverted notions of social control associated with his materials, instead using his institutional resources to create a communal environment that did not privilege a single perspective

Though this dynamic remained true in the work's later iteration, its new context altered the previously insulated space and colored its viewers' processes of reflection. Since 1976, Dan Graham has gained renown for outdoor pavilions that use one-way mirrors to engage a viewing collective and showcase interrelations between the self and society. The retrospective *Dan Graham: Beyond* travelled from MOCA in Los Angeles to

¹⁰⁷ Graham, 1979, in *Two-Way Mirror Power*, 1999: 56.

the Whitney in New York and the Walker Art Museum in Minneapolis during 2009, exposing visitors across the country to Graham's manipulations of reflective surfaces. As the exhibition was not organized chronologically, before entering *Public Space/Two Audiences* viewers encountered Graham's more recent mirrored structures, which approached the body as part of a social context rather than treating it as a distinct entity.¹⁰⁸ Contemporary occupants of *Public Space/Two Audiences* thus entered the enclosure armed with knowledge about Graham's intentions with reflection. Despite their acoustic isolation from the rest of the museum, viewers were now placed on display within the context of Graham's oeuvre instead of in a space entirely devoid of context. Thus the spectator's anticipated experience of Graham's mirrors disrupted her organic process of self-consideration. As MOCA curator Bennett Simpson says, Graham's work centers around "the way one experiences the space of the self," but in this retrospective one's experience is mediated by an awareness of Graham's work.¹⁰⁹

Graham's shifting interest from the individual body to the body in context can be traced through his transition from true mirrors to working exclusively in varying degrees of semi-reflective glass. In 1990, Graham said that while "the audience used to be very clear; it used to be general mass, extremely important," he now felt distanced from his viewers' identities, and thus his artistic interests "turned to creating a spectacle to fascinate, rather than tying into an assumed public participation."¹¹⁰ It seems that Graham has since chosen the medium for his spectacles, leaving mirrors behind in favor of the complex array of opacity and transparency enabled by one-way glass. Graham's public

¹⁰⁸ Tessa Verheul, "Overwhelming Overview: Dan Graham at the Whitney (NYC)," *Metropolis M*, pub. September 24, 2009, acc. April 26, 2014. Web.

¹⁰⁹ Bennett Simpson, in Randy Kennedy, "A Round Peg," *New York Times* 28 June 2009: AR1.

¹¹⁰ Dan Graham and Daniela Salvioni, "Dan Graham: I'll Call Myself a Conceptual Artist, Though I Don't Like Conceptual Art," *Flash Art International*, vol. 152 (May/June 1990): 143.

pavilions place their viewers in context by reflecting them among the features of their natural or urban environments (fig 3-10). Simultaneously concealing and revealing, the pavilion's unique materiality play optical tricks on passersby, interrupting everyday space and asking them to pause and reconsider their roles in a larger social context.

Though the mirror did not leave the gallery space with Dan Graham, it found its place outdoors with Anish Kapoor, whose massive mirrored sculpture *Cloud Gate* has been the centerpiece of Chicago's Millennium Park since 2004 (fig 3-11). After locating their reflections on *Cloud Gate*'s curving surface, spectators are faced with a vision of themselves as one with within a collective viewing body. But instead of considering the sculpture as a whole, visitors often rush towards it and focus solely on their own distorted likenesses. *Cloud Gate* is emblematic of the shifting impact of mirror-art since the turn of the twenty-first century, for although it does serve as a canvas for looking, the work quickly dissolves into a photo opportunity. The advent of modern technology has made individuals' appearances constantly accessible through the pixels of their cell phones. Mirrors have lost their inherent power to destabilize and shock because their viewers have grown desensitized to confrontations with their own reflections.

While both Graham and Kapoor create a "spectacle to fascinate," it seems that Graham's switch in reflective materials ultimately stays truer to the original intentions of 1970s mirror-art by provoking self-awareness in his viewers. As Graham's pavilions concentrated on transparency, they strayed from the intentions of *Public Space/Two Audiences* and drew the viewer's larger context into their layers of reflection. But Graham also retained aspects of his early work by creating an intersubjective experience among observers, disorienting them with their own reflections to invoke contemplation

about their multi-relational modes of looking. While Kapoor's mirror-art asks that one witness herself within surrounding social systems, the contemporary observer tends to overlook this intention. The iconic *Cloud Gate* has thus become more of an attraction than a reflective device for prolonged self-consideration.

Epilogue

I am not the spectator, I am involved, and it is my involvement in a point of view which makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception.¹¹¹

-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1962

When faced with *Cloud Gate*'s mirrored surface, viewers instinctively reach for their cameras to capture their own displaced reflections. In 2013, Oxford English Dictionaries deemed "selfie" the word of the year: referring to a photograph taken of oneself. Typically captured with a smartphone, the term was popularized through tags on social media and photo sharing websites during the first decade of this century.¹¹² But the recent proliferation of the selfie—increasing in usage by over 17,000 percent in the last year alone—has prompted more than its official coronation; as the number of selfies grows, as does the need for classification of its many varieties.¹¹³ Predating Oxford Dictionaries' recognition of the selfie, in December 2012 art critic Brian Droitcour composed a post for DIS Magazine detailing what he called the "art selfie." The mirror is the ideal medium of the art selfie, a term which Droitcour reserves for "cases when the art itself creates the conditions for the selfie."¹¹⁴ Beyond "museum selfies," which simply feature the photographer in front of a work of art, art selfies characterize the specific fascination with taking a picture of the self reflected in a mirrored artwork.

¹¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, in Carolyn Kane, "Multiple Views," *Rhizome*, pub. 15 July 2009, acc. 25 April 2014. Web. <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2009/jul/15/multiple-views/>

¹¹² Oxford Dictionaries, 2013.

¹¹³ Oxford Dictionaries, 2013.

¹¹⁴ Brian Droitcour, "Let Us See You See You," *DIS Magazine*, pub. 3 December 2012, acc. 11 November 2013. Web. <http://dismagazine.com/blog/38139/let-us-see-you-see-you/>

Joan Jonas, Yayoi Kusama, and Dan Graham tempted viewers with the allure of their own reflections, drawing them in and forcing recognition of their roles as spectators of art. As mirror-art returns the viewer's gaze, she is "made both a subject and object, both a participant in the making of a representation and that which is represented."¹¹⁵ The art selfie captures this dynamic but affords the observer greater agency. Using her camera to manipulate the way she appears in the art, the viewer actively controls her own objecthood. When uploaded to the internet, the art selfie thus embodies Merleau-Ponty's notion of a spectator's involved point of view. Focused entirely around the viewer's individual consciousness, the art selfie simultaneously expresses and fragments her self-perception. As Droitcour explains, social media provides an essential platform for the selfie by communicating the viewer's self-image to others who create new images in remote dialogue.¹¹⁶ He then goes on to say that by aestheticizing everyday life, social media "has leached the authority of image-making from mass media and from art. When the mirror *is* art, the image serves as a reminder of this process, and an acceleration of it."¹¹⁷ Mirror artists of the 1960s and 70s were not faced with these issues; their mirrors wielded absolute authority and dictated the way observers interacted with and perceived their own reflections.

Armed with cameras, contemporary viewers direct their own involvement in mirror-art. Social media has permeated the art-viewing experience, encouraging image-making by offering users visibility and feedback. Hashtags provide a quick and easy way

¹¹⁵ Nancy Tousley, "Let Me Be Your Mirror," from *Theatroclasm: Mirrors, Mimesis and the Place of the Viewer*, exh. cat. (Regina: MacKenzie Art Gallery, 2009): 30.

¹¹⁶ Droitcour, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Droitcour, 2012.

to view a set of images taken at a specific site, or concerning a certain subject.¹¹⁸ But as hashtags mediate observers' consumption of artworks, turning Van Gogh's into items on the social media agenda, the art itself begins to lose importance in one's art-viewing experience. Though museums try to restore art's inimitability by prohibiting photos in their galleries, these rules are clearly difficult to enforce as visitors still manage to add to #museumsselfie and #artselfie everyday.¹¹⁹ However, since users are the only regulators of these hashtags, such parameters are easily violated. Furthermore, since its inception, images logged under #artselfie have deviated from its original definition: in order to find true art selfies, one must sift through self-portraits in museums, in front of non-reflective artworks, and selfies completely removed from an art context that have merely been edited to appear "artsy." This begs the question, if contemporary art viewers cannot even adhere to this hashtag and consider its origins, how can they respect the contemplative intentions of mirror-art's origins?

By drawing spectators' eyes from the mirror to their cell phones, art selfies seem to undermine the original goals of mirror-art and disrupt prolonged self-consideration. Removed from the moment, observers instead focus on obtaining evidence of their art-viewing experience. Although the urge to chronicle the events of one's life is not a new concept, technological advancements over the past decade have made documentation faster, cheaper, and easier than ever. Sherry Turkle discusses the drawbacks of this proliferation in her article, "The Documented Life," explaining the draw of the selfie as a desire to possess a photograph of one's experience.¹²⁰ Just as the constant flow of

¹¹⁸ Hashtags are words or un-spaced phrases preceded by a pound sign (e.g. #artselfie) used to identify and organize messages and images on a certain topic over social media.

¹¹⁹ Various sites, like keyhole.co, can be used to track hashtags live on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

¹²⁰ Sherry Turkle, "The Documented Life," *New York Times* 16 December 2013: A25.

information through mobile technology interrupts the daily life of any contemporary individual, the art selfie removes the viewer from the act of looking at mirror-art and distances her from its original intentions. As Turkle writes, “when you get accustomed to a life of stops and starts, you get less accustomed to reflecting on where you are and what you are thinking.”¹²¹ By interrupting the viewer’s observation of her own act of looking, the art selfie immortalizes this moment of failed self-reflection.

Paradoxically, while the art selfie often interrupts the moment of viewing, it can simultaneously capture the very act of viewing itself and provide evidence of the spectator’s active engagement with the work. As a viewer’s experience of looking is entirely subjective, it is impossible to tell from an art selfie whether the photographer self-reflected in her time with the mirror-art. My personal experience viewing Kusama’s *Fireflies on the Water* at the Whitney in 2012 exemplifies the difficult nature of interpreting the art selfie. After two failed attempts at securing a coveted time slot in this mirrored room, it felt redemptive to snap a single picture of my reflection (fig E-1). I then slipped my phone back into my pocket and proceeded to observe my infinite reflections firsthand, making the most of the time I had to left for self-reflection. This selfie was simply my way of recording this exciting moment of my first experience in one of Kusama’s mirrored environments.¹²² Yet the image itself looks just like any other selfie taken in *Fireflies on the Water*, by individuals whose time in the piece could have been spent very differently than mine. Thus, context becomes key when considering the

¹²¹ Turkle, 2013: A25.

¹²² After seeing Kusama’s retrospective three times, I was deeply invested in her work. Had I been less interested, or the docent not explicitly stated “no pictures please” before I stepped into the space, perhaps I would not have felt the same commitment to a true experience of the work. Perhaps then I would have given more time to framing my photograph, leveling it out or taking more shots to capture different angles as I usually try to do.

implications of the art selfie. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that although my desire to possess evidence of my experience confirms Turkle's hypothesis, ultimately this desire not inhibit any self-reflection that followed. This exemplifies an unfortunate dilemma whereby it is impossible to understand the intentions behind any art selfie without a personal narrative, the likes of which are rarely included in the abbreviated posts that populate social media.

Often viewed by detached spectators, art selfies thus seem destined to be misunderstood. The highest rated comment about the Turkle's article on the *New York Times* website reads, "if you are truly into the moment, you don't interrupt it for a pic [sic]. You interrupt it for a pic when you want to appear to be in the moment."¹²³ This statement embodies the way in which selfies are typically interpreted by those who do not relate to the impulse to document oneself, or are generally uninvolved with social media. But within the media, investigations such as Alicia Eler's ongoing "Selfie Series" on the art-centric blog *Hyperallergic* treat selfies as "our networked identities, connected, refracted, and devoid of context."¹²⁴ Eler asserts that as opposed to narcissistic enterprises, selfies are tools of communication for gaining social validation and affirmation. Most significantly, she writes that "those who see us are our mirrors, reflecting how we look back to ourselves, and out to the internet world."¹²⁵ In this sense, as my art selfie joined those of hundreds of others taken in *Fireflies on the Water* their spectatorship became a reflection of mine. The art selfie's implication of mirror-art, with

¹²³ Charlie Newman, 16 December 2013, 7:56 AM. On Turkle, 2013: A25.

¹²⁴ Since June 24, 2013, Eler has asked that readers send in their selfies with an explanation of why they took them. On a bi-weekly basis, she curates the submissions into thematic blog posts that investigate different approaches to and motivations for the selfie. Alicia Eler, "Theory of the Selfie," *Hyperallergic*, pub. 20 November 2013, acc. 17 December 2013. Web. <http://hyperallergic.com/94461/theory-of-the-selfie/>

¹²⁵ Eler, 2013.

its history of provoking self-reflection, thus enhances Eler's concept and questions how viewers' own modes of looking are impacted by the way they are viewed by others.

Seeing the self seeing is an integral aspect of all selfies, but the art selfie distinguishes itself not only by using the mirror as its medium, but also through the esteem of its institutional context. Though *Fireflies on the Water* drew large crowds and was widely disseminated over social media, the Whitney's ticketing system and prohibition of photography retained a certain level of control over the work's reception. A year and half later, in November 2013 David Zwirner Gallery premiered Kusama's latest mirrored piece, *Infinity Mirrored Room – The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*, yet this time the exhibit was not restricted by admissions fees or rules against photography (fig E-2). Soon, long lines snaked down the block, awe-inspiring images spread over social media, and hype began to build about a once in a lifetime experience at David Zwirner.¹²⁶ Each day about 2,500 people waited for hours in the winter air for a chance to spend forty-five seconds alone in this ethereal environmental work (fig E-3).¹²⁷ Kusama seems to have achieved Graham's "spectacle to fascinate," bringing in a broad demographic of viewers that extended far beyond the usual seasoned gallery goers. For some, the experience of this piece was based entirely around taking an image to commemorate it.¹²⁸ Though this piece represents the way contemporary mirror-art can

¹²⁶ William Grimes, "Lights, Mirrors, Instagram! #ArtSensation: Yayoi Kusama's 'Mirrored Room' at David Zwirner Gallery," *New York Times* 1 December 2013: C1.

¹²⁷ I visited this exhibition on a snowy day in December. I waited with friends for just over half an hour to enter the show's other mirrored room, *Love Is Calling*, which admitted 8-10 people for periods of a minute and a half. We were told to "Take as many photos as we want." Afterwards, I asked a man in line for the other room how long he had been waiting. "Two hours," he said, just about halfway to the gallery's door.

¹²⁸ Nancy Lundebjerg told New York Times reporter William Grimes that after seeing a friend's photo of the work on Instagram, she was inspired by jealousy to come capture her own self-portrait. Armed with her smartphone and Canon DSLR, the 54-year-old medical executive said, "I feel as though this has the same buzz as 'Rain Room,'" comparing Kusama's show with another immersive, photogenic, limited-time-only installation in New York City that drew massive crowds and garnered much attention on social media.

quickly dissolve into spectacle when mediated by social media, at its core *Mirrored Room* aimed to inspire self-reflection and provoke a deep, meditative experience.

So how, exactly, has the art selfie impacted the way viewers reflect and relate to mirror-art? If the selfie is a means of identity construction, then it produces a highly controlled vision of the self; since the camera allows for the manipulation of the way one is seen. By snapping a picture of her reflection in a work of art, the viewer assumes a control over her self-image, which, during the 1960s, was commanded by the mirror itself. Framing the image as she pleases, the viewer represents herself exactly how she wants to be seen. However, once uploaded to the internet, this self-image is placed in the hands of others whose views then determine the way she sees herself. Becoming a spectator to other people's perception of her, the viewer is left asking the age-old question posed when confronting a mirror: "How do I look?" Self-reflection is likewise enabled by mirror-art; however, the art selfie displaces this process of self-reflection from the mirror to the picture and its perceivers. Unlike the mirror-art of the 1960s and 70s, the viewers' spectators are not implicated in the surface of the work alongside her. With the determinants of her self-image absent, the viewer's identity as perceiver grows disconnected from the mirror itself. Thus, the art selfie demotes the position of the mirror in this system of reflection, and therefore reduces the artist's agency in manipulating her viewers' experiences of the work. Yet art selfies still capture the act of looking and ignite self-reflection based on the way the subject sees herself being seen. Instead of dismantling the objectives of 1960s and 70s mirror-art, the art selfie may have simply reinvented them, thus giving rise to new means of considering one's own ways of seeing.

Figures

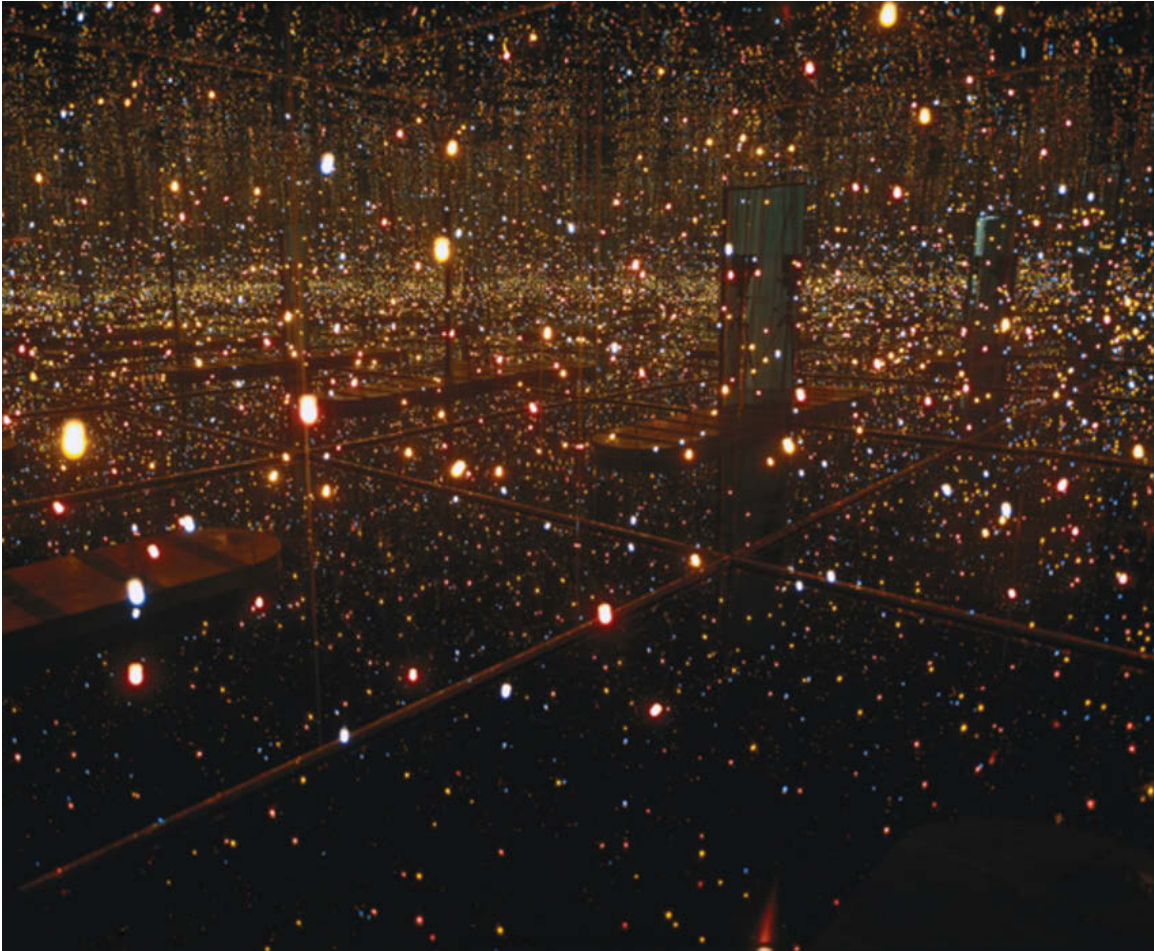


fig I-1: Yayoi Kusama – *Fireflies on the Water* – 2002

Whitney Museum of American Art

Photo courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art, accessed on ArtSlant

<http://www.artslant.com/ew/works/show/605383>



fig 1-1: Joan Jonas – *Mirror Piece I* – 1969
Loeb Student Center, New York University, New York City
Photo by Larry Qualls, accessed on ArtStor



fig 1-2: Karen LeCocq & Nancy Youdelman – *Lea's Room* – 1972
“Womanhouse” exhibition, Fresno, California
Photo from Nancy Youdelman’s website

<http://www.nancyyoudelman.com/index.php/portfolios/2011-07-09-02-05-54>



fig 1-3: Norman Rockwell – *Girl at the Mirror* – 1954
Photo from Larry Qualls Archive on ArtStor



fig 1-4: Joan Jonas – *Mirror Piece I* – 1969
Loeb Student Center, New York University, New York City

From: *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968-1982*. (Irvine: University of California, 1983): 15.



fig 1-5: Joan Jonas – *Mirror Piece I* – 1969
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
Photo accessed on Artsy

<https://artsy.net/artwork/joan-jonas-mirror-performance-i>



fig 1-6: Joan Jonas – *Mirror Piece I* – 1969
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
Photo accessed on Artsy

<https://artsy.net/artwork/joan-jonas-mirror-performance-iii>



fig 1-7: Diego Velázquez – *The Rokeby Venus* – 1648
Photo accessed on ArtStor



fig 1-8: Joan Jonas – *Mirror Piece I* – 1969
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
Photo accessed on Artsy

<https://artsy.net/artwork/joan-jonas-mirror-performance-ii>



fig 1-9: Joan Jonas – *Mirror Piece I* – 1969
Loeb Student Center, New York University, New York City

From: *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968-1982*. (Irvine: University of California, 1983): 15.

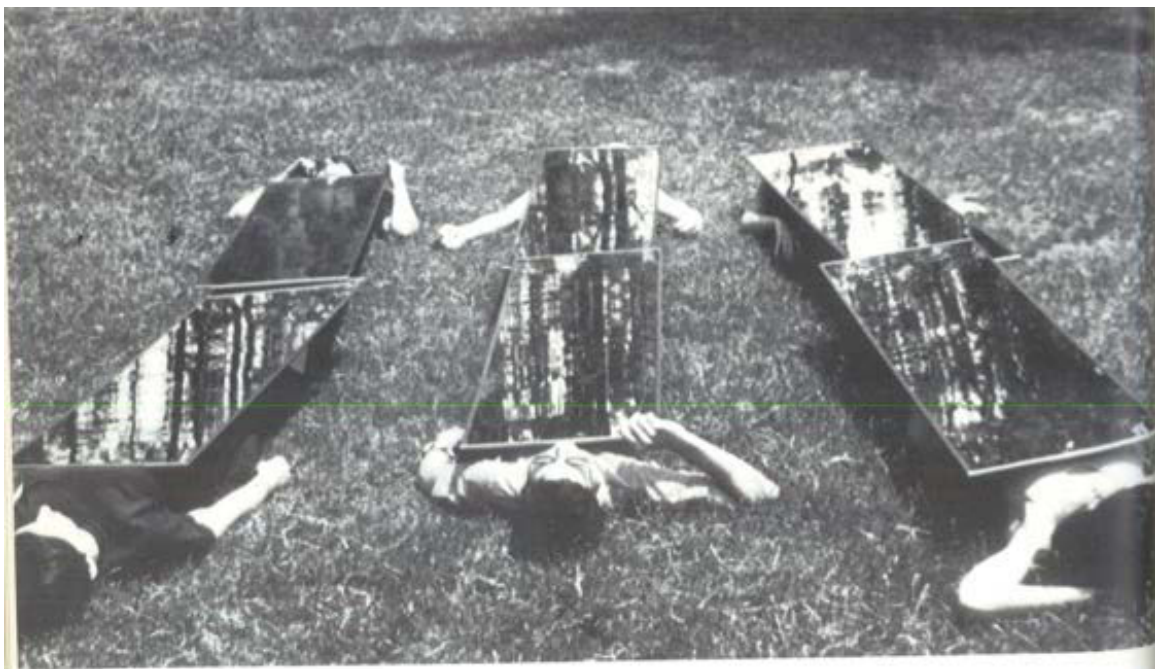


fig 1-10: Joan Jonas – *Mirror Piece I* – 1969
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

From: *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968-1982*. (Irvine: University of California, 1983): 14.



fig 1-11: Joan Jonas – *Mirror Piece I* – 1969
Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
Photo courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/24749>



fig 1-12: Hans Breder – *La Ventosa XVIII* – 1972

Accessed on ArtNet

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/hans-breder/la-ventosa-xviii-a-v4wbc5p1Ua7eUD51AC6Dng2>



fig 1-13: Hans Bellmer – *La Poupée* – 1935
Photo accessed from Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum

<http://www.neuegalerie-archiv.at/03/phantom/bild01.html>



fig 1-14: Ana Mendieta – Untitled photographs from the *Silueta* series – 1973-1980
Mexico

Photos accessed on ArtNet

<http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit4-14-15.asp>



fig 1-15: Joan Jonas – film still from *Wind* – 1968
(Mirrored costumes can be see in background)

From: *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968-1982*. (Irvine: University of California, 1983): 12.

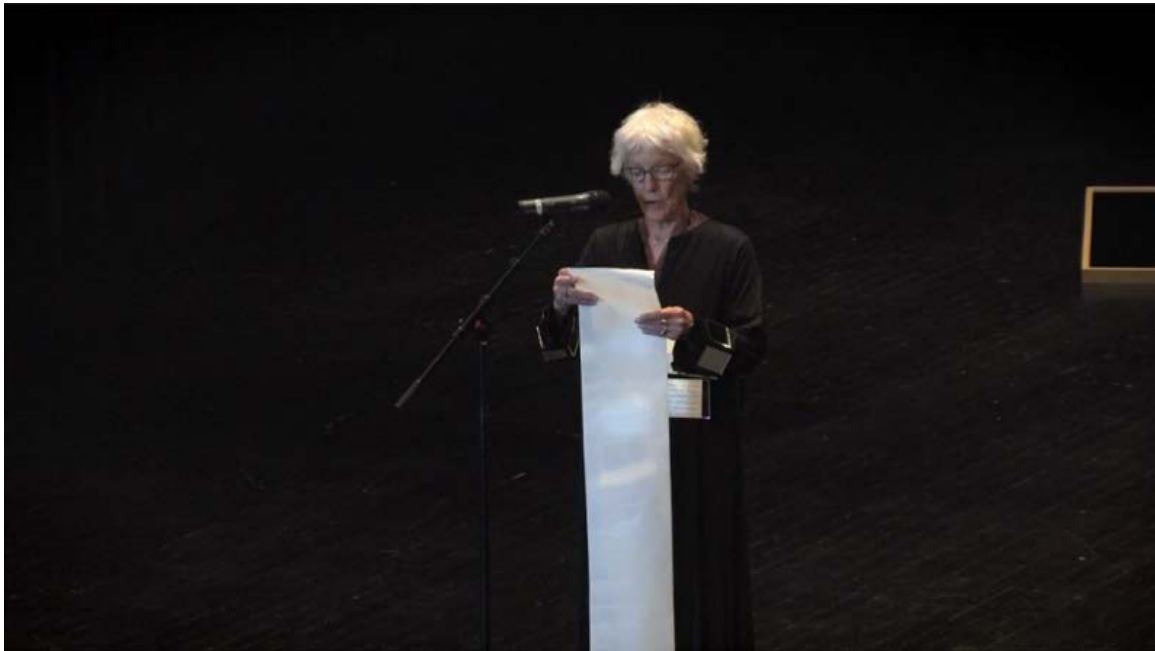


fig 1-16: Joan Jonas – still from *Mirror Piece I: Reconfigured* – 2013
Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm, Sweden

Note: The images of *Mirror Piece I: Reconfigured* are stills from a recording of the performance at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in 2013. The video was uploaded in December 2013, and I took the screenshots in February 2014.
Accessed on Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/77162791>

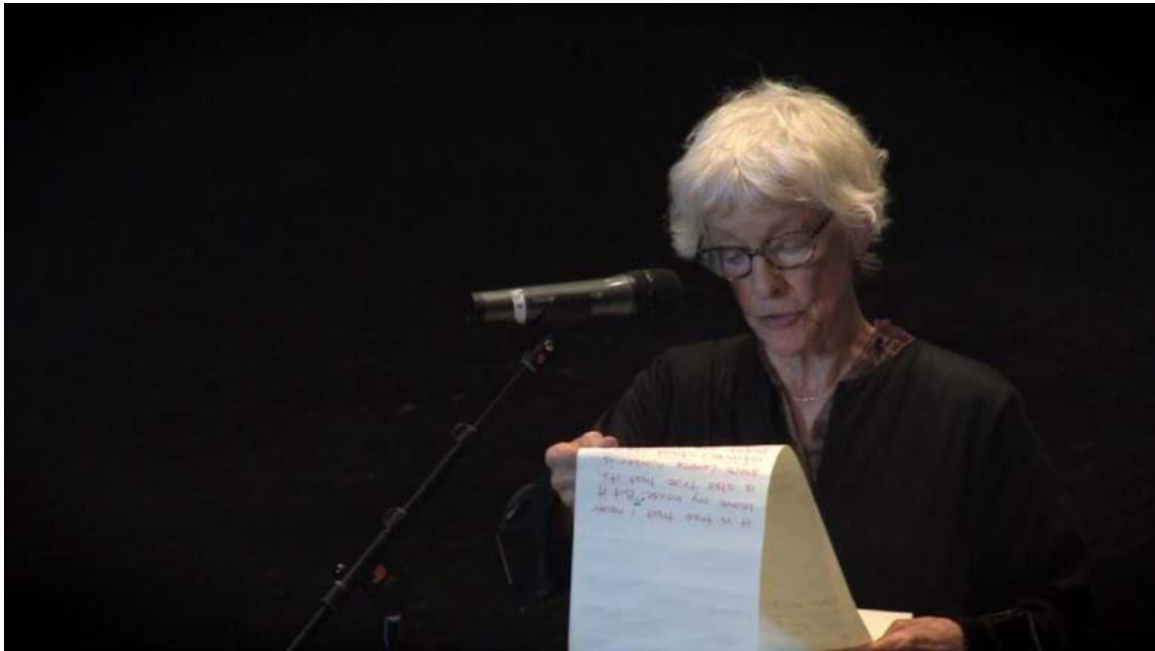


fig 1-17: Joan Jonas – still from *Mirror Piece I: Reconfigured* – 2013
Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm, Sweden



fig 1-18: Joan Jonas – still from *Mirror Piece I: Reconfigured* – 2013
Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm, Sweden



fig 2-1: Yayoi Kusama – *Narcissus Garden* – 1966
Installed outside the Italian Pavilion at the 33rd Venice Biennale. Venice, Italy

From: *Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years*, ex. cat. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2009): 101.



fig 2-2: Exhibition view at Green Gallery, New York – June 1962
With Yayoi Kusama's *Accumulation No. 1* and Claus Oldenburg's *Suit*
Photo courtesy of Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc.

Accessed on Museum of Modern Art's blog "Inside/Out"
http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/10/09/yayoi-kusamas-return-to-moma/



fig 2-3: Yayoi Kusama with *Accumulation No. 2* at her studio
New York, New York – 1962
Photo from Phaidon

<http://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/picture-galleries/2012/february/02/the-fantastical-world-of-yayoi-kusama/?idx=2>



fig 2-4: Claes Oldenburg with *Floor Burger*, *Calendar*, and *Floor Cake*
Green Gallery, New York – September 1962
Photo from 34th Street blog

<http://34st.com/2011/09/amplified-simplicity-claes-oldenburgs-presence-in-philadelphia-and-worldwide/>



fig 2-5: Yayoi Kusama – *Narcissus Garden* – 1966
Installed outside the Italian Pavilion at the 33rd Venice Biennale. Venice, Italy
Photo courtesy of Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc., accessed on Love Magazine, UK

<http://www.thelovemagazine.co.uk/share.php?id=8304>



fig 2-6: Yayoi Kusama – *Narcissus Garden* – 2004
Photo courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, accessed on ArtSlant

<http://www.artslant.com/ew/works/show/651518>



fig 2-7: Yayoi Kusama – *Narcissus Garden* – 1966
Installed outside the Italian Pavilion at the 33rd Venice Biennale. Venice, Italy

From: *Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years*, ex. cat. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2009): 155.



fig 2-8: Yayoi Kusama and *Infinity Net* painting, double exposure – c. 1960
New York, New York
Photo provided by Midori Yamamura



fig 2-9: Yayoi Kusama with *Narcissus Garden* – 1966
Venice, Italy
Photo from ArtIT

http://www.art-it.asia/u/admin_ed_feature/IVjzuHQDLY57eOqsfSyt/?lang=ja



fig 2-10: *Narcissus Garden* at the Venice Biennale – 1966
Venice, Italy

From: *Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years*, ex. cat. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2009): 101.



fig 2-11: Yayoi Kusama – *Kusama's Peep Show* – 1966
Castellane Gallery, New York
Photo by Peter Moore

From: *Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years*, ex. cat. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van
Beuningen, 2009): 98.



fig 2-12: Yayoi Kusama – *Infinity Net, No. F* – 1959
Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=80176

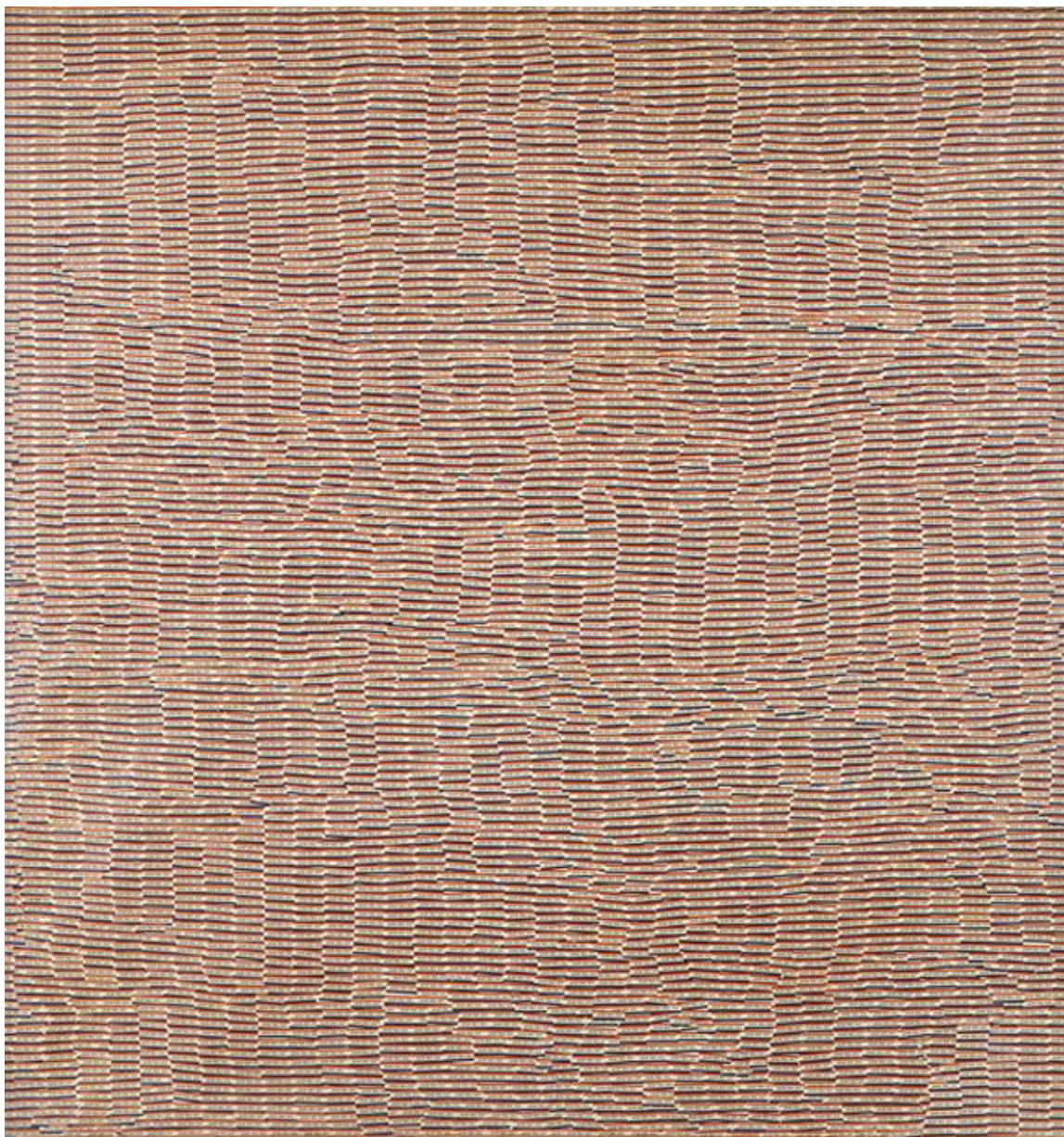


fig 2-13: Yayoi Kusama – *Airmail Stickers* – 1962
Photo courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

<http://whitney.org/Collection/YayoiKusama/6434>

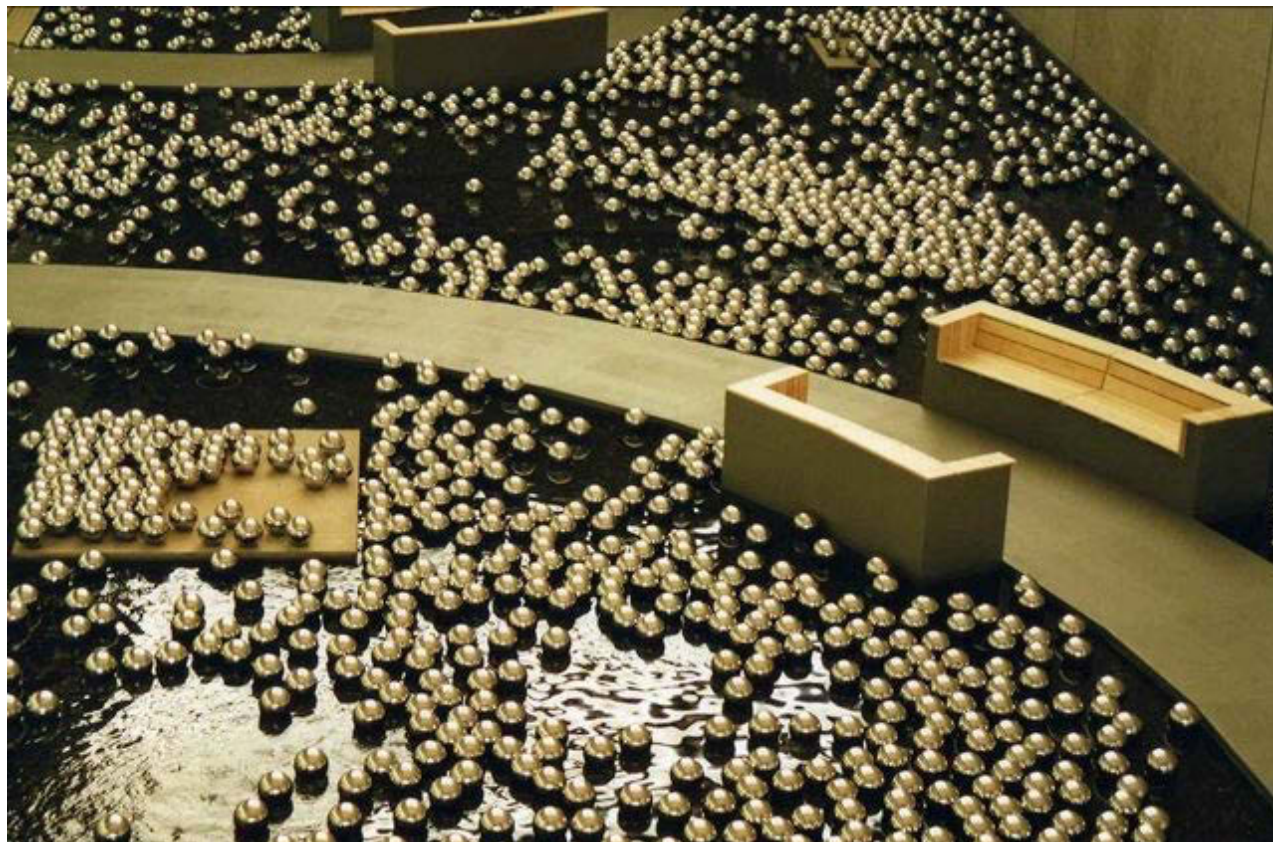


fig 2-14: Yayoi Kusama – *Narcissus Garden* – 2002
Installed at the Watermill, Queensland Art Gallery, Australia
Photo by Christine Yeh, accessed on lightstalkers.org

<http://www.lightstalkers.org/images/show/197014>

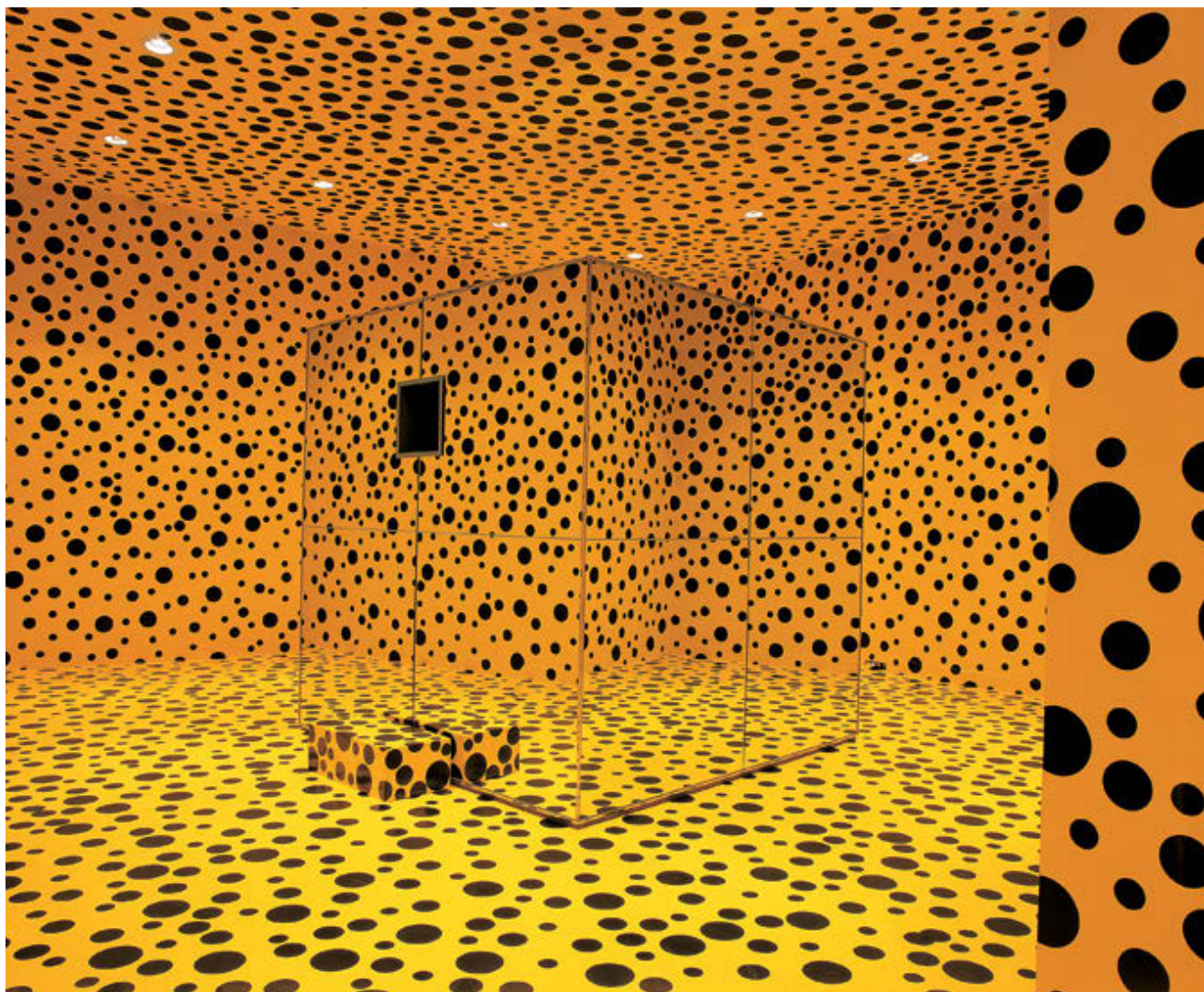


fig 2-15: Yayoi Kusama – *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)* – 1991
Japanese Pavilion, Venice Biennale
Photo courtesy of the Hara Museum, Tokyo

From: *Yayoi Kusama* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000): 75.



fig 2-16: view inside *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)* – 1991
Japanese Pavilion, 45th Venice Biennale

From: *Yayoi Kusama* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000): 76.

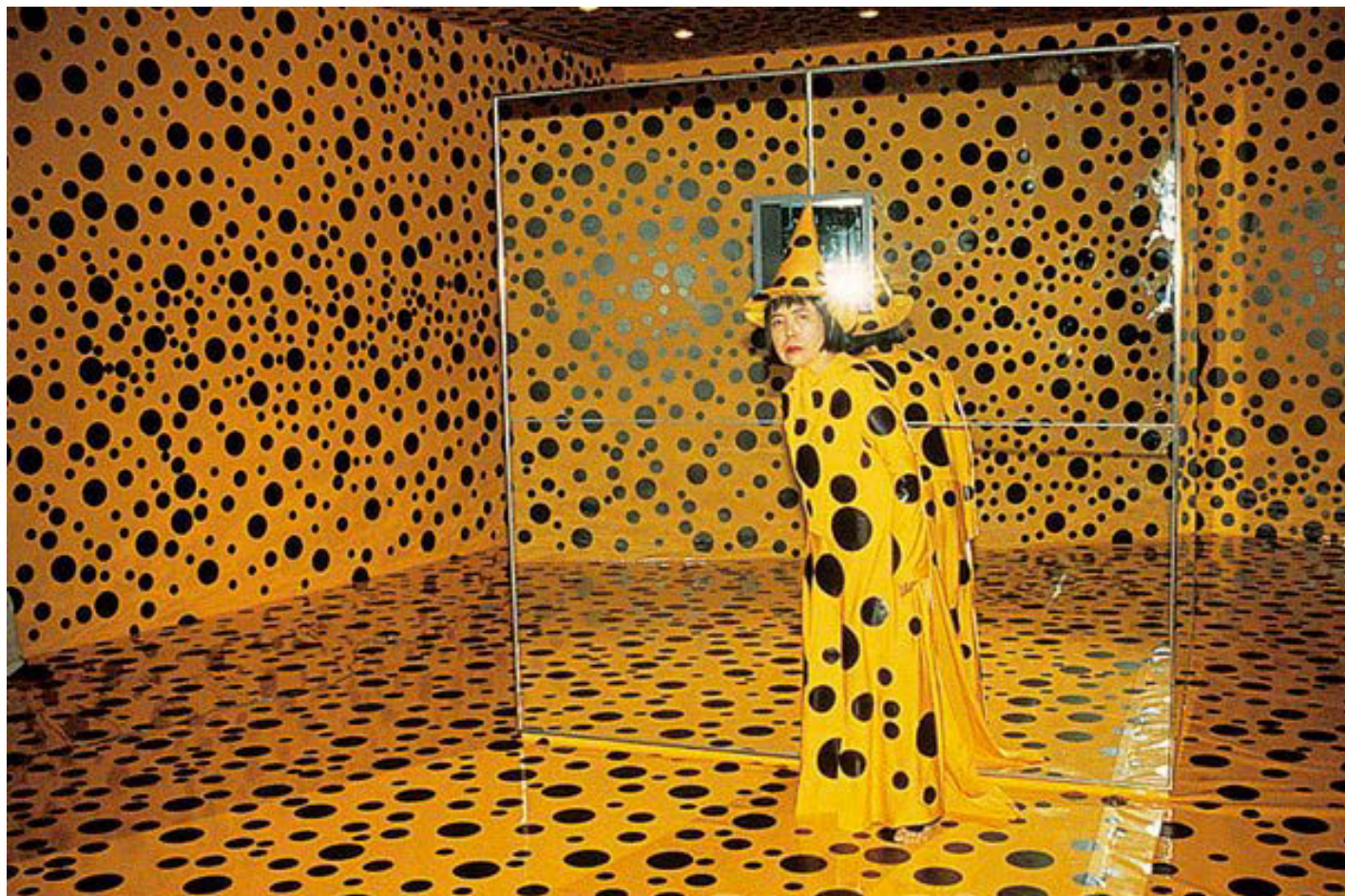


fig 2-17: Yayoi Kusama in *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)* – 1993
Japanese Pavilion, 45th Venice Biennale

From: *Yayoi Kusama* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000): 74.

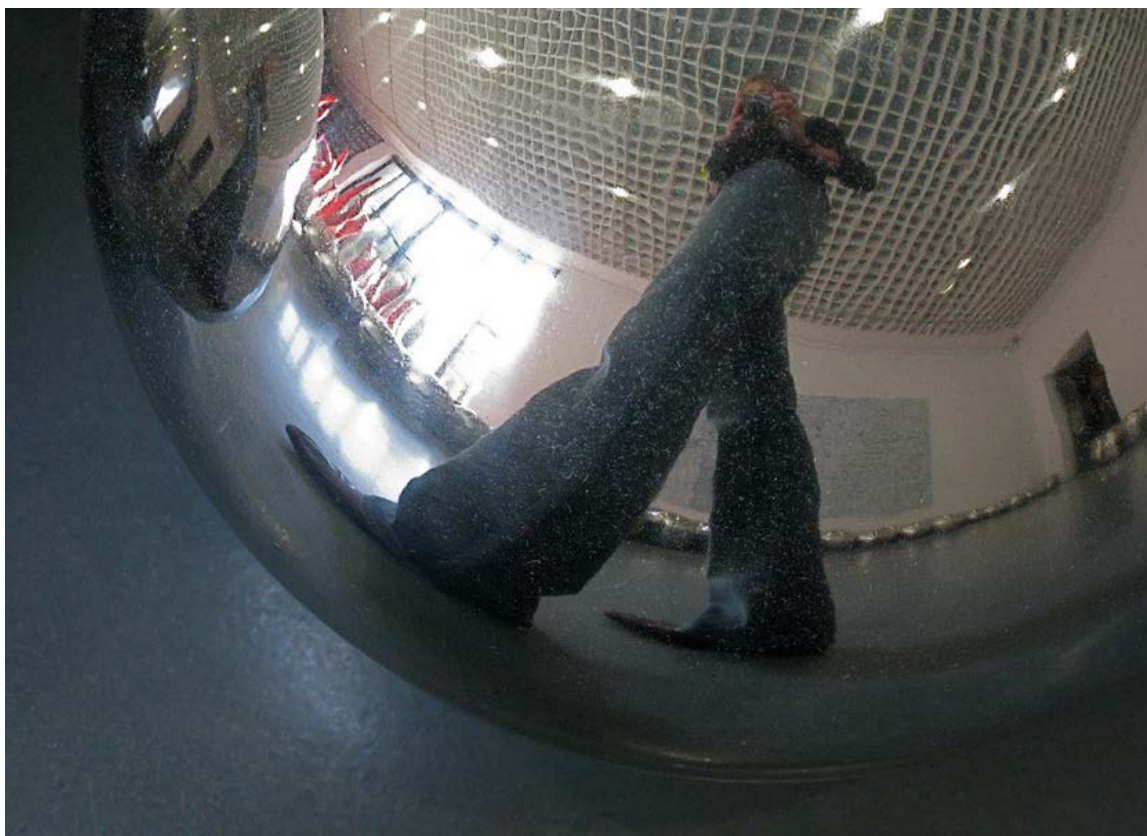


fig 2-18: Self-portrait in *Narcissus Garden* – October 9, 2008
Photo by Flickr user HannyB

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hannyb/2938827430/>

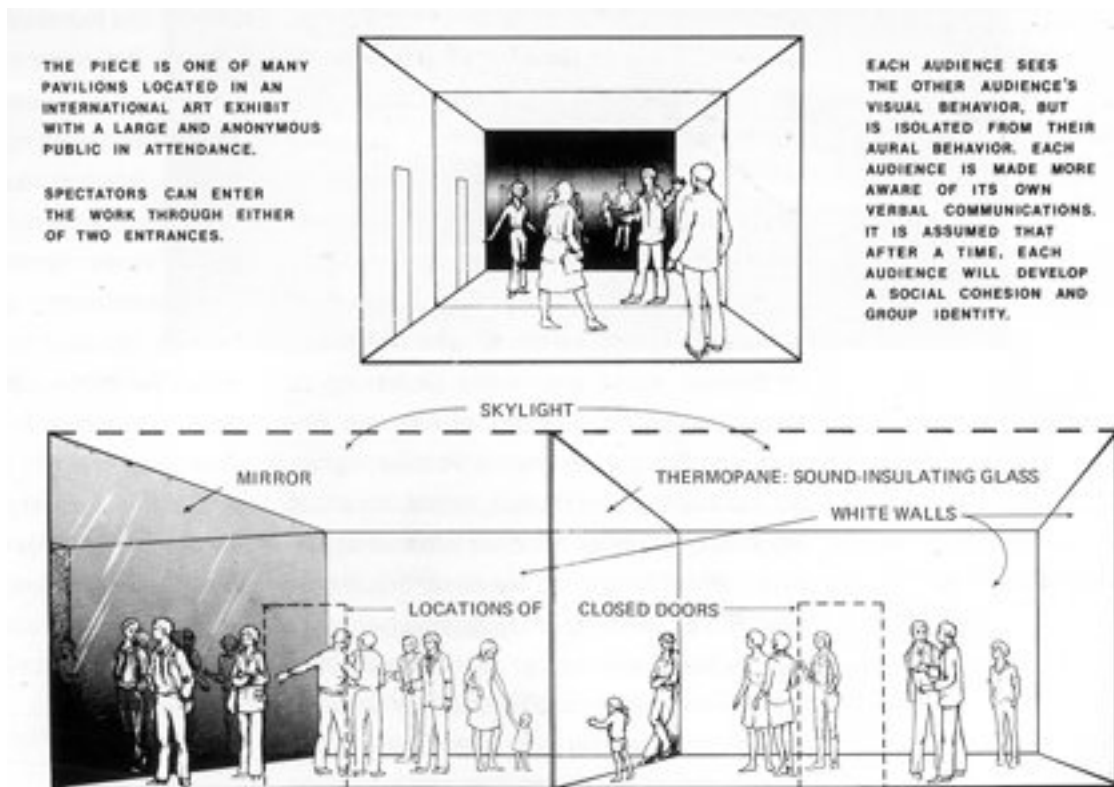


fig 3-1: Dan Graham – *Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
 Illustration by Marianne Brouwer, 1976

From: Dan Graham, *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999): 156.



fig 3-2: Dan Graham (left) in *Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
Installed in “Ambiente Arte” at the 37th Biennale di Venezia. Venice, Italy
Photo courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery



fig 3-3: Dan Graham – *Public Space Two Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
Installed in “Ambiente Arte” at the 37th Biennale di Venezia. Venice, Italy
Photo by Eustachy Kossakowski

http://www.eustache-kossakowski.com/venise2_uk.html



fig 3-4: Dan Graham – *Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
Installed in “Ambiente Arte” at the 37th Venice Biennale. Venice, Italy

From: Mark Francis, “A Public Space: Context and History,” in *Dan Graham: Beyond*,
exh. cat. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009): 184.



fig 3-5: Dan Graham – *Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
Whitney Museum of American Art. New York, New York
Photo by Larry Qualls, accessed on Artstor



fig 3-6: Dan Graham – *Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
Van Abbemuseum. Eindhoven, Netherlands
Photo by Peter Cox

http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_ons003200501_01/_ons003200501_01_0115.php



fig 3-7: Dan Graham – *Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
Museum of Contemporary Art. Los Angeles, California
Photo by Michael Buitron, from his blog “Leap Into The Void”

<http://imoralist.blogspot.com/2009/02/dan-graham-at-moca-above-and-beyond.html>



fig 3-8: Dan Graham – *Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
Collection Herbert. Ghent, Belgium

<http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=249482#>



fig 3-9: Dan Graham – *Public Space/Two Audiences* – 1976
Collection Herbert. Ghent, Belgium
Photo by R. Lautwein

<http://www.herbertfoundation.org/en/collection/15/dan-graham>



fig 3-10: Dan Graham – *Ying/Yang Pavilion* – 2003
Installed at Simmons Hall, MIT Campus. Cambridge, Massachusetts
Photo courtesy of Takaishii Gallery



fig 3-11: Anish Kapoor – *Cloud Gate* – 2003
Installed in Millennium Park. Chicago, Illinois
Photo provided by ART on FILE, accessed on Artstor



fig 3-12: Anish Kapoor – *Cloud Gate* – 2003
Installed in Millennium Park. Chicago, Illinois
Photo provided by ART on FILE, accessed on Artstor



fig E-1: Yayoi Kusama – *Fireflies on the Water* – 2002
Whitney Museum of American Art
Photo by Claire Demere, August 2012



fig E-2: Yayoi Kusama – *Infinity Mirrored Room – The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* – 2013

David Zwirner Gallery, New York

Photo by Benjamin Norman for the New York Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2013/12/02/arts/design/20131202KUSAMA.html#1>



fig E-3: Line outside David Zwirner Gallery for Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirrored Room – The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* – December 14, 2013
Photo by Claire Demere

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