

ELENA COLOGNI, MA FA

**'THE ARTIST'S PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE WITHIN THE ANTI-
OCULARCENTRIC DISCOURSE'**

Ph.D. Fine Art

March 2004 THE LONDON INSTITUTE

CENTRAL SAINT MARTINS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

The thesis discusses the development of my artistic research in relation to the critique of the ocularcentric Western philosophical tradition developed by twentieth century French thought, as referred to by Martin Jay and Amelia Jones. The work reviews the positions of both authors with respect to the relationship between Lacan's *Mirror Stage* and *Gaze* and Merleau-Ponty's *Chiasm* or *Intertwining* within two areas of investigation: the self and strategies for its engagement with the external world.

The research was conducted by adopting an evolutionary approach, which allowed me to test hypotheses through artistic experimentation. The structure of the thesis encompasses these two theoretical discussions in relation to my artistic practice, fully presented in the enclosed cd-rom.

The first discussion, in Part I and II, analyses the *Mirror Stage* and the emerging of the self, its psychological implications and manifestations in the history of art, with particular emphasis on self-portraiture, the *performative self*, Body Art and my own production.

In Part III, the concept of *Chiasm/Intertwining* – developed from the notions of *visuality* and *Gaze* – is discussed in relation to *inter-subjectivity* in Body Art. The issue of the interaction between artist/audience and environment is also investigated in my most recent artworks, which question the primacy of vision over the other senses.

I believe my original contribution to be both in the content of the artworks and the methodology adopted, rather than at theoretical level. By adopting a set strategy in the creation of my work, I challenged the static artist-audience relationship implicit in the one-way perception of representations based on central-focus perspective. My hypothesis, which encompasses a two-way artist-audience interaction, was first tested in the body of work I produced in 1999. The theoretical argument of *chiasmatic intertwining* I subsequently developed, allowed me to place my practice within the anti-ocularcentric discourse and confirmed the direction undertaken in the practice to be satisfactory. The validity of my initial hypothesis was further confirmed by the participation of the audience in aspects of the art making process of the recent video-live installations.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	p. 4
1. The process.....	p. 5
1.1. List of works included in the research.....	p. 9
Part I. METHODOLOGY FOR THEORY AND ART PRACTICE.....	p. 10
I. 1. Interactivity.....	p. 12
I. 2. The care of the self in the practice of writing.....	p. 17
I. 3. The relationship between diary and memory for archiving.....	p. 22
Part II. MIRRORING: THE RELATIONSHIP ARTIST-SELF IMAGE....	p. 29
II. 1. The emerging of the self.....	p. 30
II. 2. Reflection and representation.....	p. 43
II. 3. The represented and <i>performative self</i> in the history of art.....	p. 52
II. 3. 1. Historical references for performance and Body Art.....	p. 54
II. 3. 2. A new awareness of the perception of the body: Body Art.....	p. 56
II. 3. 3. Presence, absence, documentation.....	p. 60
II. 3. 4. Enactment of the self through <i>mirror</i> photographic media.....	p. 64
II. 4. The mirror experience through the observation of the shifting position of the artist as viewer in the creative process	p. 77

Part III. A DISCUSSION OF VISION , THE LOOK AND THE GAZE. A

METHODOLOGY FOR THE ARTIST’S INTERCHANGE WITH

AUDIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT.....p. 96

III. 1. Vision-visuality: discussion on alternative scopic regimes.....p . 97

III. 2. Anamorphosis in relation to the *Gaze* in Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and
Lacan.....p. 105

III. 3. From *Gaze* to *Chiasm* in the artist’s work.....p. 131

III. 4. Inter-subjectivity in Body Art.....p. 147

III. 4. 1. Artist-audience interaction.....p. 157

III. 5. The interchange with the audience and the environment through an
investigation of the senses.....p. 175

III. 5. 1. Synaesthetic relations.....p. 175

III. 5. 2. Touch and vision.....p. 186

CONCLUSION.....p. 208

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....p. 211

ILLUSTRATIONS.....p. 217

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....p. 222

CD-rom of practical research documentation and analyses

INTRODUCTION

This research is led by the understanding of the methodology implied in conceiving my ideas to become an integral part of the works produced. For instance, the investigation of the relationship artist-perceiver (through the artwork) is located in my personal experience of shifting between the position of artist and that of perceiver of my own work within the creative process. This has led to the development of strategies for presentation of the work in which the audience participates. By implying these methods within the structure of the works, the boundaries dividing the audience's perceptual space (and often passive role) and the artist's space (and active role) become blurred; moreover the audience is partially involved in the creative process for which a third symbolic space is being constituted within the work. In this light, my own body presence and its representations, are to be understood as the vehicle for the relationship and interchange with the self, the audience and the environment.

The discussion by Martin Jay in a critique of the ocularcentric Western philosophical tradition by French thought in the twentieth century, also referred to by Amelia Jones, becomes the ground for part of my own artistic investigation. For both authors I have reviewed their position in respect to the relationship between Jacques Lacan and Maurice Merleau-Ponty: the Lacanian concepts of the *Mirror Stage* and *Gaze*, which lead me to Merleau-Ponty's *Chiasm* or *Intertwining*, to which the notion of inter-subjectivity and interchange, particularly in relation to my live performance pieces, is linked. The theoretical account of these and other authors revolves around two main areas of investigation: the self and its engagement with the external world. For this reason the structure of the thesis includes the two relevant philosophical sections grounding the artistic research related.

Vision is the sense primarily involved in the artistic investigation as well as in the theoretical discussion. Vision, together with the other senses, through which we perceive the world, has been investigated and questioned in the interactive art pieces. In my practice the above mentioned relationship of artist-self image/audience/environment is tested and challenged through a series of projects, performances, documented actions, photographs and interactive digital work. As the research developed my own artistic intuition of producing interactive work has proved to have been appropriate for some, as they meet the research methodological requirements to gain data. Whereas the latest video live installations deal with a less tangible aspect of interaction theorised as *interchange*, where the audience's involvement consists of them witnessing the piece's creation. In some cases their reactions became part of the work itself, in others these create the condition for the event's delivery.

1. The process

This thesis including the practical works, recorded in the attached CD-rom, attempts to represent my process of experimentation and theoretical research.

The research's original title 'The identity of the real in relation to concepts of space', first changed into 'The identity of the real in relation to the experience and representation of space', has been submitted as 'The Artist's Performative Practice within the Anti-Ocularcentric Discourse'. This title evolution is significant for the path undertaken in my practical work in relation to the theory and it mirrors my investigation. In this, the investigation of methods of spatial representation introduced the discussion of alternative ones and, in parallel, the conceptual and psycho-analytic approach gave way to a more experiential one which finally led to phenomenology. Moreover, the performative element in my work, specifically

grounded in phenomenology, expresses the importance of the physical engagement in the space within a post-Cartesian theoretical context. Particularly in the later stage of my work, the interconnection of the senses in Merleau-Ponty's thought became one of the main sources for my practical thinking. This also allowed my work to develop beyond the narrow corridor of solely visually oriented modes of expression.

Although not addressed directly in the actual title, the issue of space is implicitly discussed both in the theoretical and practical research as follows:

- the perspectival Renaissance constructed space is, according to Martin Jay, opposed to Baroque and Dutch Art, and it was first challenged in my piece *Stretched Mirror* (1997) by referring to Lacan's Gaze and again deconstructed in *Diagrammi* (1999);
- Merleau-Ponty's spatial concept of the *Flesh of the World* is the conceptual territory for the *interchange* with the audience, which takes place in my performative pieces;
- my attitude towards drawing diagrams both for composing a piece in the space and to translate visually theoretical concepts, thus creating different grounds for investigation, can be an example of my speculative process involving a spatial component.

The process involved in the development of the research has, of course, been complex: some practical works have begun intuitively and I have discovered *parallels*. Some works have been influenced from the start by theoretical concepts drawn from philosophy and psychology: the self; self-representation; the psychology of self-identification; the self in the social arena; the dissolution of the Cartesian concept of the self and space through phenomenology. I recognise also that the form and content of my work has drawn on, and developed ideas from, the history of art itself, particularly the concept of the performative. I have therefore attempted to put my work into the context of art history and recent work

by established artists. I have also attempted to link both this historical review and my own experiments to a developing set of theoretical concepts: the changed priority of the visual over the other senses and synaesthesia.

All concepts implied for different disciplines have had some value in understanding my own practical work and in many cases have led me to explore artistic ideas in a different way. In retrospect, my PhD research has led me to identify a number of component issues from the history of art that come together in various ways in my practical work. These are:

- The construction of spatial concepts and their contradictions through the tradition of perspective.
- The representation of the artist's self through self-portraiture and its link to the politics of women's self representation.
- The concept of the mirror in the act of artistic self-reflection, self-representation.
- The implications of considering the position of the spectator in the art process, drawing particularly on art forms emerging from performance, happenings and Body Art.
- The concept of inter-subjectivity as a result of the 'open' form of art making, presentation and audience feedback.

In exploring modes of expression through senses alternative or complementary to vision the research also touched upon:

- The concept of the inter-sensory relating to notions of synaesthesia leading to work exploring touch and smell.
- The issue of memory in relation to the absence of vision linked to imagination has emerged.

In the process of my research, as in the works I have produced, the progression is not strictly linear and therefore it does not seem entirely coherent, as this is a creative enquiry and allowed a number of stimuli in. Many works address a range of issues simultaneously and many of the

issues have emerged for me in the process of making work and considering the theoretical framework. As a consequence, some issues were addressed in parallel in more than one work, whereas some other aspects of the same notions needed to be theoretically investigated. The research activity became somehow multidirectional and can be read in both synchronic and diachronic ways (as shown in fig.1). The structure of the thesis reflects this and is devised to discuss a number of concepts. Within this structure, the diary inserts also mark moments of the ongoing speculation prior to any conscious choice of research direction, thus letting intuition to emerge.

In the quotations from the diary I have kept throughout, I have taken the decision to retain all the faulty spelling and grammar, where the initial inadequacy of my grasp of colloquial English as an Italian is reflected. In the spirit of a performative attitude I believe these 'inadequacies' remain a point of reference that may later lead me to some other interpretation of the diary. Here, it expresses the attempt to link art making to a critical self-understanding in a way that balances the more formal theoretical debate. Some of the intentions and personal reasons behind the production of the pieces have not been revealed. This is due to both a methodological choice and a firm believe in the non possibility to express or illustrate the work fully with words. The unexplained side is the possibility for the audience to participate according to their own life experience.

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figure 1, layer b. Patterns of investigation evolution

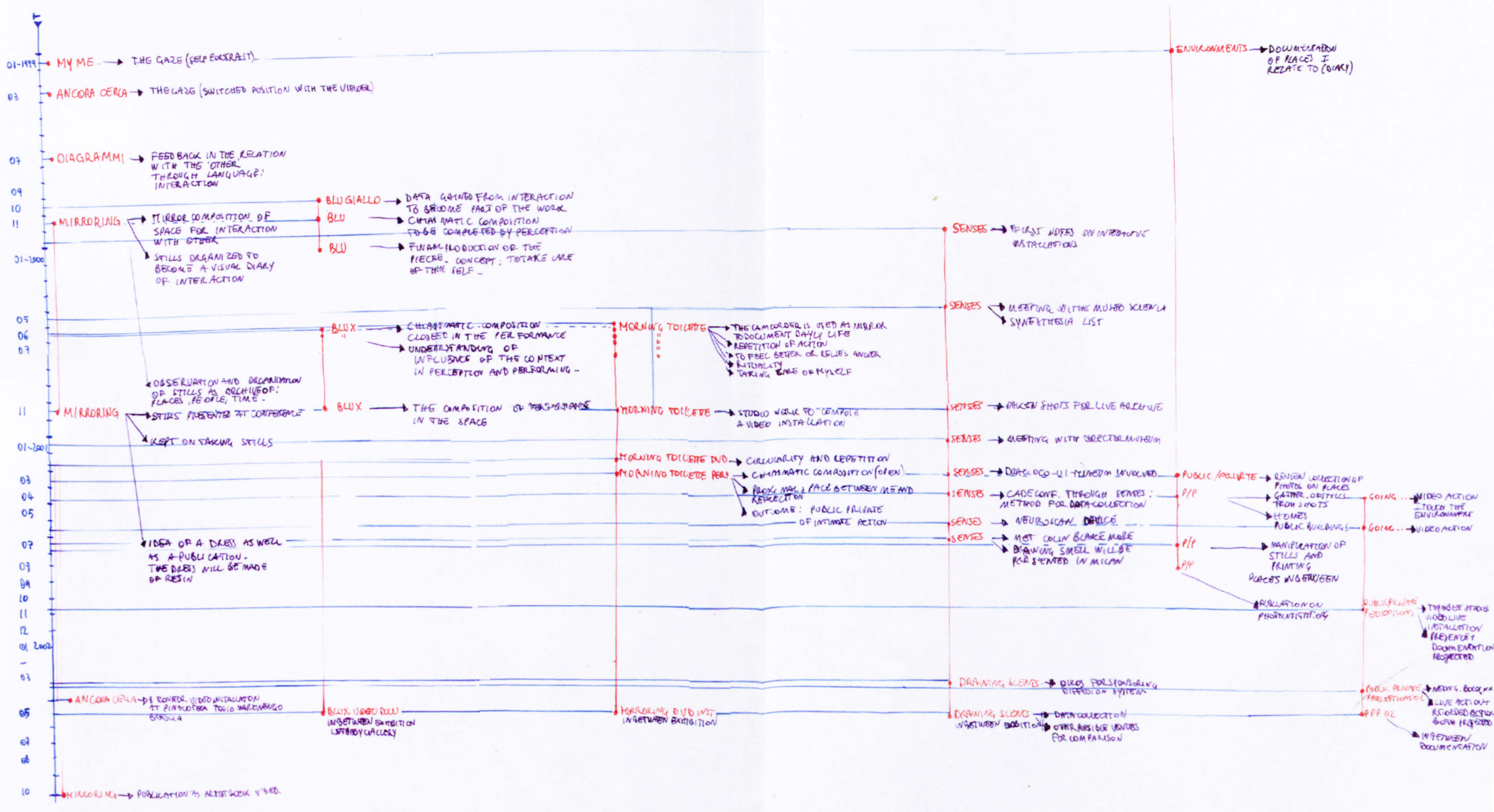


figure 1, layer a.. Diachronic Research Development

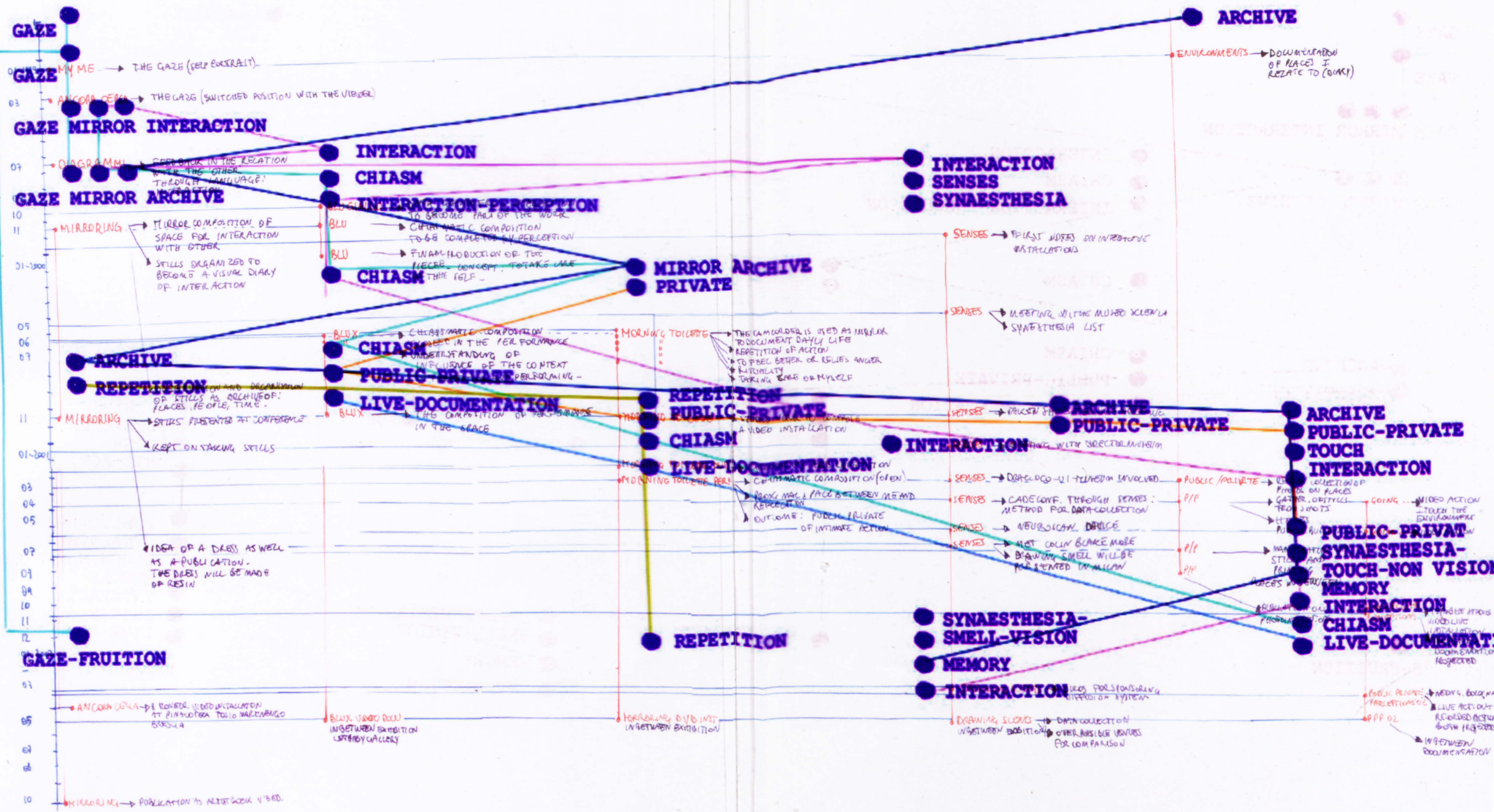


figure 1, layer a.. Diachronic Research Development
 figure 1, layer b. Patterns of investigation evolution

1.1 List of works included in the research

Works presented to the public

title	Production or Presentation Venue	Outcome Format	Year
<i>Ancora Cerca</i>	National Portrait Gallery, London, UK	Performance	1999
	Pianacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia Italy	8-monitor video installation	2002
<i>Blugiallo</i>	The Global Cafe' London	Participatory video	1999
<i>BluX</i>	Camberwell College 'Exchange 2000', Watershed Centre, Bristol	Video Live Installation Video Live Installation	2000 2000
	London Biennale	Video live Installation	2000
<i>Diagrammi</i>	48 th Venice Biennale	Interactive performance	1999
<i>Drawing Scents</i>	Lethaby Gallery, London	Interactive installation	2002
<i>Live Archive (transition)</i>	Lethaby Gallery, London	Video piece	2002
<i>Madrid</i>	Lethaby Gallery, London	Video piece	2002
<i>Mirroring</i>	'Performance as Research' London College of Fashion	Interactive performance	1999
	'Exchange 2000' Watershed Centre Bristol	Interactive performance	2000
<i>Morning Toilette</i>	My own flat London	Performance	2000
	Tate Modern London	Video live installation	2001
	Lethaby Gallery London	Video installation	2002
<i>Myme</i>	My own flat, London		
<i>Public Private</i>	London Underground and Neon Gallery, Bologna, Italy	Video live installation	2002
<i>Perceptions 02</i>	Toynbee Studios, London and my home, Cambridge	Video live installation	2001
<i>Public/Private</i>	www.photoinsight.org	Digital photos	2001
<i>Through Senses</i>	CADE Conference Glasgow	Interactive video	2001

Works in progress

<i>Don't touch</i>		installation	2001
<i>Life Archive</i>		installation	2001
<i>Noisy Depth</i>		installation	2001
<i>Take my breath away</i>		installation	2001

Works undertaken before the start of this research project

<i>Stretched Mirror</i>	Centre for Sculpture, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK	Drawing and installation	1997
<i>3D Mirror</i>	Centre for Sculpture, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK	Drawing	1997

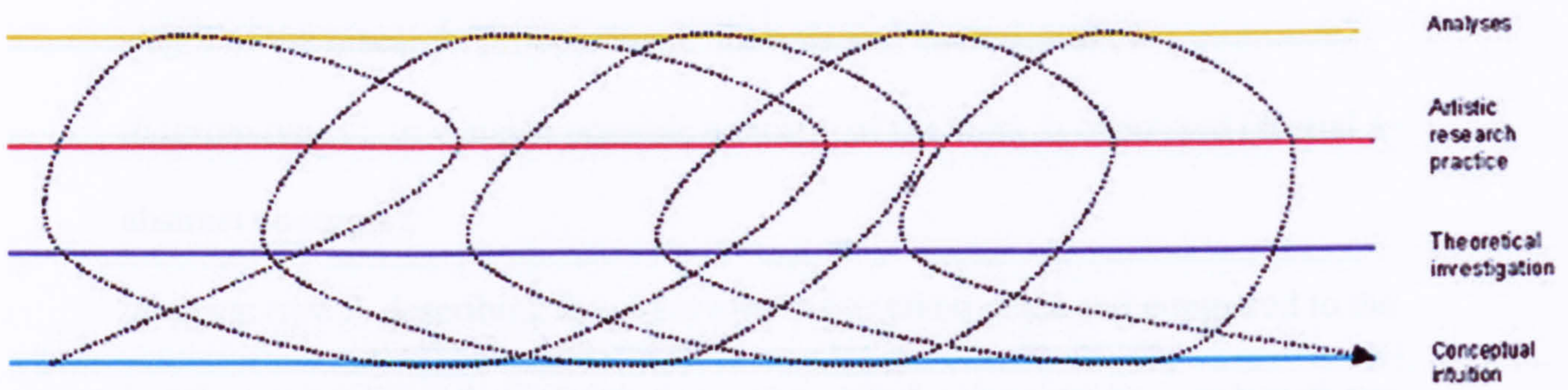
Part I. METHODOLOGY FOR THEORY AND ART PRACTICE

If the non-linear journey of my research were to be visualised it would be a multidirectional diagram. A similar pattern can be found in the structure of the thesis, where diverse positions of theoreticians and artists in relation to a similar concept are investigated to let an original one arise within my artistic research as an answer.

An evolutionary approach, combining both empirical and theoretical methodologies, has been adopted to let specific hypotheses and methodologies emerge, in a circular way. Synchronicity and diachronicity is implied in the development of different concepts through different works, the analysis of which led to new hypothesis to be tested through the production of new work (as shown in fig. 2).

In the methodology implied in the practice, the process for production comprises four phases:

- I. Intuition and research and the relationship to theoretical context (contains notes and symbolic drawings).
- II. Intentions and proposition (contains propositional diagrams).
- III. Realisation (of the work depending on instruments, audience, context).
- IV. Analysis of obtained data in relation to the theoretical context (these can be unexpected and alter my initial intentions) opening up new research questions.



Pattern of research development and relation theory practice. Nov 2002

figure 2. Practice-Theory relationship

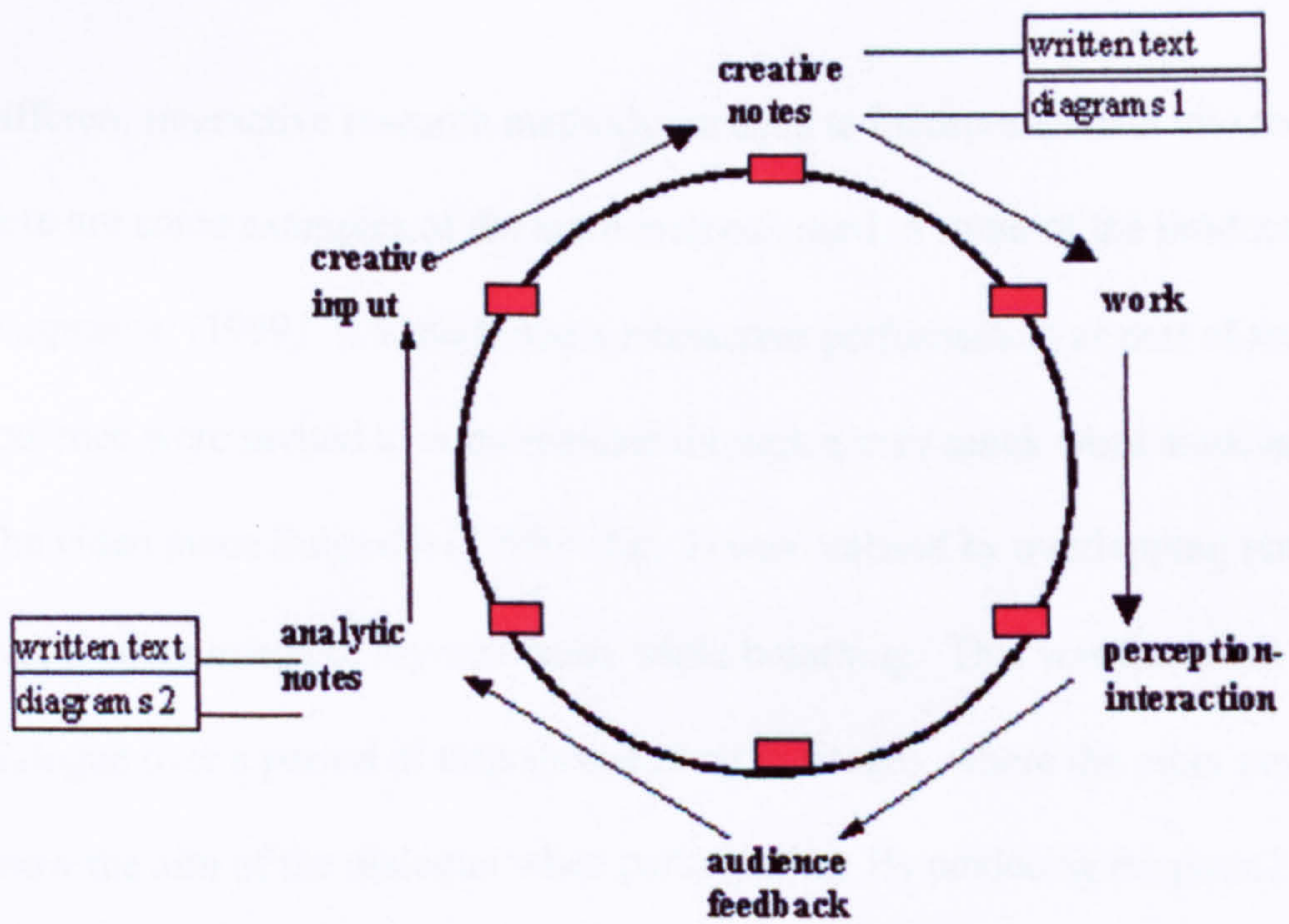


figure 2b. Diagram of creative process in artistic practice research, 1999

The earlier diagram in figure 2a regards the use of diagrams in artistic practice research. This includes different types of diagrams and text notes used at different stages of the research: propositional, analysis and documentation :

diagram type 1: in which a possible concept of the work is expressed (spatial + abstract concepts);

diagram type 2: describing the event after it has taken place and compared to the initial intention. From these diagrams, together with the observations, new hypotheses arose for the work to follow. Neither of the two types of diagrams are fixed models: they change according to each single project. While writing the thesis the diagram type 2 have become the instrument of analyses for most of the work produced.

I. 1. Interactivity

Different interactive research methods are used to incorporate data into the works.

Here are some examples of the main methods used in some of the produced pieces.

Diagrammi (1999)¹ is a multimedia interactive performance; as part of the piece the audience were invited to communicate through a very quick word association game.

The video piece *Blugiallo* (1999)² (fig. 3) was realised by overlapping scrolling text over a video image of my own body while breathing. This was the result of a dialogue over a period of time through text messages, where the other person did not know the aim of the dialogue when participating. By producing the piece I understood that the input of the other person gave an unsuspected meaning to the work.

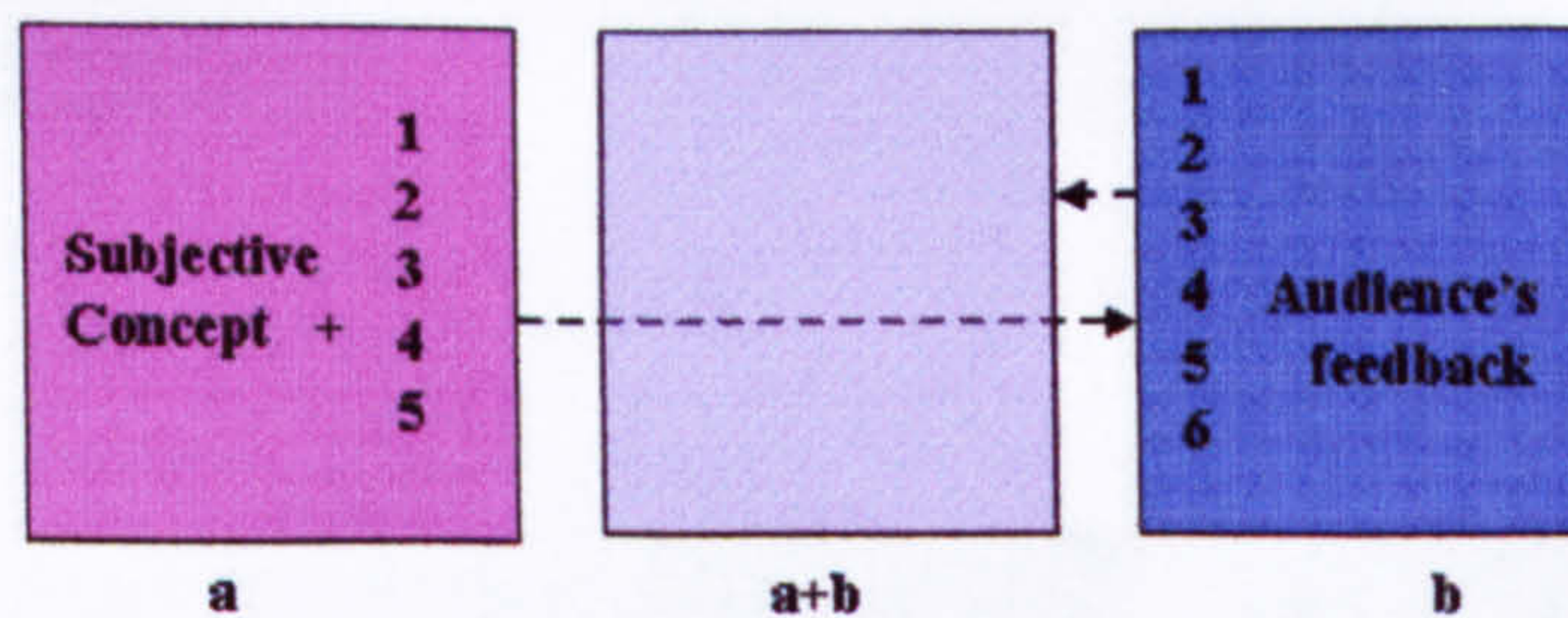
¹ Presented at the Venice Biennale 1999, publication on the event can be found in 'Institutions in Great Britain: Artist as Researcher. Diagrams', *Oreste at the Venice Biennale*, published by Charta, Milan 2000, presented as part of exhibition *Democracy*, 13 April-13 May 2000- Royal College of Art, London. Also in http://www.media.uwe.ac.uk/exchange_online; and <http://www.thegallerychannel.com/content/index.shtml?ContentID=1484> a description of the piece will be given at a later stage.

² Presented at the 'Global Café' in London in November 1999 in the exhibition *com/and/see*.

'to sense deeply
 to listen
 to smell
 to touch
 to taste
 to breathe deeply
 deeply
 inside
 deep inside
 I sink
 to exhale
 slowly
 out
 OUT
 from outside
 keep out'

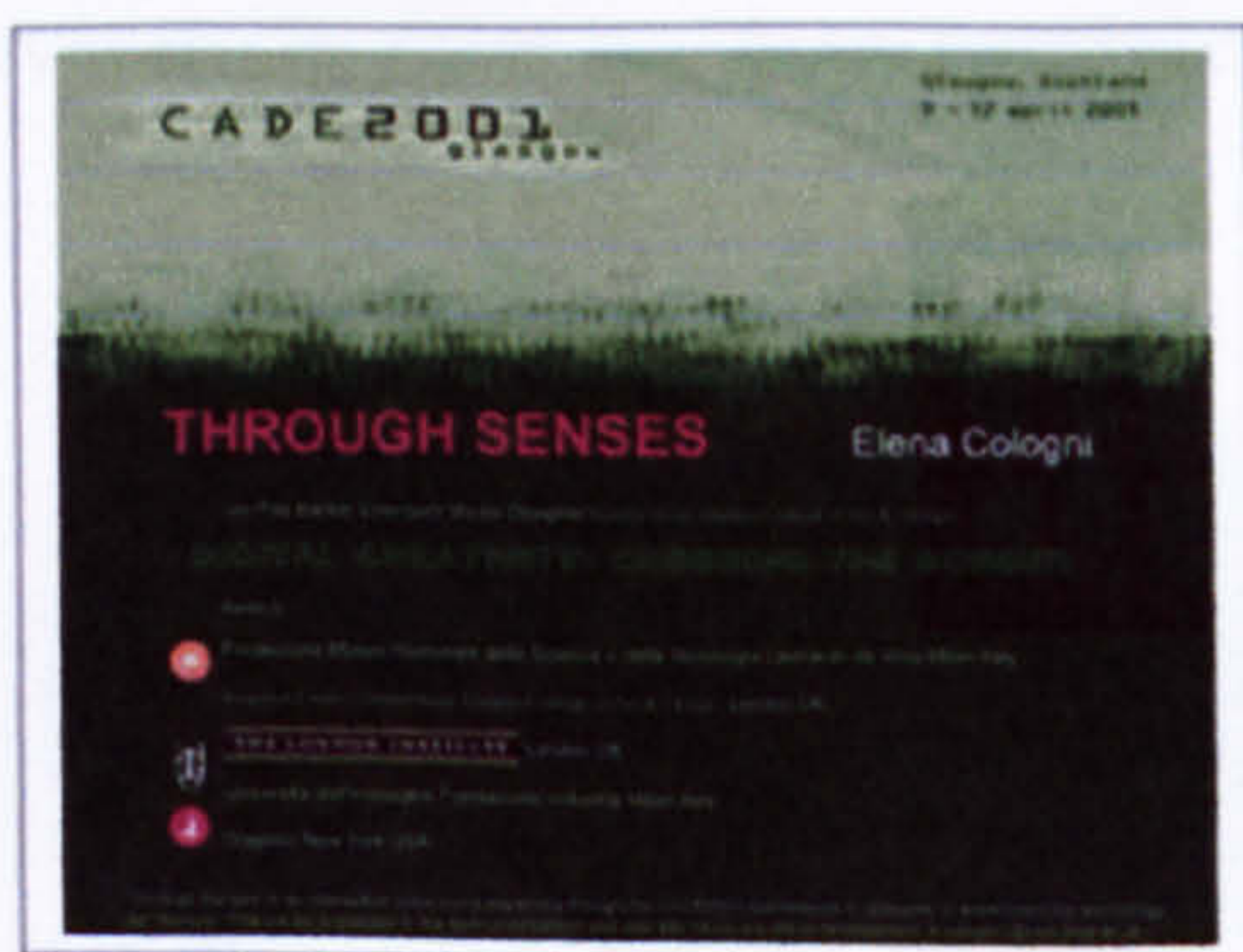


figure 3. *Blugiallo*, video 4', still, 1999



- 1- the artist's concept expressed in stimuli (a), already contemplating a number of possible responses, is presented to the audience (b).
- 2- the audience responses are reincorporated into the work.
- 3- the artwork represent a meeting point, the screen of representation onto which artist's concept and audience feedback meet (a+b).
- 4- the presence of unpredicted response (e.g. 6), ever changing element according to the contexts, indicates the unstable nature of the dynamic's results.

figure 4. Diagram on interaction and method for incorporation of research data , 02-2001, developed from previous version , 01-2000



1. COVER AS IT WAS SHOWN AT CADE2001 CONFERENCE IN GLASGOW APRIL 2001



2. THERE IS A SELECTION OF 8 VIDEOCLIPS, 50" LONG EACH. MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE INTERACT BY SELECTING A COLOUR TO ACTIVATE A VIDEOCLIP IN ORDER TO CONSTRUCT THEIR OWN NARRATIVE

3. THE WORK HAS BEEN PROGRAMMED SO THAT A TEXT FILE IS PRODUCED EVERY DAY, AFTER EACH PERCEIVER HAS MADE A SELECTION OF EIGHT VIDEOCLIPS

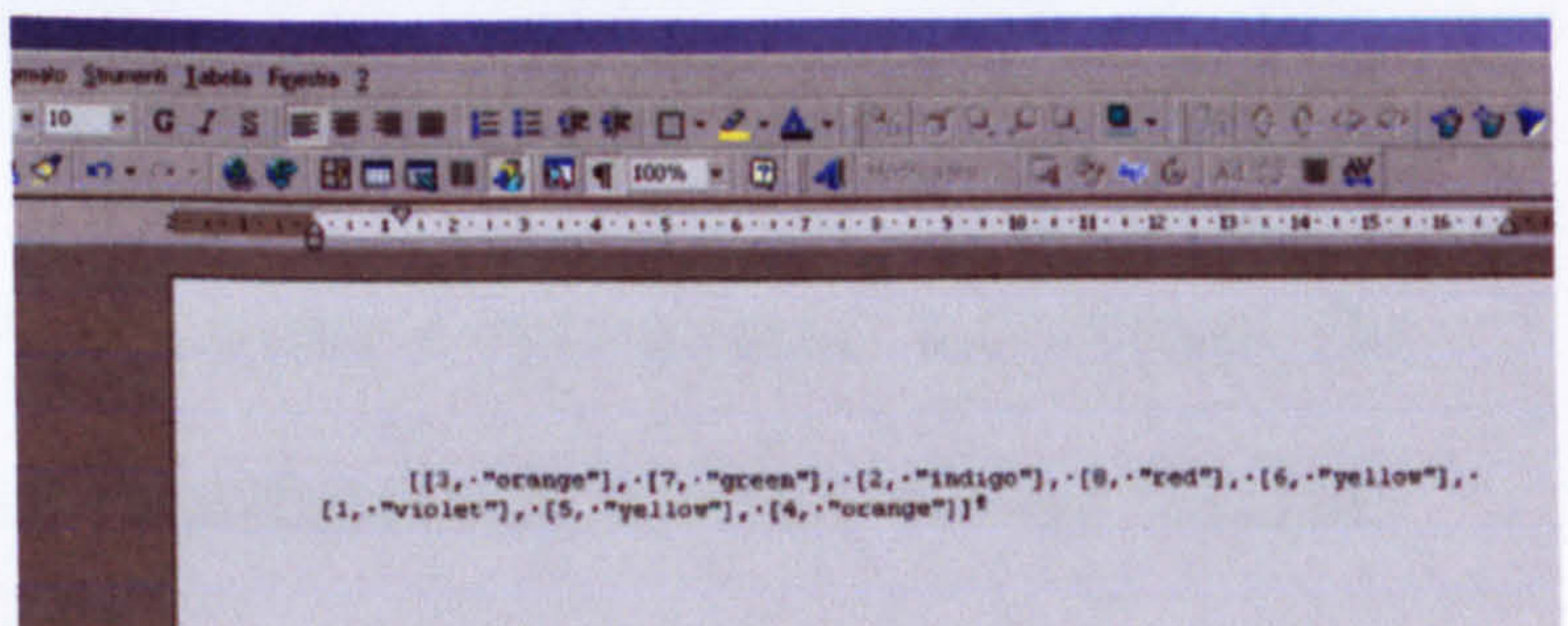


figure 5. *Through Senses*, stages of interactive dynamics, exhibited at CADE Conference, Glasgow School of Art, 2001

Most of the other works produced during my research, including *Mirroring* (1999-ongoing), *Senses* (designed in 2000-2001), *Through Senses* (2001) (fig.5) and others are based on the diagram produced to schematise how the interactive pattern (as shown in fig. 4) is imbedded in the art making process involving the audience. Furthermore, in some cases, such as in the pieces *Mirroring*, *BluX* (2000), *Drawing Scents* (2002) and *Public Private Perceptions* (2001-2002), the feedback from the audience in different environments incorporated back into the work have had an important impact on the construction of its meaning and format. The following observations from my diary notes, refer to *Mirroring*.

'291100 Trans from 270700

observing printed images (selected stills from the shots: chosen criteria for page composition: portraits of both myself and the person I met. A description of author, place, date, context is given above. I now realise that with some people, the close ones I notice elements constantly repeated.

This means that all the collected material will provide different ways of selecting and presenting. Within the group of images there can be for example a group of portraits of me and the person I meet in different places, of people I meet in specific contexts. Perhaps here as much as in DIAGRAMMI I can trace a graphic of the archive in relation to the one I used then.'

3

Some of the works produced were presented in various venues and contexts. The changing conditions of the place, the audience and, of course, the way I (and the piece) reacted to that environment influenced the delivery and reception of the piece (fig. 6). This was noticed while confronting the various outcomes. The analysis was very helpful for the production of new pieces and the understanding of weaknesses to be improved in the pieces when presented again.⁴

³ Notes from my diary.

⁴ *BluX* was presented in 3 contexts: on 1st of June 2000 at Camberwell College London, on 21st of June 2000 as part of the London Biennial and at the screening session at the Conference Exchange 2000, Watershed Centre in Bristol, on 2 November 2000; *Mirroring* was acted in many contexts; *Public Private* in 2 places; *Drawing Scents* in 1 and will be in another 2, as explained at p. this can also be found in the chart at p. of this introduction.

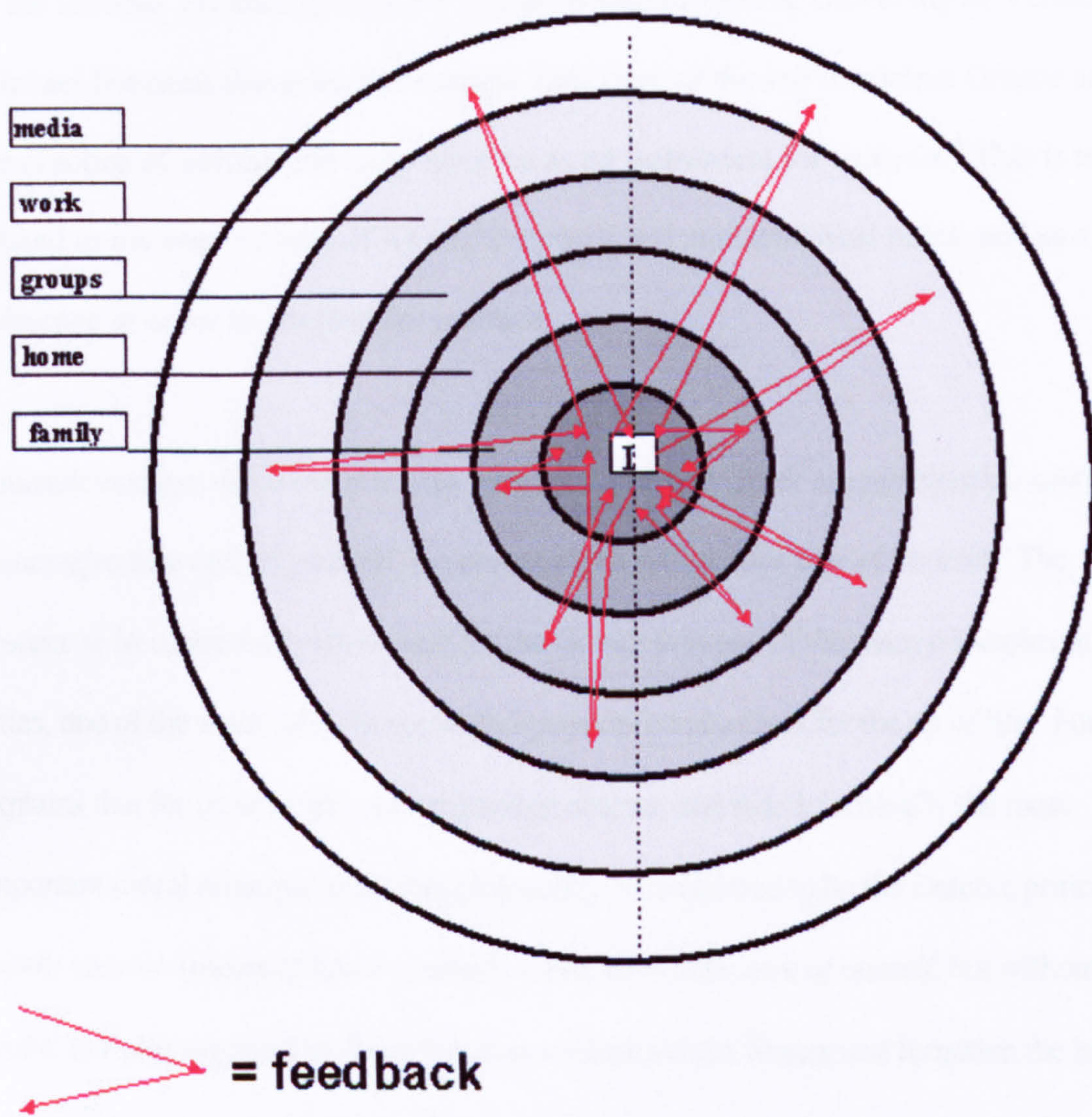


figure 6. Diagram of gathering of feedback from the audience in a defined context, created in 1999

I. 2. The care of the self in the practice of writing

In the seminar *Technologies of the Self* presented in 1982 at University of Vermont, Michael Foucault discusses the concept *Take care of the self* in ancient Greece and the practice of writing and diary keeping as an instrument for analysis.⁵ This is to be related to my own activity of writing propositional and analytical notes, and as a reference in order to develop the practice.

Foucault explains that these practices were constituted in Greek as *epimeletsthai sautou*, meaning to take care of yourself, the concern with self, to take care of yourself. The precept *to be concerned with oneself* for the Greeks was one of the main principles of cities, one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life. Foucault explains that for us now, this notion is rather obscure and faded. Generally the most important moral principle in ancient philosophy is considered to be the Delphic principle, *gnothi seauton* (meaning know yourself) rather than *Take care of oneself*, but without doubt, our philosophical tradition has overemphasised the former and forgotten the latter. In Foucault's view, the Delphic principle was not an abstract one concerning life; it was technical advice, a rule to be observed for the consultation of the oracle. *Know yourself* meant: do not suppose yourself to be a god.⁶

There are several reasons why *Know yourself* has obscured *Take care of yourself*,⁷ amongst which Foucault particularly explores the way that, in theoretical philosophy

⁵ Foucault, M., 'Technologies of the Self', Martin, L. H., Gutman, H., Hutton, *Technologies of the Self, A Seminar with Michael Foucault*, The University of Massachusetts Press 1988,

⁶ Ibid, pp16-49.

⁷ Foucault explains that there has been a profound transformation in the moral principles of Western society. We are more inclined to see taking care of ourselves as an immorality, as a means of escape from all possible rules. 'We inherit the tradition of Christian morality which makes self-renunciation the condition for salvation. To know oneself was, paradoxically, a means of self-renunciation. We also inherit' Foucault states 'a secular tradition that sees in external law the basis for morality. How then can respect for the self be the basis for morality? We are the inheritors of a social morality that seeks the rules for acceptable behaviour in relations with

from Descartes to Husserl knowledge of the self (the thinking subject) takes on an ever-increasing importance as the first step in the theory of knowledge, thus, in the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle.

For the purposes of my research and, particularly, its concern with the self-reflection, following Foucault, I shall review in some detail the less popular concept of *The care of the self*.

The first philosophical elaboration of the concern with taking care of oneself is found in Plato's *Alcibiades I*⁸. Neoplatonism in the third or fourth century AD shows the significance given to this dialogue and the importance it assumed in the classical tradition. The *Alcibiades* is considered to be the first dialogue of Plato – the first to be read, the first to be studied. It was the *arche*. In the second century, Albinus said that every gifted young man who wanted to stand apart from politics and practice virtue should study the *Alcibiades*. It provided the point of departure for all platonic philosophy and *Taking care of oneself* was its first principle.

Foucault analyses the care of self in the *Alcibiades I*⁹ and describes the notion of *epimeleisthai*: taking pains with oneself. This is divided into two questions: What is this self of which one takes care and of what does the care consist? The care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul-as-substance. Foucault explains that when you take care of the body, you do not take care of the self. The

others[...] "Know thyself" has obscured "Take care of yourself" because our morality, a morality of asceticism, insists that the self is that which one can reject.' Ibid., p.22.

⁸ Plato, *Alcibiade*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb, in *Plato*, Harvard, Cambridge, Mass, 1967, Vol. 12.

⁹ Ibid., pp23, 24, 25. Foucault explains that *Alcibiades* is about to begin his public and political life. He speaks before the people and be all powerful in the city. He is satisfied with his traditional status, with the privileges of his birth a heritage. He wishes to gain personal power over all others both inside and outside the city. Socrates intervenes and declares his love for *Alcibiades* who can no longer be the beloved; he must become a lover. He must be active in the political and the love game. There is a dialectic between political and erotic discourse. Socrates helps him gain the upper hand - to acquire *tekhnē* - *Alcibiades* must apply himself, he must take care of himself. Concern for self always refers to an active political and erotic state. *Epimeleisthai* expresses something much more serious than the simple fact of paying attention. It involves taking pains with one's holdings and one's

self is not clothing, tools, or possessions; it is to be found in the principle that uses these tools, a principle not of the body but of the soul. One has to worry about ones soul - that is the principal activity of caring for the self.

The second question in the text illustrated by Foucault is how must we take care of this principle of activity, the soul, and of what does this care consist. The soul cannot know itself except by looking at itself in a similar element: a mirror. Thus, it must contemplate the divine element. In this divine contemplation, the soul will be able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behaviour and political action.

‘The effort of the soul to know itself is the principle on which just political action can be founded, and Alcibiades will be a good politician insofar as he contemplates his soul in the divine element.’¹⁰ The dialogue ends when Alcibiades knows he must take care of himself by examining his soul.

In Foucault’s view, this text illuminates the historical background of the precept ‘taking care of oneself’ and sets out four main problems that endure throughout antiquity, although the solutions given often differ from those in Plato's Alcibiades.¹¹

According to Foucault, writing was also important in the culture of the care of the self. ‘One of the tasks involved in the care of the self is that of taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping

healt. It is highly significant that the concern for self in Alcibiades I is directly related to a defective pedagogy, one that concerns political ambition and a specific moment of life.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

¹¹ First, there is the problem of the relation between the care of the question is presented in an alternative way: When is it better to turn away from political activity to concern oneself with oneself? The second, there is the problem of the relationship between the care of the self and pedagogy. For Socrates, occupying oneself with oneself is the duty of a young man, but later in the Hellenistic period it is seen as the permanent duty of one's whole life.

notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed. Seneca's letters are an example of this self-exercise.¹²

In traditional political life, oral culture was largely dominant, and therefore rhetoric was important. Yet the development of the administrative structures and the bureaucracy of the imperial period increased the amount and role of writing in the political sphere. In Plato's writings, we see how dialogue gave way to the literary pseudodialogue, although by the Hellenistic age, writing prevailed, and real dialectic was practised through correspondence. Taking care of oneself became linked to constant writing activity. 'The self is something to write about a theme or object (subject) of writing activity. That is not a modern trait born of the Reformation or of Romanticism; it is one of the most ancient Western traditions. It was well established and deeply rooted when Augustine started his Confessions.'¹³

Foucault contends that the new concern with the self involved a new experience of self. The new form of the experience of the self is seen in the first and second centuries, when introspection became more and more detailed. Attention was paid to nuances of life, mood and reading, and the experience of self was intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing. An example of meticulous concern with the details of daily life, with the movements of the spirit, with self-analysis in writing activity can be found in this extract from Marcus Aurelius letter of AD 144-45 to Fronto:

Hail, my sweetest of masters. We are well. I slept somewhat late owing to my slight cold, which seems now to have subsided. So from five A.M. till nine I spent the time partly in reading some of Cato's Agriculture and partly in writing not quite such wretched stuff, by heavens, as yesterday.

Then, after paying my respects to my father, I relieved my throat, I will not

¹² Ibid., p. 26.

say by gargling - though the word *gargarisso* is, I believe, found in Novius and elsewhere - but by swallowing honey water as far as the gullet and ejecting it again. After easing my throat I went off to my father and attended him at a sacrifice. Then we went to luncheon. What do you think I ate? A wee bit of bread, though I saw others devouring beans, onions, and herrings full of roe. We then worked hard at grape-gathering, and had a good sweat, and were merry and, as the poet says, "still left some clusters hanging high as gleanings of the vintage." After six o'clock we came home[...]¹⁴

This letter presents a description of everyday life where the details of taking care of oneself are here, all the 'unimportant' things he has done. In Aurelius' letter these details are important because they are you - what you thought, what you felt.

Foucault suggests that the examination of conscience begins with this letter writing. Diary writing, following on from reflexive letter writing, comes later. It dates from the Christian era and focuses on the notion of the struggle of the soul.¹⁵

In my own research the practice of diary writing has been an important tool for self analysis, it enabled me to look at intuitive thoughts and ideas from the outside, it provided me with instruments for the *analytic self* to emerge. Within my research this concept of the split self will be discussed further in relation to psychoanalysis.

¹³ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

I. 3. The relationship between diary and memory for archiving

Lacan's concept of the *Gaze* based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's

Chiasm/Intertwining is a key consideration for the production of most of the works in my research¹⁶, being implied in the methodology diary keeping.

A written diary along with visual forms of collecting information, or recording have formed part of the research. For example: the performative work *Mirroring* (1999-ongoing); the collection of images on environments to form the body of work *Public/Private* (2001); and the video piece *Life-Archive (transition)* (2001).

'29th Feb 2000

about the fragment, about the collection of fragments of time, of experiences, of places, of people, referring to the concept of *mirroring*: through meeting people I recognise an aspect of myself in them, and viceversa AND VICEVERSA. This because really I do not think to be the focus of my work. It is by being honest by placing myself in that central position and by admitting that I can just say things from my own view point, that I finally understand that it is not enough and I need the other people's viewpoint. But again, I need it not for myself but in order to be able to express OUR concept. Living my experiences in life I can catch and absorb from others, they give me a lot. My personality, myself is made out of everything I have lived also with others.

Collected images of myself together with other people I meet constitute a kind of diary, now : what kind of a diary? [...]

17

¹⁵ I produced the piece *bluX* with a text that is directly related to this notion of the care of the self, which is illustrated at a later stage because also based on a chiasmatic composition, and therefore relates to Merleau-Ponty's notion.

¹⁶ It will relate particularly to the shift between artist-viewer in the making and perceiving of the work itself.

¹⁷ Writing about the piece *Mirroring* from my diary 29 February 2000. Part of this was published in Cologni, E., *In Between*, exhibition catalogue, Lethaby Gallery London 28 May- 1 June 2002.

In my own project *Mirroring*, started on 6 November 1999,¹⁸ the exchange with the position of the other is a central issue (fig. 7, fig. 8). This piece produces a shift in the ever-changing positions of both artist and audience and enabled me to incorporate both of them in the space of artistic representation. The work, in this sense, represents an overlapping of theory, practice and methodology: the audience's feedback is here used as data for research as well as part of the artwork. The action involved in the making of the piece has been repeated in various venues and contexts, allowing me to collect a considerable number of images.

The work constitutes the basis for the subjective approach I have adopted in the production of my research. While performing and collecting material for the project over a period of nearly three years, I understood that my life experience fed into it and altered my initial perception of the work itself, influencing its outcomes. This also applies to my understanding of the theoretical issues I encountered and methodologies implied in my research. As a consequence, my reading of models, diagrams and meanings is *transitional* and *temporary*, because it depends upon their position within a particular context and time.

¹⁸ This performance was first presented part of the paper 'The idea of the mirror between audience and performer: let's make a portrait!' – on 6 November 1999- *Performance as Research*- International Symposium - The London Institute- London and on 8 November 1999- Central Saint Martins College. Also as part of the paper 'Interaction as a research data collecting system: the chiasmus', at conference: *Exchange 2000: facilitating research in Art, Design and Technology*, Watershed Centre, University of West England, Bristol- 2/3 Nov. 2000, published on http://www.media.uwe.ac.uk/exchange_online. I have recently published an artist book of *Mirroring* in three copies which represents just one of the many possible editions. The work also is a research in practice exercise: an overlapping of theory, practice and methodology: the audience's feedback is here used as data for research as well as part of the artwork. My own and the audience's action of mutual portraying happens in my everyday life. The result is video material from which stills are taken of both my view of the other and the other's view of myself. This piece is a visual diary of myself and people I meet in different contexts, in which we both play a different role, through which we communicate.

'Mirroring' interactive performance (work in progress)
 since 6 November 1999 Performance as Research Symposium The London Institute London

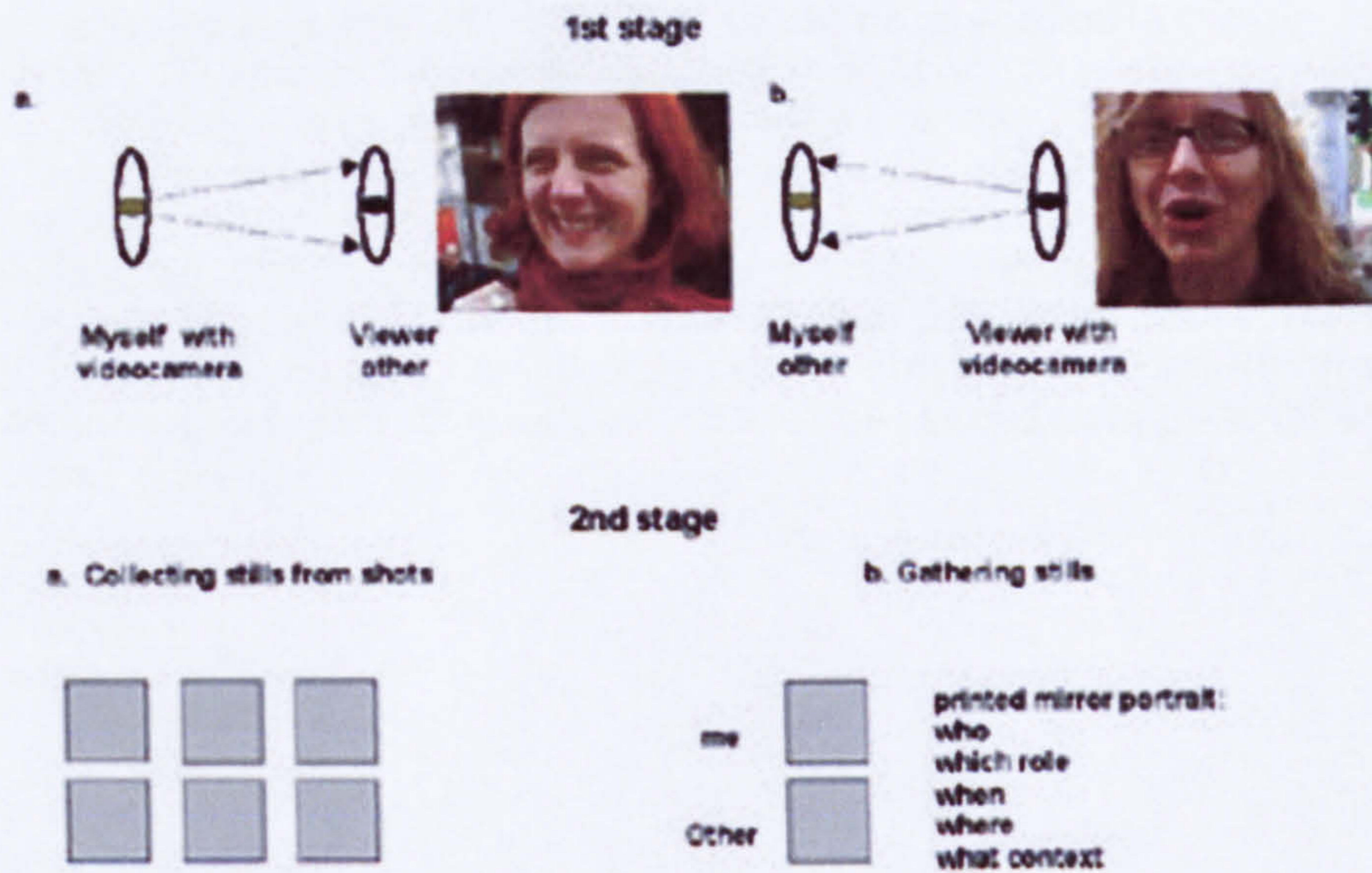


figure 7. *Mirroring* stages involved in the production process

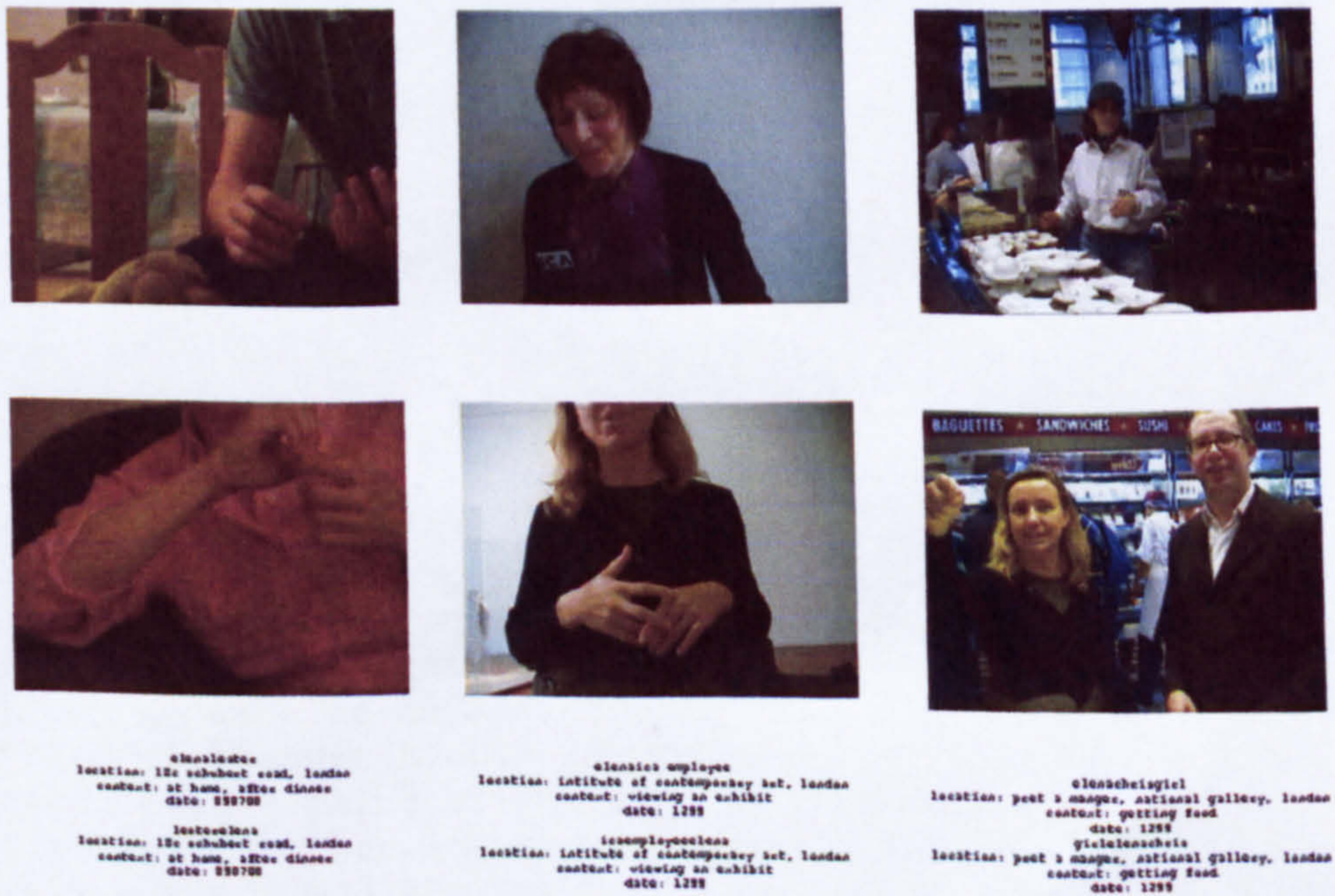


figure 8. Layout of 3 pages for publication, 2000

Another form of visual diary is constituted by the series of photographs *Public/Private*, published on the website www.photoinsight.org in August 2001; the idea for the work started to take shape in February 2001 by observing some previously collected images.

'A series of photographs has been taken in various places since the beginning of the PhD with no particular purpose, but that of recording stimuli coming from the surrounding environments. These photographs reveal a vivid interest in spatial concerns which apparently would not find a conceptual location into the artistic discourse I was pursuing at the time, focused on my own represented image. I want to include them into the photo diary because they have been the basis for a greater focus on the relationship between myself and the other (in a particularly connotated context).

Roses
Autoscatti
National gallery
British museum
Various homes

public/private

'I started to look at pictures of my homes. In the past four

years I moved to few different places in London:

130 Shroffold Road,

Bromley Kent

BR1 5NJ october/november 1997

Flat D 34/36 Gertrude Street

London SW10 OJG dicember 1997/August 1998

4 Gladstone Court

97 Regency Street

Westminster London W1P 4AL August 1998/August 1999

11 Carlton House

127 Cleveland Street

London W1P 5PL August 1999/April 2000

18c Schubert Road

London SW15 2QS Aril 2000/April 2001

58 Eden Street

Cambridge CB1 1EL April 2001

I recently started to play with those images somehow stepping in and out continuously in relation to the fact that would live in a certain home and relate to the same public places differently. I now go to London and the Tate Gallery appears to be a little bit far away from my own experience because London is no longer my city. I produce digital images using stills from my digital video clips trying to give that idea of displacement, of being the absent subject and the spectator at the same time. This is suggested by juxtaposing or overlapping private spaces and public spaces in order to create a new non existing one: a non belonging space'

¹⁹ From my diary June 2001.

Public/Private (fig.9) is a body of digitally enhanced still images which I have been working on while travelling, mostly between Italy and England. As I wrote in August 2001: ‘The body of work is the beginning of a visual diary of my perception of environments I deal with: public and private spaces and buildings, within which my own role in relation to others’ changes. As much as the relationship between private-intimate spaces and public-institutional spaces, this investigation involves the positioning of myself as artist and subject looking from within or outside the context. [...] The superimposition of two different environments allows me to create a space in between, a sort of non belonging space where I locate myself.’²⁰

In *Live Archive (transition)*, a video produced in 2002 (fig. 10), I adopted a non-linear composition. This was achieved by alternating a still shot of myself, while involved in the domestic activity of making coffee in the morning, with short shots of other environments I used to encounter in my daily routine. These two shots also coincide with two opposite viewpoints: the first from the position of the other looking at me, in a narrative present time; the second from my own viewpoint in specific moments and places, like a series of flashbacks. The result is a continuous shift of attention from present experience to past experience; the spectators have the choice to position themselves conceptually in one of the two, or to be in a condition of transition.

²⁰ Three images were published in August 2001 on www.photoinsight.org.



figure 9. From *Public/Private* series, 2001

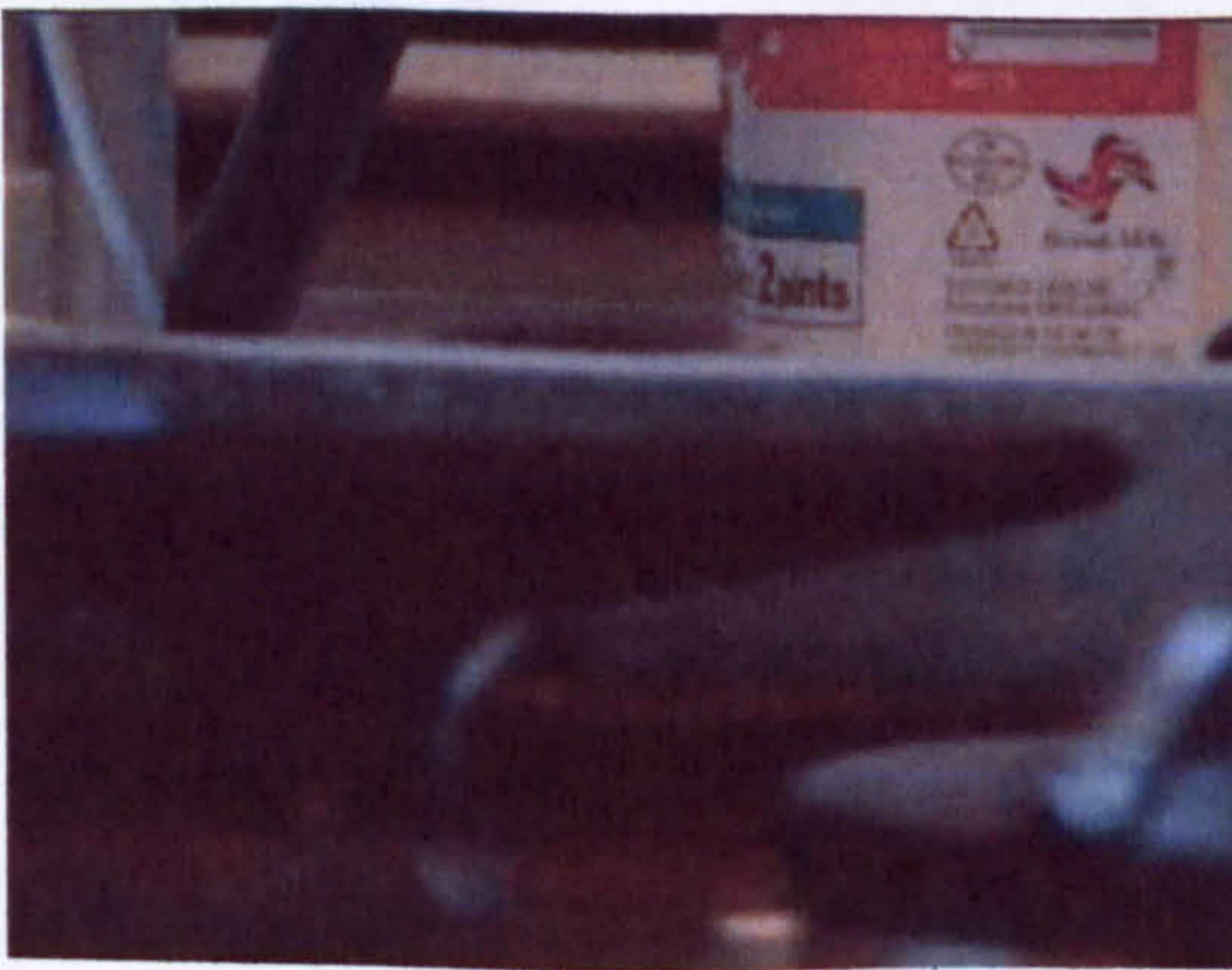


figure 10. *Live Archive (transition)*, digital video 4 minutes, stills, 2001

In these pieces, more clearly than in the others, the presence of the obsessive element of collecting is evident. This was intentionally investigated by means of keeping everyday experiences alive and constructing archives for future reference. Moreover, in referring back to them, I continuously verify my own recollection from memory and can compare it to the documentation.

Marina Wallace in her essay *Images of Knowing* for the catalogue *Public Private Perceptions*,²¹ traces an account of the relationship between photographic images, memory and senses in relation to my own project *Public Private Perceptions*. By illustrating methods of memorising in ancient times, she argues that memory can be compared to a photographic archive. Wallace suggests that 'our memory of the visual world is fed by a wealth of images that populate our visual field. Some of these images are projections of "live" and "real" things, of the three-dimensional "moving" objects that occupy our world; some are two-dimensional renderings of "life", they are transcriptions of the "real world" produced in various graphic forms and by different media, such as painting, film, and photography.'²² Wallace then states that our emotional and psychological responses to two-dimensional images are quite different from those we have when looking at three-dimensional images. Equally, we react differently in front of moving or still images. This discourse is relevant to define the nature and role of documentation of time based pieces and live events also in relation to my own process methodology, which will be discussed at a later stage.

²¹ *Public Private Perceptions, Diary of the Creative Process and other Fragments*, edited by Elena Cologni, contributions by Marina Wallace, Malcolm Le Grice, Elio Grazioli, published in March 2002 by Galleria Neon Associazione Culturale, Bologna, Italy, pp. 20-26.

²² Wallace, op. cit., p. 21.

Part II. MIRRORING: THE RELATIONSHIP ARTIST-SELF IMAGE

Representational ambiguities have to date played a major role in my artwork (for example, in the use of perspective and its paradoxes in three dimensions in *Stretched Mirror*, 1997, where the viewer would experience the dichotomy between the visual and the physical perception of the constructed space). These ambiguities have been used sometimes to test the deceptive nature of sensory perception and at other times to stimulate the observer's interaction with the questions posed in the work. Because the practical artistic investigation has evolved in a direction where the most used media are video and photography (also as documentation of performances) a new understanding of technologies and methodologies for the spectator's involvement becomes necessary.

The surface for spatial representation is here considered as a screen, a partition between the space for the art and artist and that occupied by the observer. The concept of the mirror – but also *Chiasm*, intertwining, symmetry, self-reference, repetition – becomes the basis for a process of development of art practice that questions and then breaks the static schema of the relationship.

The following is an attempt to map the complex metaphoric significance of the mirror in some philosophical and psychological aspects, and also through the history of representational conventions. Particularly, this will include the illustration of art pieces where the concept of reflection coincides with the position of the viewer within the relationship artist/viewer, in the making or perceiving of the artwork. The accent will be placed on the artistic outcome that takes the form of a self-portrait (the artist's own image) in photography, video and performance based work.

II.1. The emerging of the self

Rudolph Gasché, in *'The Tain of the Mirror'*, states that the concept of philosophical reflection is a name for philosophy's eternal aspiration for self-foundation. In his view, only with modern philosophy – philosophical thought since Descartes – did reflection explicitly acquire this status of a principle par excellence. Reflection as a principle of philosophical thinking, from the moment it became the chief methodological concept for Cartesian thought, has signified a consideration of the significance of the very experience in which objects are given. For instance, with such bending back upon the modalities of object perception, reflection shows itself to mean primarily self-reflection, self-relation, self-mirroring. Gasché states that 'By lifting the ego out of its immediate entanglement in the world, Descartes establishes the apodictic certainty of self as a result of the clarity and distinctness with which it perceives itself.'²³ Furthermore, 'through self-reflection, the self – the ego, the subject – is put on its own feet, set free from all unmediated relation to being. In giving priority to the human being's determination as a thinking being, self reflection marks the human being's rise to the rank of a subject.' According to Gasché, Descartes's is the first epoch-making achievement of the concept of reflection, and it characterises modern metaphysics as a metaphysics of subjectivity.²⁴

Bernard Brunon²⁵ writes that the painting *Las Meninas* heralds the emergence of a self on the stage of Western culture, from the time when it was painted to the time Louise Bourgeois made her *Torso*, the self had been invented, registered and

²³ Gasché, R., *The Tain of the Mirror, Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Harvard University Press, 1986, 1997 5th printing, p.13, 14.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵ Brunon, B., *Autoportraits, Here's Looking at Me*, catalogue of exhibition at Espace Lyonnais d'Art Contemporain Ville de Lyon, 29 Jan- 30 Apr. 1993.

recorded. In Brunon's view, the self was the most significant production and driving force of the humanist thought dominating Western culture.

Rita Carter writes that at about eighteen months children seem to develop self-consciousness. They no longer point at their reflection in the mirror as though they see another child, and if a dab of coloured powder is put on their face while they are looking at their reflection they rub it off – they don't rub the mirror as younger children do. Carter also states that the simultaneous emergence of speech and self-consciousness may simply reflect the parallel maturation of the two relevant brain areas: language and front lobes of the brain. Or it may be that the two are inevitably connected. Language gives the child the tool it needs to form a concept itself that it can then place outside its own experience and regard in relationship to others.²⁶

Martin Jay suggests that the precise moment of the appearance of the self in a young human being has been determined scientifically as the *Mirror Stage* by Lacan.

On 3 August 1936, Lacan read a paper to the *Fourteenth Congress of the International Psychoanalytic Association*, which met in Marienbad with Ernest Jones presiding. It was entitled *The Mirror Stage. Theory of a Structuring and Genetic Moment in the Constitution of Reality, Conceived in Relation to Psychoanalytic Experience and Doctrine*.²⁷ Although unpublished, it was the predecessor of a later version delivered to the Sixteenth Congress in 1949 and included in *Ecrits*, the collection of Lacan's work which appeared in 1966,²⁸ the main rudiments of the *Mirror Stage* argument seem to have been in place by the mid-1930s. Jay recalls that the universalization and normalisation of the

²⁶ Carter, R., *Mapping the mind*, Seven Dials, London, 1999, p.156.

²⁷ The paper was indexed as 'The Looking-Glass Phase' in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 18 (1937), p. 78.

²⁸ The title was now *The Mirror State as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*.

Mirror Stage was abetted by Lacan's absorption of several other influences, some narrowly psychological, others more generally cultural²⁹.

Jean-Francois Chevrier writes that there is no longer truth of the self but only its 'imaginary'. Anyone looking in a mirror, even seeking to discover their true identity, discovers first of all a fixed image of themselves, a persona to which they try to restore movement and life by a whole range of grimaces, facial gesticulations and minuscule, perverse gestures of defiance. They are attempting to act and influence their persona. It is the same in photography. Every self portrait is inevitably by its very nature a doubling, an image of the other. Our simplest most familiar experience of the photographic self-portrait is a constant reminder of the primordial fiction and the primal alienation of the first *Mirror-Phase* described by Lacan.³⁰

We have only to understand the *Mirror Stage* as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image - whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term of imago.³¹

I think that it can be argued that every self-portrait is the portrait of another and, in the process of producing one, artists confront themselves with a reflected image.

²⁹ Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes, the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, 1994, p. 342. Among them were scientific studies of imitation in animals, especially pigeons and locusts, and Roger Caillois's remarkable comparison of insect with human behaviour in the pages of *Minotaure*. These works seemed to have alerted Lacan to the importance of visual fusion with the other through morphological mimicry. According to Caillois, however, such a fusion was accompanied by a loss of psychic energy. Borrowing a term from Pierre Janet, Caillois called this condition 'psychasthenia', which meant a drop in ego strength.

³⁰ Chevrier, J-F., 'The image of the Other', in *Staging the Self, Self-Portrait Photography 1840-1980s*, catalogue of exhibition National Portrait Gallery 3 Oct 1986-11 Jan 1987, p 9.

Lacan's study of the child's recognition in front of the mirror is seen as being formative of the function of the I as recounted in psychoanalytic experience.

The child, at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognise as such his own image in the mirror.

In Lacan's view, this recognition is the expression of situational perception, an essential stage of the act of intelligence. This act, as in the case of the monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures 'in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates - the child's own body, and the persons and things around him[...]'.³²

Lacan describes the child's activity in front of the mirror:

Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial he nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his *Gaze*, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image.³³

He also states that this jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the infant stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the 'I' is precipitated in a primordial

³¹ Lacan, J., *Ecrits, A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Norton & Company, New York-London, 1977, p.1.

form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.³⁴

Amelia Jones states that Lacan's *Mirror Stage* – in which the subject 'coheres' in relation to a misrecognised image of his own unity as body/self/ image – coincides with Merleau-Ponty's observations in its acknowledgement of the simultaneous contingency of self on other and the fundamental narcissism of this relation. 'It is the image through which the subject seeks to know herself or himself but fails, succumbing to self-alienation, and through which the subject attempts to cohere itself, but it can only do so at the price of becoming the *other*.'³⁵

Martin Jay suggests that Merleau-Ponty began to be more sympathetic to certain psychoanalytic ideas near the end of his career.³⁶ Jay describes that, rather than construing Freudianism merely as a version of causal psychology, in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty began to appreciate its substantive contribution to the philosophical problems he so obsessively explored, to revise completely the pre-reflective cogito of Phenomenology through an increased sympathy for psychoanalysis and, in particular, its notion of the unconscious. Jay states Merleau-Ponty found that one aspect of the unconscious especially congenial complemented his earlier interests in the cognitive development of children, the role of the *Mirror Stage* in creating the knowing self. In his 1960 essay *The Child's Relations with Others*, Merleau-Ponty drew on psychologists

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lacan, J., *Ecrits, A selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Norton & Company, New York-London, 1977, p. 2.

³⁵ Jones, A., *Body Art Performing the Subject*, p.46.

³⁶ This is part of the anti-ocularcentric discussion he illustrates in Jay, M., *Downcast eyes*, p.320.

like Henri Wallon and Paul Guillaume, who had discussed the cognitive implications of specular images.³⁷ Jay writes :

What he called autoscopia, or the external perception of a self, was responsible, among other things, for an ideal, uniform notion of space, which is assumed to be the same wherever the image of the child appears. It also has profound affective implications that purely cognitive psychology fails to explain.³⁸

In Jay's view, psychoanalysis, through the work of Jacques Lacan, provided a useful corrective. Having recently read Lacan's seminal papers, *The Psychic Effects of the Imaginary Mode* and *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I*, Merleau-Ponty noted that they accounted for an aspect of specularity that Wallon had noted but neglected to address: the child's jubilation on seeing itself for the first time. But in addition to registering the positive emotional implications of the *Mirror Stage*, Merleau-Ponty followed Lacan, as he read him, in discerning negative ones as well.

Thereupon I leave the reality of my lived me in order to refer myself constantly to the ideal, fictitious, or imaginary me, of which the specular image is the first outline. In this sense I am torn from myself, and the image in the mirror prepares me for another still more serious alienation, which will be the alienation by others. For others have only an exterior image of me, which is analogous to the one seen in the mirror.³⁹

³⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 'The Child's Relations with Others', in *The Primacy of Perception*, pp. 125ff. He distinguished between the 'specular image', which is a psychological phenomenon, from the "image in the mirror," which is merely physical.

³⁸ Jay, p. 321.

The conflict between the internal and external senses of the self leads to aggressive feelings as well as narcissistic jubilation. As Jay notes, Merleau-Ponty took from Lacan the recognition that the *Mirror Stage* could well be the source of an alienated self and conflict between visually constituted selves.⁴⁰

One of my concerns is to note that here, and also experienced in my art practice, visual experience means a crisis of the bounded well-formed self. A parallel to my own experience in the Lacan's account on the precarious formation of that self is addressed at a later stage.

In 1931, the French psychologist Henri Wallon had published a paper entitled 'How the Child Develops the Notion of His Own Body.'⁴¹ Although the published version of Lacan's *Mirror Stage* essay mentions Wallon only in passing, Jay suggests that he was deeply influenced by the argument in this piece and Wallon's lectures from 1928 to 1934.

Wallon had experimented on the differences between animal and human infant behaviour in front of a mirror, demonstrating that whereas the former failed to take its reflection for itself, the latter did so. Thus was born a visually constituted notion of the self. Wallon also noted that children often identified very closely with the feelings of others, for example crying when another child felt pain. This phenomenon, known as 'transitivism', investigated by other child psychologists such as Charlotte Blihier and Elsa Kohler, suggested that the temporary confusion of self-image and the image of the other could be understood as functional in the creation of a healthy self.

³⁹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 136.

⁴⁰ Jay writes that the Merleau-Ponty equation of the mirror stage with the creation of the ego ideal or the super ego was not what Lacan had meant; he identified it squarely with the ego itself and thus explicitly jettisoned Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological notion of an ego prior to the cogito. For all his appreciation of Merleau-Ponty's positive appropriation of his work, Lacan thus carefully distanced himself from his interpretation of it in the tribute he wrote after the philosopher's death and in later statements. This can be found in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, 1981, p. 119.

⁴¹ Wallon, H., 'Comment se developpe chez l'enfant la notion du corps propre', *Journal de Psychologie* (November-December, 1931), pp. 705-748.

Whereas Wallon conceived of these experiences in essentially positive terms as advances in the maturation of consciousness, Jay suggests that Lacan's interpretation of them was more dark. In Jay's view, Lacan transformed Wallon's positive description of specular identification in a negative direction by absorbing Hegelian analyses of master-slave interaction presented in Alexandre Kojève's lectures at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in the mid-1930s. Kojève's influential anthropological reading of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a dialectic of desire, violence, and intersubjective recognition left a strong mark on Lacan, as it did on an entire generation of French intellectuals.⁴²

The initial attempt to achieve a coherent sense of selfhood is made by reducing the other to an image of the self in a manner similar to the projective transitivity by Wallon:

This violent derealization of the other, however, proves unsatisfactory, for only when the other is truly separate from the self can the self benefit from its recognition. A second stage of the dialectic thus entails acknowledgment of the ineradicable otherness of the nonself, which resists reduction to a specular double. In Kojève's terms, a 'higher' self is constituted by a dialectic of desire in which achieving the other's recognition supplants solipsistic visual projection.⁴³

A comparison between Lacan and another member of Kojève's audience, Sartre, for the similarities in their attitudes toward the *Gaze*, can be traced. Martin Jay states

⁴² According to Kojève, human consciousness emerges over time in response to a primordial desire to overcome a lack, a felt sense of incompleteness on the part of the biological proto-subject. But what defines human as opposed to animal desire is that its realisation must entail an interaction with the desire of the other, an interaction which is the basis of history.

⁴³ Jay, M., *Downcast eyes...*p. 342

that in the 1949 article Lacan specifically criticised Sartre, as he would Merleau-Ponty fifteen years later, for positing an irreducible core of subjective autonomy, a 'self-sufficiency of consciousness'⁴⁴ prior to the intersubjective dialectic of desire. Lacan implied that the residual Cartesian cogito latent in phenomenology must be rejected. But, in Jay's view, what Lacan did not spurn was Sartre's radical demolition of the transcendental ego created by the internalised look of the other.

Insisting that the ego was nothing more than an illusory construct based on a false faith in a mirror image of corporeal wholeness, Lacan set himself resolutely against ego psychology.

The *Mirror Stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development.⁴⁵

The therapeutic goal of a strong, integrated ego, therefore, is misguided, for rather than proving an escape from the vicissitudes of alienation, it is itself the greatest alienation of all. Produced by identification with a specular mirage, a dead image of a body like a film 'suddenly stopped in mid-action,'⁴⁶ it is in Jay's opinion, nothing less than an instantiation of what Sartre called 'bad faith'.

⁴⁴ Lacan, *The Mirror Stage*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Lacan, *The Mirror Stage*, p. 4. The language of armouring is also found in Lacan's in 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis' in *Ecrits, A selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Norton & Company, New York-London, 1977, pp. 101, 109.

⁴⁶ Lacan, 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis,' *Ecrits, A selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Norton & Company, New York-London, 1977, p. 17.

Jay sees here the link between Lacan's work on paranoid violence and his discussion of the *Mirror Stage*. If specular identification meant the rigid constriction of the psyche, failing to move beyond the *Mirror Stage* could lead to a repetition of its aggression.

Lacan states that the 'fragmented body usually manifests itself in dreams when the movement of the analysis encounters a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual'.⁴⁷

The double, infinitive repetition, modularity and the *Chiasm* are typical visual references to the mirror ontology discussed. These had often been present in my practical research in the composition of the pieces. More recently, though, I am more conscious of the psychological unfolding of some of my own experiences, and the implications in the use of those modular, multifaced compositions. Lately an aggressive aspect of my personality manifested itself in vivid images, which, as psychologist Emily Holmes told me, are usually produced by fear. At the time by meaning to face my parallel thinking, I wrote:

211101 Dialogue: The subjective self, the analytic self

SS-I fear my thoughts

AS-It is because you are tired and stressed, you work too hard!

SS-No it's all their fault! They have so much power, they control my thoughts.

AS None does that, you are in control of your thoughts

SS-No, I cannot, at that level; I see red, blood, someone heating me, and myself heating someone, and sometimes I love so much and hate so much, I get confused on the meaning of these words and feelings.

AS-There is a common ground for these sensations, you know, Lacan...

SS-Who cares about him, I do not want to understand I am angry, very angry, none should mess with my perception of reality, this is what they have done to me, fuck you, all of you and fuck me, when I don't take responsibility for telling the truth.

⁴⁷ Lacan, J., 'Ecrits, A selection', trans. Alan Sheridan, Norton & Company, New York-London, 1977, p.4.

AS-How are you going to do that?

SS-I do not know yet, but I think it will be against something and about something at the same time

AS-You saw Serrano's exhibition didn't you?

SS-Yes... Objects of desire (kuger 22 Long Kifle Mark II Target 2) 1992, it pushes you so close to the gun that you cannot but see its beauty, it is no longer a gun, I want the viewer to see things from where I see them, does this mean that I am imposing a viewpoint, am I in a position of power?

Faint
Joy
Sadness

48

I think that this somehow schizophrenic practice is very much implied in the methodology of the research I have conducted, and therefore I trained myself to be in such a condition, in order to be able to pursue my goals. As well as the relation with the viewer of one of my pieces, by putting myself in that very position in order to look the work from the outside, I also have had to detach my analytic self from the subjective self.

'The word "individual" comes from the Latin *individuum*: that which cannot be divided, but it becomes increasingly difficult to constitute oneself as an individual when one's perception of one's self is split and shattered.'⁴⁹ I remember very well when I first experienced that 'split'. It was in 1985, and I was going back home from art school. I saw my own reflected image in a shop window and would not recognise it as me. I think I was experiencing a split between my perception of myself and the look of myself, the way other people would see me. I think that this was the beginning of a series of attempts at the time to match my own image with an idealised one. More recently I have aimed to know better the perception of my own image from the outside, also through my research.

⁴⁸ From my diary notes.

⁴⁹ Brunon, B., *Autoportraits, Here's Looking at Me*, catalogue of exhibition at Espace Lyonnais d'Art Contemporain Ville de Lyon, 29 Jan- 30 Apr. 1993.

Martin Jay's writes that what Lacan called 'the Imaginary',⁵⁰ the dimension or realm of images, perceived or imagined, conscious or not, is a constant dimension of the human psyche,⁵¹ which can never permit unimpeded access to 'the Real', the realm of raw fullness prior to the organisation of the drives. But there is a difference between normal and psychotic behaviour that depends on the partial transition from the Imaginary to a further stage, which Lacan termed 'the Symbolic.'⁵²

Coincident with the resolution of the Oedipus complex, the Symbolic meant the child's entry into language.⁵³ In Jay's view, for Lacan, only when the illusory *dyadic* specularity of the *Mirror Stage* is surpassed by the *triadic* interaction of the Oedipal drama can a non-narcissistic inter-subjectivity become possible, one in which the alterity of the nonself is preserved rather than destroyed. 'The creation of the superego through the *introjection* of the prohibition of the father against incest creates a secondary identification, which supplants the primary identification based on specular *projection*.'⁵⁴

Jay writes that the splitting of the ego helps to defuse the aggressive potential in the *Mirror Stage* which is still evident in paranoid psychosis, because the split self is no longer in danger of projecting its ideal of wholeness on to another, which it confuses with itself.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ An account can be found in the seminars grouped under the rubric 'The Topic of the Imaginary' in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book 1.

⁵¹ Jay's reading of Lacan's Imaginary: 'By connecting the unconscious to conscious life through a variety of invisible joins, the Imaginary places affective value on Symbolic order conventions and thereby infers a heterogeneity into discourse. As the purveyor of active albeit repressed, representations and identificatory 'knowledge,' the Imaginary judges people and experiences -intuitively,' in light of invisible resonances. Like the *moi*, the Imaginary also functions to blot out the unconscious knowledge to which its very existence gives silent witness'. p., 351.

⁵² Ibid., p. 352.

⁵³ Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes, the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth -Century French Thought*, University of California Press, 1994, p. 349.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.251, 'Only when the desire for fusion is replaced by the acceptance of the prohibition of that desire, represented by the father's "no," can a healthy subject replace the "misrecognized" subject of the mirror stage. Because the father's "no" is a speech act, and one which in French is conveniently homophonic with his name the introjection is a fundamentally linguistic phenomenon, which is why entrance into the Symbolic is related to the Oedipus complex. The healthy subject thus produced, however paradoxical it may seem is thus split, decentered'.

⁵⁵ Jay continues by stating that only when the unconscious functions like a language and not like a mirror can the mature subject, split and injecting the other rather than projecting itself onto it, be achieved.

Jay suggests that the problem of remaining hostage to the *Mirror Stage*, as explained by Lacan, is a problem that characterised Western philosophical ocularcentrism as a whole. This is due precisely to its inflation of the role of the eye at the cost of recognising that of the *Gaze* (its complexity will be illustrated at a later stage). In Jay's view, it fails to register what Merleau-Ponty had pointed out: 'that we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world. That which makes us consciousness [sic] institutes us by the same token as *speculum mundi*'.⁵⁶ This failure can also be understood if we contrast waking and sleeping experience. Whereas awakened consciousness only operates with a looking eye, in our dreams, images show themselves to our unconscious.⁵⁷

The function of the picture' states Lacan 'in relation to the person to whom the painter, literally, offers his picture to be seen – has a relation with the *Gaze*. [...] I think there is a relation with the *Gaze* of the spectator, but that is more complex. The painter gives something to the person who must stand in front of this painting [...] he gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his *Gaze* there as one lays down his weapons [...] Something is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the laying down of the gaze.'⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lacan, op. cit. p. 75.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 'In the final resort, our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does not see where it is leading, he follow.'

⁵⁸ Lacan, J., *The four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, p.101.

I.2. Reflection and representation

Rodolphe Gasché gives an explanation of the etymological roots of the verb to reflect, in the Latin verb *re-flectere*. In his view this will suggest some of the more formal characteristics of the movements that compose reflection, as well as some of the fundamental imagery associated with this concept. *Reflectere* means 'to bend' or 'to turn back' as well as 'to bring back'. Gasché states that this turning back is significant for understanding reflection only if one recalls that in both Greek and Latin philosophy the term has optic connotations, in that it refers to the 'action' of mirroring surfaces in throwing back light, and in particular a mirror's exhibition or reproduction of objects in the form of images. Reflection signifies the process that takes place between a figure or object and its image on a polished surface. Gasché points out that from the beginning self-consciousness, as constituted by self-reflection, has been conceptualised in terms of this optical operation and perception, with the effect that self-consciousness has come to suggest a beam of light thrown back upon itself after impact with a reflecting surface. He concludes by writing that in this sense reflection is the structure and the process of an operation that implies that the mirror is mirroring itself, by which process the mirror is made to see itself.⁵⁹

Bernard Brunon writes that the visual vocabulary of Western artists has been ordered and codified through a set of rules that have been invented, implemented and in turn rendered obsolete throughout the centuries. One of the codes that ruled the process of image making for the majority of our history, and until the early years of this century, was that of visual representation. It offered the theoretical ground on which

⁵⁹ Gasché, R., *The Tain of the Mirror, Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Harvard University Press 1986, 1997 5th printing, p. 16.

images could be built.⁶⁰ Brunon writes that one of the aspects of representation relevant to self-portraiture is the characteristic straightforward gaze looking outward. This specific gaze is at the very centre of the major system of representation introduced in painting during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries and carried through the Renaissance to the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries and beyond. This system, called 'one view point perspective' or 'single vanishing point perspective', for centuries fixed the painter's position in front of the model.⁶¹

In my own artistic experiments the relation with the spectator is investigated through considering his/her position of *fruition*⁶² (fig. 12). I adopt a system of analysis divided into three stages: production, perception and fruition. In considering the fruition stage: the spectator here occupies a space which can be considered as symmetric to that occupied by the artwork, it is a mirror composition. This stage is realised when the artist produces an artwork leaving a gap to be filled by the presence of audience. In this situation an exchange between the piece and the spectator takes place as visualised in the diagram in figure 12. In order to examine this concept in more detail I shall illustrate various discussions regarding the painting *Las Meninas*, painted in Madrid in 1656 by Diego Velázquez. I believe this work can be understood in relationship to my three stage concept and that this painting can be a parallel to my own artistic research, where the condition of fruition is a prerequisite for enabling an interchange with the spectator to happen.

⁶⁰ Brunon, B., *Autoportraits, Here's Looking at Me*, catalogue of exhibition at Espace Lyonnais d'Art Contemporain Ville de Lyon, 29 Jan- 30 Apr. 1993.

⁶¹ Brunon, op.cit. He writes that this place occupied by the artist is the very same one defined by the lens of the camera obscura, with regards to the Jonathan Crary's concept that the camera obscura was not reserved to the exclusive use of the artists but available to a larger audience. Brunon points out that Crary underestimates the similarities between the optical system and that of the camera obscura and the geometrical system of one point perspective constructions. Both systems required a single fixed observation point, looking out in a given direction and dictating a very specific view of reality. However one of the advantages the artist had over Crary's observer was the ability to manipulate and finely tune the images he was producing.

⁶² The term fruition is used to signify the verb of perceiving and becoming part of the work. It has been so far part of my artistic intention to incorporate the spectator's response, in various ways and at various levels, at the perceptual stage. His/her presence is complementary to the meaning of the work.

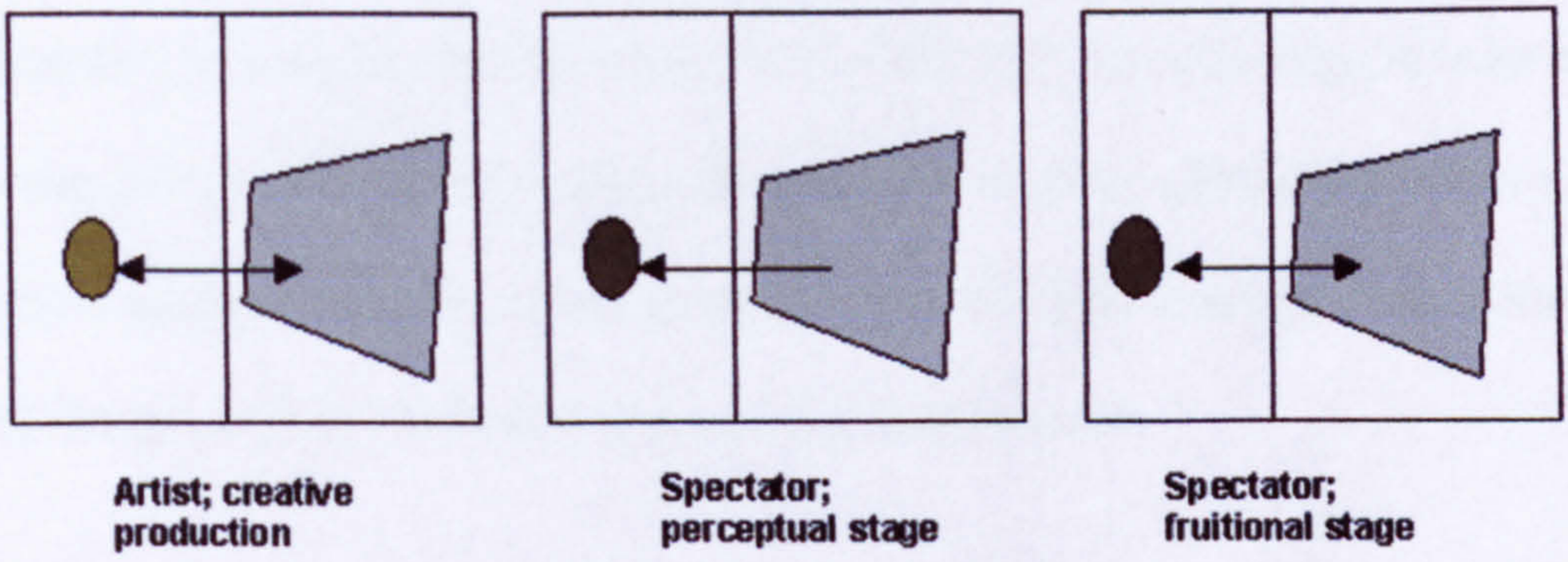


figure 12. Stages of artist and spectator production of spatial context in relation to their activity



figure 11. *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez

It is not my intention here to give a new reading of this painting, but to illustrate where a critical model for interpretation may arise. This will be used at a later stage in order to draw a parallel between the observation on the relationship viewer/painting within a spatial perspective construction in this painting and the undertaking of a similar investigation in some contemporary artworks and in my own practical research.

In the painting *Las Meninas*, the issues of representation and self-portraiture overlap to become one and, as Burton very well illustrates, the interpretation of the composition and subject matter of this painting has been discussed by various art historians and writers such as John R. Searle, George Kubler, Leo Steinberg, Martin Kemp and Jonathan Brown.⁶³ The non-scientific application of perspective by the Diego Velázquez as suggested by Martin Kemp, leaves 'space' for the spectator's subjective interpretation.

The straightforward look in self-portraits does not necessarily coincide with the single focus perspective for its spatial construction. This means that when, as it happens in *Las Meninas*, the perspective construction is not scientifically based on the position of the viewer and artist, then it no longer coincides with the painter's viewpoint either.

Martin Kemp interpreted the construction of the space in *Las Meninas* aiming to find how scientifically Velázquez applied perspective rules that he might have been aware of because of his contacts with Italian painters. Kemp says: 'The setting of the 'action' is quite specific - this is not the least original of its aspects - and can be identified as a long room in the Alcazar, adjacent to the painter's own suite of rooms'⁶⁴(fig. 13). In

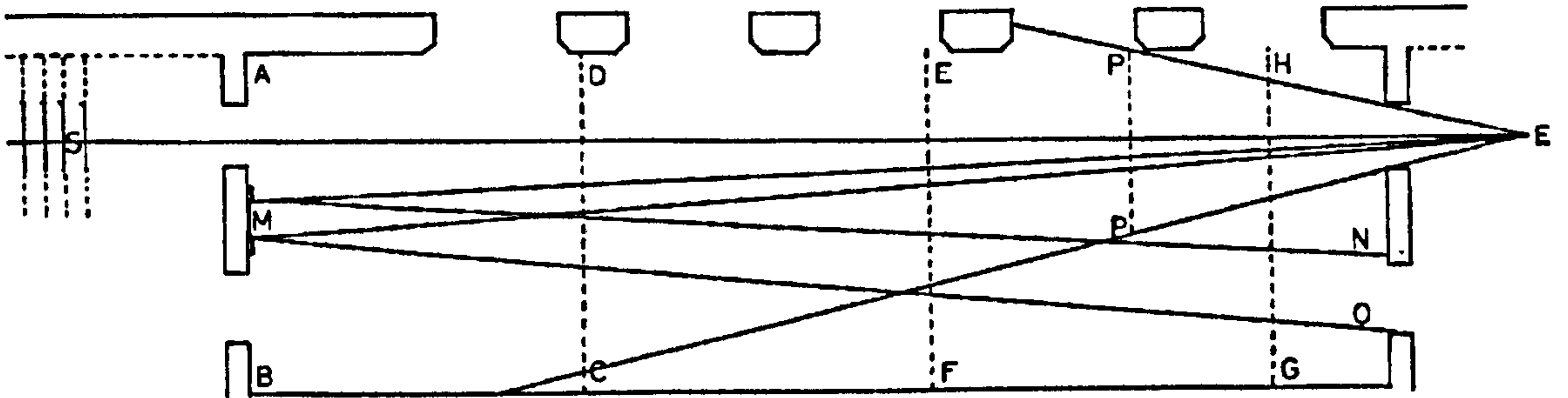
⁶³ Some sources: Searle, J. R. 'Las Meninas and Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation', in *Critical Inquiry*, University of Chicago, Spring 1980; Kubler, G., 'Three Remarks on Las Meninas', in *The Art Bulletin*, New York, June 1996; Steinberg, L., 'Velasques Las Meninas' in *October 19*, winter 1981.

⁶⁴ Kemp, M., *The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, p.107.

his view the perspectival clues are less obvious than they might be in Italian Renaissance painting, but they are definite enough.

The vanishing point lies close to the central point of the door opening [fig. 14]. The visual axis thus runs asymmetrically down the room along a line between two of the doors. The painter's own position in the picture can be determined as straddling the central axis of the room. Given the viewing axis, the centrally-placed mirror cannot but reflect a relatively narrow vista which lies almost exclusively to the left of the central axis. The line of vision from the mirror would almost certainly have been intercepted by the large canvas. The painting would, therefore, represent a double portrait of the King and Queen. This interpretation corresponds to that of Palomino and is confirmed by the pictorial device of a red curtain visible in the mirror reflection. Velazquez would not have required advanced optical planning to achieve this effect, but simply his first-hand knowledge of what was visible in the room from a certain standpoint and what was (or would be) reflected in that mirror[...].⁶⁵

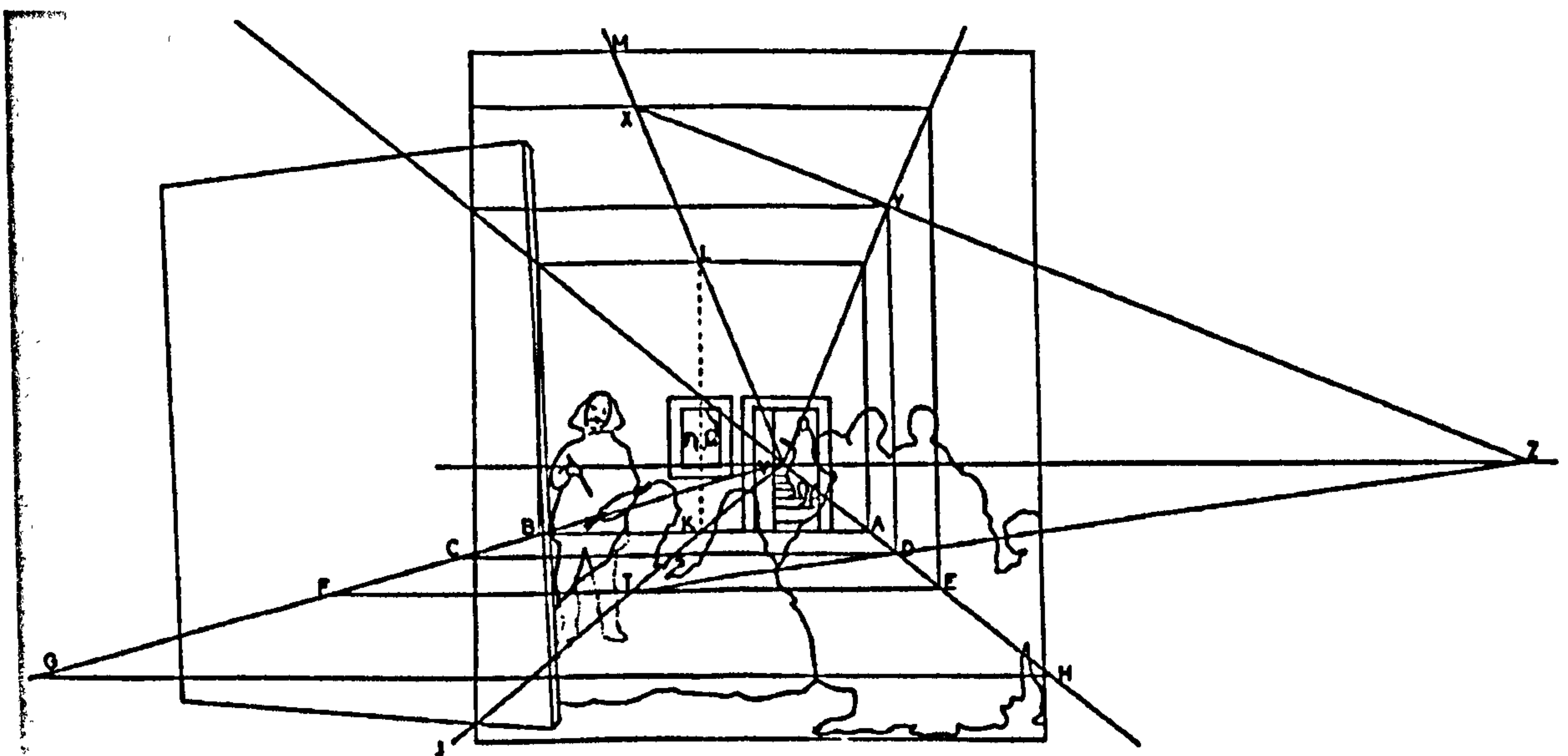
⁶⁵ Kemp, M., op. cit. p. 108



202. Ground plan of the room in the Alcázar Palace represented in Velázquez's *Las Meninas*.
 E—viewer
 S—stairs on which the man stands
 M—mirror

ABCD, CDEF, EFGH—square units equivalent to the width of the room
 PP—required position of picture plane, if the picture had been designed in a precisely scaled manner.
 NO—width of the area reflected in the mirror

figure 13. from Kemp, M., *The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, p.107



203. Perspectival analysis of Velázquez's *Las Meninas*.

V—'vanishing point'
 ABCD, CDEF, EFGH—square units equivalent to the width of the room (as in pl. 202)

JKLM—central axis of room
 XY, TI—diagonals through units twice as deep as wide
 VZ—half the viewing distance

figure 14. from Kemp, M., *The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, p.107.

Martin Kemp questions whether Velázquez did precisely recreate the view according to optical principles. He supposes that Velázquez could determine units corresponding to squares in the ground plan using the width of the end wall as the side length to show that the picture plane is situated somewhat more than three-and-one-quarter units from the rear wall (fig. 14); it would nearly coincide with the plane of the opposite wall of the room.

However, this would not be consistent with the scales of the uprights [sic] canvas and *Las Meninas* itself, which is over three meters tall. To produce the proper scaling, the picture plane would need to be located at PP in pl. 202 [fig. 13]. I interpret this discrepancy to mean that there was probably not a directly geometrical relationship between the setting and the perspective of the painting. The setting and the painting would therefore stand in a different relationship from that in the standard construction.⁶⁶

Kemp suggests a reading of the design procedure in the following terms: 'Velázquez took his basic view of the room as framed by the upright edges of the door from point E. This would mean that the plane of the door aperture acted as the Albertian 'window'[...]'. In Kemp's view, this was directly recorded 'by eye' without a precise scaling of all the architectural forms 'in depth in the Piero [della Francesca] manner' and given Velázquez's access to perspective science, this would represent a conscious choice. Kemp states that according to this interpretation he would be openly challenging the perceptual limitations of the Italians' geometrical mechanics.

67

⁶⁶ Kemp, M., op. cit., p. 108

In Kemp's view, one instance of Velázquez's desire was to give a wider sense of the subtle processes of vision and how these can be magically evoked or paralleled in the medium of paint, thus achieving more than was possible with the drier mechanisms of linear perspective and geometrical shadow projection. 'No painting was ever more concerned with 'looking'—on the part of the painter, the figures in the painting and the spectator.'⁶⁸

He also writes that 'Velázquez's art is a special kind of window on the world—or a perceptual mirror of nature—or perhaps even more literally in this instance his personal door to the subtle delights of natural vision and painted illusion...' Kemp states that artists of high intelligence like Velázquez, concerned at this time with questions of visual representation, could set their understanding of perspective into a broader context of seeing and representation to fall into subjective interpretation based on their appearance to the viewer rather than theoretical constructs.

In my opinion the fascination of the painting rests in this non scientific construction of the space that, while giving the illusion of spatial engagement, also allows subjective interpretations where the fruition aspect of the work may be realised.

Brunon⁶⁹ refers to Michael Foucault's Chapter 1 of the *Order of things*, published in France in 1966 and translated into English in 1970, as an important contribution to the study of the painting, for his own discussion of it. The explanation given by Foucault of the scene in the painting is that a framed mirror on the back wall represents a reflection of the king and queen posing for their portrait.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Brunon, B., *Autoportraits, here's looking at me*, catalogue of exhibition, Espace Lyonnais d'Art Contemporain Ville de Lyon, 29Jan- 30th Apr. 1993, p. 15.

[...]what [the mirror] is reflecting is that which all the figures within the painting are looking at so fixedly [...] the mirror holds in its glow the figures that the painter is looking at [...] the two personages serving as model to the painter are not visible, at least directly, but we can see them in a mirror, and they are King Philip IV and his wife Mariana.⁷⁰

Brunon criticises Foucault's interpretation by constructing diagrams showing the paradox of his theory. Brunon states that it is impossible that the royal couple stand in front of the painting generating the attributed reflection on the back wall of the composition. The mirror situated on the back wall of the painting is not positioned in the centre and does not represent the focus of the applied perspective. Brunon again suggests that the supposed reflection of the royal couple may well be in fact the portrait of the couple that Velázquez painted around the same time. If this theory was right 'if all the characters represented are facing a mirror, if the scene as it is in the painting were viewed in a mirrored wall, then it all makes sense [...] and the painter enjoys the full view of the back wall reflected as well in the mirror providing a reversed image of the royal portrait.

When I saw the painting at the Prado Museum in Madrid, the perception of the depicted space seemed to be the same in which, as the viewer, I was positioned. And then a closer look suggested a different perception of that space: although I was part of it, something not that easily explained kept me attracted to it. The impression was that the painting really let me into its space, but not literally: this happened rather at a more conceptual level.

⁷⁰ Foucault, M., *The Order of Things*, New York, Vintage Books, Random House, 1970, p. 8-9

Jonathan Miller writes that ‘Velásquez developed the paradox of the reflection [which] in addition to the represented mirror he teasingly implies an un-represented one, without it is difficult to imagine how he could have shown himself painting the picture we now see, *Las Meninas*. For to reflect the appearance of the otherwise invisible self is one of the mirror’s best functions’.⁷¹

Velásquez, by setting this composition in front of a mirror, realised a self portrait: he looks straight ahead in the position that we occupy at the time of its fruition. This particular painting, with the spatial illusional quality and the visual engagement of the viewer, synthesises two issues central to my thesis: on the one hand the *Gaze*, the look for the viewer engagement; on the other hand the reflection of the self as constituting a self portrait. It is in their superimposition that viewer and artist meet on the painting surface.

Steinberg sees the main effect of *Las Meninas* as creating an encounter ‘and as in any living encounter, any vital exchange, the work of art becomes the alternate pole in a situation of reciprocal self-recognition [...]. [Confronted with the mirror] we are, polarised selves, reflecting one another’s consciousness without end, partaking of an infinity that is not spatial but psychological, an infinity not cast in the outer world, but in the mind that knows and that knows itself known’.⁷²

II. 3. The represented and *performative self* in the history of art.

Although instances of self representations have been recorded throughout Western Art history, starting in the fifth century BC when sculptor *Phidias* represented himself among the figures of the *Battle of Amazons*, I shall focus on a few

⁷¹ Miller, J., *On Reflection*, National Gallery Publications Limited 1998, London, p. 12.

contemporary artists whose work has been inspirational for my own production and that I think is one relevant to my theoretical debate.

The relationship with one's own reflection is a major factor for artists. To follow the desire of its investigation implies a discussion on the relationship of the represented image with oneself, but also with others.

We may look more closely at this issue in terms of the artistic process. Two stages may be defined: one stage is the relation between artists and their own image, often taking place in a private context; the second stage is that of the presentation of the artist's self through the work, and it takes place in a public arena – in performance art the two are often simultaneous. The exposure of the image in a public arena suggests artists' intention to reduce the distance between artists' private and public persona, the distance between artist and viewer.

I think that the distinction between action and photography within an artist's work (and also in my own practice research) presents two different stages of the creative process. Here the position of the artist, as well as the conditions for the perception of the work by the audience, change. I shall examine the context of these in what is often known as Body Art. I identify two moments: *action*, being carried on with (or without) an audience, within a context of an intention to be accomplished inside a set frame of time and space; *photography* (and video) documenting the action, illustrating the work as it happened becoming something different from it. Self-portrait photography, therefore, is here understood as representing the final result of the action/performance of relating to the artist's own reflected image.

⁷² Steinberg, L., 'Velasquez Las Meninas' in *October 19*, Winter 1981, p.54.

A brief historical account⁷³ will give a structure within which to locate the evolution of the concept of performance art and Body Art as a format for self-portraiture in the arts, to show how performance art developed as an hybrid art form within a broad range of art expressions and in relation to other art practices.

II. 3. 1. Historical references for performance and Body Art

I take the origins of 'live art' of the twentieth century to be found in the Futurist Movement, although their use of it was mainly for propaganda purposes. In 1909 Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto was also published in Russia. There young poets and painters Burlyuk, Mayakovsky, Livshits and Khlebnikov also published their manifesto titled *A slap in the face to public taste* in 1912⁷⁴. Dada's performance activity began at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916 around the founders Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball, although they had already been in contact in Munich, where Tzara, Arp, Kandinsky and many others met and worked.

The development of performance in the Twenties in Germany was due largely to the pioneering work of Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus.⁷⁵ Oskar Schlemmer, took over the stage workshop from Lothar Schreyerm, presenting his programme in *The Figural Cabinet I*, which reflected the Bauhaus spirit. His refusal to accept the limits of art categories resulted in performances becoming a major focus of Bauhaus activities. Schlemmer's theory of performance was a unique contribution to the Bauhaus and was based on the relation between theory and practice. Moholy-Nagy worked at the Bauhaus

⁷³ Some of the following historical references are found in Goldberg, R., *Performance Art From Futurism to the Present*, first published 1988, reprinted Singapore, 1999.

⁷⁴ As illustrated in Goldberg's account, p. 31.

for five years and the concept of a the total work of art that he based his work on, refers back to the Richard Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁷⁶ The early Bauhaus was also marked by this idea, and the *Bauhütten* was more than anything else the invocation of a romantically transfigured holistic synthesis of artistic production and social life.⁷⁷

Performance in the US began to emerge in the thirties, with the arrival of European artists fleeing from the rising national socialist regime, to become a recognised practice after 1945. Black Mountain College directed by John Rice, including Josef and Anni Albers, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham, was the centre of attraction for artists, writers, playwrights, dancers and musicians. Cage's extension of the basis of music to include sources of sound beyond conventional musical instruments influenced younger artists and particularly dance performance by Cunningham⁷⁸.

Cage began to teach at the New School of Social Research in New York in 1956 where amongst the students, Allan Kaprow considered environments as spatial representations of a multileveled attitude to painting. Claes Oldenburg's production extended from sculpture to performances and Jim Dine saw performances as an extension of the everyday life. Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* at the Reuben Gallery in New York in 1959 was one of the earliest opportunities for a wider public to attend the live events that artists had performed more privately. The general term, *happenings*, used to include a range of art performances including various artists, often connected to the fluxus

⁷⁵ where, among others, Paul Klee, Ida Kerkovius, Johannes Itten, Gunta Stölzl, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Alma Buscher, László Moholy-Nagy were working.

⁷⁶ Richard Wagner wished to regenerate his Fatherland, after 1848 revolution, at his Bayreuth Festival by means of an aesthetic myth which combined words, music, architecture in an artistic synthesis. Though he was from then target of mordant criticism by Friedrich Nietzsche because of his incipient sanctimoniousness, Wagner's total work of art became a paradigm for modernism in general. The most diverse tendencies within the avant-garde were united, aesthetically, philosophically and politically, by the desire to spearhead a social, national, political regeneration with a new image of the whole of society as a unified total work of art.

⁷⁷ Fiedler, J., Feierabend, P., *Bauhaus*, Könemann, Cologne, 1999, Germany, p. 302. Moholy's 'total artwork' cannot, however, be simply equated with Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the ultimate implications of which led to the total aestheticization of politics, as described by Walter Benjamin. On the contrary, Moholy wished to dissociate himself from such illusion of universal regeneration. He saw the aesthetics as a source of the solution to the social problems.

movement. Figures such as Names Dick Higgins, Bob Watts, Al Hansen, George Macunias, Jackson MacLow, Richard Maxfield, Yoko Ono, La Monte Young, Alison Knowles, at the Cafe A Gogo, all contributed to the development of concepts that linked space, time, music, film and performance into a less 'bounded' form of art that now represents the basis of contemporary performance, Body Art and installation art.⁷⁹

II. 3. 2. A new awareness of the perception of the body: Body Art.⁸⁰

Henry Sayre suggests that Body Art can be seen as a way of understanding portraiture in its *theatricalization of the self*⁸¹. Whilst Amelia Jones distinguishes Body Art from performance on the basis of theatricality. In relation to this concept and some of its implications in my own work, after the having performed *Morning Toilette*, Video Live Installation at Tate Modern, I wrote:

[...] My own experience as performer was such that I decided that I will not perform for a while. This was also what I said to the audience soon after I finished. The reason is because I did not feel comfortable in that environment, but most of all because I felt I was lying to my self and to the audience because I was acting. Performance to me is a symbolic and cathartic action which can be read at different levels, but the result of which depends on its genuineness... The artist has the responsibility to give an image that the audience can reflect into with their own experience.

Although it can be argued that art is representation and, in that sense any action repeated in front of an audience

⁷⁸ Goldberg, R., *Performance Art From Futurism to the Present*, first published 1988, reprinted Singapore, 1999, pp. 123-126.

⁷⁹ The common denominator of these events was New York City: its downtown lofts, alternative galleries, cafes and bars that housed the performers of the early sixties. In Europe Robert Filiou, Ben Vautier, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Patterson, Joseph Beuys, Emmett Williams, Nam June Paik, Tomas Schmit, Wolf Vostell and Jean-Jacques Lebel. More festival programmes were organised throughout New York, from Central Park to 69th street Armory were performances by Cage, Rauschenberg and Whitman were held. Dancers like Simon Forti, Yvonne Rainier, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, David Gordon, Barbara Loyd and Deborah Hay found in the art world a more responsive audience and interesting ground to be included in their approaches. Concerns such as body and space were shared by dancers and visual artists. The view of dance as a way of life had its historical origin in Isadora Duncan and Rudolf von Laban, thread picked up by Ann Halprin in 1955 with a company formed just outside Chicago. Collaborators were dancers Trisha Brown, Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainier and Steve Paxton and musicians Terry Riley, La Monte Young, Warner Jepson. By 1963, many artists involved in live events were participating in the Judson Dance Group concerts. Simone Forti worked for many years with Robert Morris. Morris created performances as an expression of his interest in the 'body in motion' (e.g. *Site* 1965).

⁸⁰ Literature on the matter: Willoughby Sharp, 'Body Works' *Avalanche*, n.1 (Fall 1970), pp 14-17; Cindy Nemser, 'Subject-Object Body Art' *Arts magazine* 46, n1 (September- October 1971), pp 38-42; Lea Vergine *Il corpo come linguaggio (La body Art e storie simili)*, Milan, Gianpaolo Prearo Editore 1974; Francois Pluchart, 'L'art Corporel', Paris, Galerie Stadler 1974; Ira Licht, 'Bodyworks' in *Bodyworks*, Chicago, Museum of Contemp[orary Art, 1975.

⁸¹ As can be found in Henry Sayre chapter I 'The Rhetoric of the Pose: Photography and the Portrait as Performance', in *The Object of Performance, The American Avant-Garde Since 1970*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

cannot be the spontaneous action of the everyday life but, as much as in a ready made, the artistic context or simply the intention of the artist to express him/herself in a particular context makes the action become an artistic action.

My everyday own experience of washing the face and putting make up on is usually performed at home, and the piece morning toilette DVD installation is composed by a collection of the shots of those intimate events where I am both the audience and the performer in front of the camera's reversed screen.

I do not act, it is myself. By the fact that I am recording, I am more focused on what I am actually doing. The repetition of a performance so far has always been a different experience for me who was interacting with a different environment or audience, but while performing I was also detaching myself from the environment and getting in touch with my inner side. As a consequence, the performance worked to me because I felt that it had an effect on myself and therefore the audience[...]'

82

According to Amelia Jones, Body Art asks us to interrogate not only the politics of
visuality but also the very structures through which the subject takes place through the
inevitably eroticised exchange of interpretation.⁸³ She argues that to a certain extent the
coincident movements of minimalism and conceptualism engaged in similar questions of
the relationship between the body and the thought, the object and the space it inhabits.

Roger Marcel Mayou writes in the essay *Portrait of The Artist as a work of Art, Body Art or Permanence and Continuity in Self- Portrait:*

Body art is the culminating point in the relationship between the artist
and his work; the union of the two to form-a-single whole. The artist
does not introduce himself into a created work, he is art, and his
personality is no longer subjected to passive treatment, it is shown as
real.

In his view, Body Art is a pure humanistic movement that at this level does not represent a break with tradition, but on the contrary, expresses all the psychological aspects implied in it through an explosion of the self. Furthermore: ‘ [...]because they insist on the immediacy of the “making”, body artists have removed what separated them and the spectator and created an immediate visual relationship with their audience.’⁸⁴

In historical terms, the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s was the most productive moment in the history of Body Art. Body artists participated in this dislocation of normative subjectivity, reconfiguring identity politics and the very parameters of subjectivity itself.

In Europe artists like Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, and Joseph Beuys additionally felt responsible for raising political issues in discussion. In Milan Piero Manzoni believed that it was necessary to reveal the process of art to demystify pictorial sensibility. His work is centred on the everyday reality of his own body as an expression of personality.

Many artists of this period questioned the accepted premises of art and attempted to re-define its meaning and function. Moreover, a number of artists took it upon themselves to express these new directions in lengthy texts, rather than leave that responsibility to the art critic. The gallery was attacked as an institution of commercialism and other outlets were sought for communicating ideas to the public. Performance was an expression of the concept that art should not be sold and was

⁸² From my diary 10th April 2001

⁸³ Jones, A., *Body Art, Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 23.

⁸⁴ Mayou, R. M., ‘Portrait of The Artist as a work of Art, Body Art or Permanence and Continuity in Self-Portrait’, in Billiter, E., *Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography, Photographers reflecting their own image* catalogue of Exhibition Musee Cantonal des Beaux-Arts Lausanne Benteli Verlag Bern, 1985, p.20

also seen as reducing the element of alienation between performer and viewer, since both audience and performer experienced the work simultaneously.

The involvement of the viewer was also actuated by a strategy which relied on the presence of the artist in public as interlocutor to the viewer. Some artists gave instruction to the viewers, suggesting that they enact the performances themselves. Some early conceptual actions were more written instructions than actual performance, as proposals for the reader to perform or not. Audiences were provoked questioning the boundaries of art.

Amelia Jones, in her book *Body Art, Performing the Subject*, explores the ways in which Body Art radically negotiates the structures of interpretation that inform our understanding of visual culture, as well as an exploration of Body Art as a profound shift in the conception and experience of subjectivity. She refers to artists Caroleen Schneemann and Yayoi Kusama and writes that their projects 'make clear that the Cartesian "*I think therefore I am*" [...] is transcended through pure thought or creation, is no longer viable in the decentering regime of postmodernism [...]'.⁸⁵ Jones turns to Body Art and phenomenologically inflected feminist post-structuralism (Merleau-Ponty as read by Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler) to *re-embody* the subject of making and viewing art, she returns to the phenomenological bases of poststructuralism. Jones does not see poststructuralism as having caused the death of the centered subject nor as being any of its effects, but as a dynamic mode of speaking of a new experience of subjectivity. In her view 'Body art is one of the most dramatic and thorough cultural productions to initiate the dispersal of the modernist subject.'

⁸⁵ Jones, A., *Body Art, Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 10.

III. 3.3. Presence, absence, documentation

According to Amelia Jones, works by Kusama, Schneeman, Vito Acconci, Yves Klein, Hannah Wilke, which '*take place through the enactment of the artist's body*', are documented to be experienced subsequently through photography, film, video and text.⁸⁶

In my own work, the live event (in a public or private context) is just the starting point for a number of different ways of presenting the work. To see the presentation of the documentation as part of the work, is to rethink the meaning of the work in order to add a new understanding to it. In many cases Body Art mutated into either performative photographic work, such as the film stills of Cindy Sherman, or large-scale semi-narrative performance, such as Laurie Anderson's theatrical *United States*.

Amelia Jones introduces Laurie Anderson's practice by illustrating her decision to document her work. Jones explains that in 1975 Anderson was invited to give a performance in conjunction with the *Bodyworks* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. She noted at the time that she was struck by the term Body Art although the show, as she wrote 'consisted of pieces of paper on a wall, photographs, notes, tapes. Artists putting their bodies on the line, on the shelf, dressing in drag, assuming alter egos, putting themselves through various exercises, contortions, exorcisms. ... But in fact, no bodies were there. Only paper'.⁸⁷

Debunking the myth of presence circulating around Body Art at the time, Anderson's comments suggest that the body is both insistently 'there' and always absent (never knowable through vision). Anderson who was initially strongly opposed to documenting her own work in photographs, film, or video, wanting to avoid the

⁸⁶ Jones op. cit., p. 13, her italic.

⁸⁷ Anderson, L. 'What is body Art?' from '*Confessions of a Street Talker*' 1975, reprinted in Anderson, L., '*Stories from the Nerve Bible: a retrospective 1972-1992*', Harper Collins, New York, 1994, p.109, collection of writings and performance documentation, in Jones op.cit., p. 32.

appropriation and commodification of her work, subsequently realised that 'people [don't] remember them very well'.⁸⁸ The assumption that Body Art or a performance event is only 'real' once, or that it remains itself only through the memories of people who were present during its live performance, is undermined by Anderson's own experience of having people ask her about elements of performances she never did, or never remembered doing. Anderson thus claims that she began documenting her performances to ensure their accurate existence in history.

Jones suggests that most early accounts of these practices made heroic claims for Body Art's status as the only art form to guarantee the presence of the artist.⁸⁹

Art historian Kathy O'Dell⁹⁰ has argued that, precisely by using their bodies as primary material, body and performance artists highlight the 'representational status' of such work rather than confirming its ontological priority. The representational aspects of this work - its 'play within the arena of the symbolic' and as Jones argues 'its dependence on documentation to attain symbolic status within the realm of culture'⁹¹ - expose the impossibility of attaining knowledge of the self through bodily proximity. Body Art, shows that the body can never be known 'purely' as a totalisable, fleshy whole that rests outside of the arena of the symbolic.⁹²

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Jones explains that, thus, in the catalogue for the 1975 Chicago *Bodyworks* exhibition, Ira Licht proclaims that bodyworks go away with the 'intermediary' mediums of painting and sculpture to 'deliver ... information directly through transformation.' And, also in the 1970's, Rosemary Mayer claimed Body Art to be a direct reflection of the artist's life experiences, while Cindy Nemser described the 'primary goal of body art' as 'the desire to bring the subjective and objective self together as a totally integrated entity', which is then directly projected to the audience. In 1982, Chantal Pontbriand privileged performance by arguing that it 'presents; it does not re-present'. Rosemary Mayer, 'Performance and Experience', *Arts Magazine* 47, n. 3, Dec 1972-Jan 1973, pp 33-36. Cindy Nemser, 'Subject-object Body Art', *Arts Magazine* 46, n.1, Sept-Oct 1971, p.42. Chantal Pontbriand, 'The eye Finds No Fixed Point on Which to Rest', *Modern Drama* 25, 1982. Jones. A., *op. cit.* p. 33.

⁹⁰ Kathy O'Dell, *Toward a Theory of Performance Art, An investigation of Its Sites*, thesis, City University of New York, 1992, as referred to by Amelia Jones, in the opus cited, p. 248.

⁹¹ Jones, *op. cit.*, p.33.

⁹² 'Having direct physical contact with an artist who pulls a scroll from her vaginal canal does not ensure "knowledge" of her (as individual and/or artist and/or work of art) any more than does looking at a film or picture of this activity, or looking at a painting that was made as a result of such an action.' Jones states, in *op. cit.* p. 34.

Jones states that Body Art tells us that the self is inexorably embodied, and yet she argues that the works suggest that this does not mean that the performed body/self is ever completely legible or fixed in its effects. 'Body art, through its very performativity and its unveiling of the body of the artist, surfaces the insufficiency and incoherence of the body/self (or the body-as-subject) and its inability to deliver itself fully (whether to the subject-in-performance herself or himself or to the one who engages with this body).'⁹³

Jones explains⁹⁴ that the unique body of the artist in the Body Art work has meaning by virtue of its contextualization within the codes of identity that accrue to the name/body. Thus, this body is not self-contained in its meaningfulness; it is a body/self, relying not only on an authorial context of 'signature' but also on a receptive context in which the interpreter or viewer may interact with it. This context is precisely the point at which the body becomes a 'subject'.⁹⁵ In Jones view, documents of the body-in-performance are just as easily contingent in that the meaning that accrues to the image of the body is open-ended and dependent on the ways in which the image is contextualized and interpreted. Seemingly acting as a 'supplement' to the 'actual' body of the artist in performance, the photograph of the Body Art event or performance could in fact, be said to expose the body itself as supplementary, as both the visible proof of the self and its endless deferral.

Jones argues that the sequence of supplements initiated by the Body Art project - the body 'itself', the spoken narrative, video, and other visuals within the piece, the video, film, photograph, and text documenting it for posterity - announces the

⁹³ Ibid., p. 34.

⁹⁴ Op cit., chapter I, pp.33-37.

⁹⁵ Live performance, in fact, makes the intersubjectivity of the interpretative exchange even more pronounced and obvious since the body's actions can be interfered with and realigned according to other bodies/subjects.

necessity of ‘an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, or originary perception. Derrida notes that ‘the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self’.⁹⁶

The relationship between issues of presence and representation addressed in my pieces through the use of documentation is also imbedded in my own production methodology. Particularly, the synchronic way of working in different media (photographic, video, live) has led me to conceive a form of presentation of my work, which contains them all simultaneously. The type of format of work that I define as *video live installation*⁹⁷ includes the elements of: performativity (that because of its nature gives the character of the temporary every time the piece is performed); the involvement of the audience because their presence complete its meaning; the question of the relation between the real and the representation in the present time, from the viewpoint of the audience, of the piece’s apprehension and from my own, of its delivery. The most significant point is that the documentation of the event is produced during the event itself, becoming part of it, and this process is therefore witnessed by the audience. It is precisely by witnessing the production process that the audience participate, and at this stage the chiasmatic intertwining takes place in the phenomenological and conceptual space of the event. In the pieces *BluX*, *Morning Toilette* performance, and *Public Private Perceptions 02* the physical

⁹⁶ In *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, Derrida explicitly examines why the body must be excluded from determinations of meaning within the idealistic regime of signification and Cartesian subjectivity posited in Western metaphysics. The impure and supplementary body must be opposed to the soul, where the will is lodged and meaning is generated: ‘Visibility and spatiality as such could only destroy the self-presence of will and spiritual animation which opens up discourse. They are literally the death of that self-presence’ Derrida’s insight explains the equivocal position of the body in modernist and postmodernist art discourse. Within the modernist logic of formalism, the body of the artist—in its impurity—must be veiled, its supplementarity hidden from view. The formalist insists upon the “disinterestedness” of his interpretations, and such disinterestedness is predicated upon a pure relation between the art object and its supposedly inherent meaning. The supplementarity of the body corrupts this logic. Derrida, J., ‘That Dangerous Supplement,’ in *Of Grammatology*, tr Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 163.

⁹⁷ Used for the pieces illustrated: *BluX*, *Morning Toilette* performance, *Public Private Perceptions*.

presence of myself performing is mirrored by the video represented image (live recording of the action); in this way my own body presence is never understood unless a re-presented image is also simultaneously there to shift the attention towards the symbolic.

Thus the multiplied represented image of myself in the *video live installation* format, as well as the production of the subsequent resulting artistic outcomes (video documentation, video stills or text), are all based on conceptual compositions of the ontology of the mirrored image, which is projected and repeated. In this sense the enactment of the self in Body Art generating the supplementary representations of the self and encompassing time and movement, not only contributes to, but also reinforces the questioning of the ocularcentric discourse posed by the mirrored self in self-portraiture.

Particularly in Body Art works, the meaning emerges in between the split and multiplied selves, thus taking away the attention from a united and fixed self.

II. 3. 4. Enactment of the self through *mirror* photographic media

For my research, Body Art represents the starting point of a creative process based on a symbolic and conceptual action, and where it exists, the documentation becomes a work of art itself. Roger Marcel Mayou states that for many of the Body Artists in the production process ‘the photograph is the work of art itself and unites all the semantic aspects of an action undertaken to produce it. The photograph is a print which, apart from presenting a permanent record, has no ‘raison d’être... This is where the self-portrait takes on its full meaning’.⁹⁸

Or, I may say, takes away the meaning of the action to generate a new one. Butler writes that to photograph oneself is unavoidably something of a *schizoid* undertaking. For it implicitly acknowledges the division, the difference between one's own self-perception and an external self perceived by others. This brings into play the consciousness of self as other - not I, not first person, but second or even third- he/she, appearing as an element in the visual and perceptual field of others, displaced from the centre of the universe amidst their myriad of glances. In her view, as an instrument of observation controlled by someone else, the camera reproduces the looks of others upon us, congealing in the photograph the impression of an instant, translating it into varying contexts of identity. But when the person photographed also controls the camera, converting it into an instrument of self-projection, there is the means of creating an image that represents the self in its own terms, as it would be seen, as it would affect others. 'And if the photographer is a woman - customarily the object of male look, and especially so in the realm of photographic looking, from fine art through to pornography - than the implications of this relation through the camera of self to self and to the outside world are redoubled [...]'. Butler states that for a woman to use the camera is a kind of theft of this power, 'an assertion of the right to value her own capacities of observation and judgement, rather than simply sustain someone else's exercise of these functions [...] shift in her thinking, to conceive of how she looks more nearly in the senses of how she sees rather than of how she appears [...]'.⁹⁹ She concludes by writing that the woman photographs herself in a position to marshal all the resources of self-presentation (dress, setting, pose) and to ally them with the 'power of active looking to create images that put into question the dominant conventions of both'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Mayou, R. M., 'Portrait of the artist as a work of art' in *Self Portrait in the age of photography, Photographers Reflecting their own Image*, p. 15

⁹⁹ Butler, S., 'How do I look', *Women Before and Behind the Camera*, *Staging the Self, Self Portrait Photography 1840s-1980s*, catalogue of Exhibition National Portrait Gallery, 3 Oct 1986-11 Jan 1987 op. cit., p. 51.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

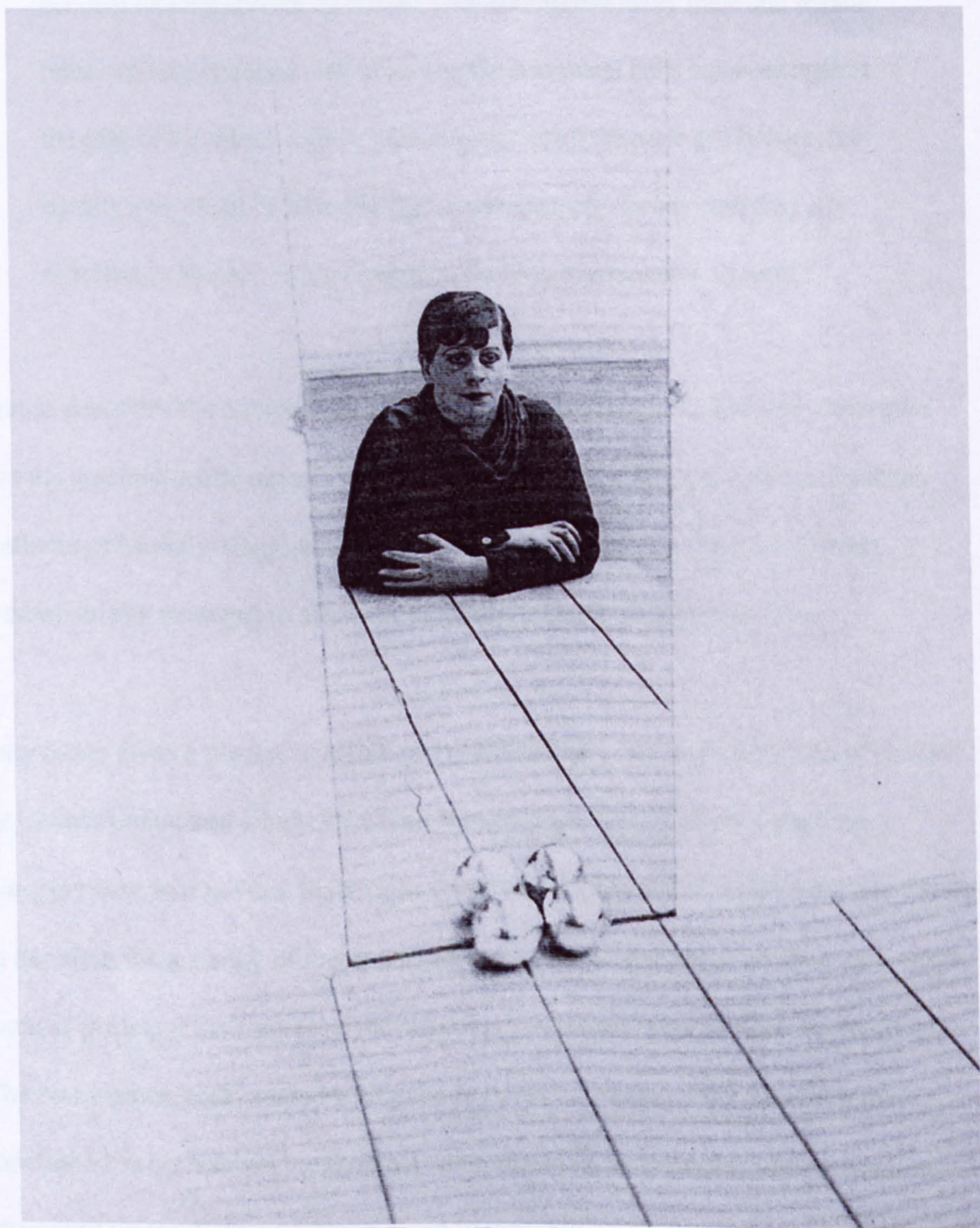


figure 15. Florence Henry, *Self portrait* 1928

Florence Henry's self-portraits (*Self portrait 1928* in fig. 15) 'fully embrace and assert the conscious role of looking'. Rosalind Krauss has recently suggested the phallic symbolism of her use of the narrow, upright mirror in her self-portrait of 1928:

Gazing at herself in the mirror she fills this 'male' space of looking with both her own looking and her reflection, with both traditionally male and female roles, with observing as well as posing the two metal balls balanced against the edge of the mirror may be seen as completing the male symbolism, but equally they might be a female sign counterpoised – in any case they are reflected, redoubled in appearance and perhaps in meaning as well.¹⁰¹

Krauss describes the composition as pristine and highly geometric and she argues that the machine-made objects reflect Florence Henri's affinity with the Bauhaus aesthetic of Moholy-Nagy, with whom she had studied. 'Through an abstract symbolism she manages to allude to the body without picturing it.'¹⁰²

Katy Kline gives a precise account of the difference in the representation of the self by Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman, particularly due to Cahun's startling *Autoportraits*, lost to view for several decades, which came to light in the late 1980s. In her view the audacity of these unusual personae led a number of critics to classify them as prescient harbingers of the staged self-representations of Cindy Sherman. The two women both created a large body of photographic work in which they functioned as both subject and object, staging affective scenarios with scrupulous attention to pose, lighting, costume and backdrop.

Although Kline notices that the scale used by the artists is just one difference amongst others between their works: 'After all, Cahun's spare and concentrated black-and-white statements are surprisingly intimate, often the size of a page from a personal diary. Sherman's exaggerated size, colour, and theatricality, on the other hand, align themselves with the ambitious reach of painting.'¹⁰³

Her essay looks closely at Cahun's work, selecting singular and representative images to evaluate both in the context of their historic moment and in relation to some of Sherman's later images. I here refer particularly to the 1928 *Self-portrait by Cahun and Untitled Film Still, #2* by Sherman, where the theme of the mirror is more explicitly engaged.

As Kline discusses, in the essay *In or out of the picture Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman*, 1920s Cahun produced an astonishing number of self-portraits in various guises. She describes that the figure generally occupies a good deal of the frame, with background details and stage props kept to a minimum, compressing an enormous psychological weight and affect into the figure. In these photographs she presents herself as coquette, body builder, skinhead, vamp and vampire, angel, and Japanese puppet. She reworked most of these images several times, playing with slight variations in size, focus and point of view. 'Her many female variations make no attempt to seduce. She both parodies flirtatiousness and ridiculously exaggerates the facial makeup of a vamp (emblazoning "Do Not Kiss Me: I Am in Training" on her chest).

¹⁰¹ Butler, S., op. cit., p.54, the reference included by the author is to Krauss, R., 'The photographic conditions of Surrealism', *October 19*, Winter 1981, pp 3-6.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Kline, K., 'In or out of the picture Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman' in Chadwick, W., *Mirror Images, Women, Surrealism, and Self-representation*, MIT Press 1998, p.67.

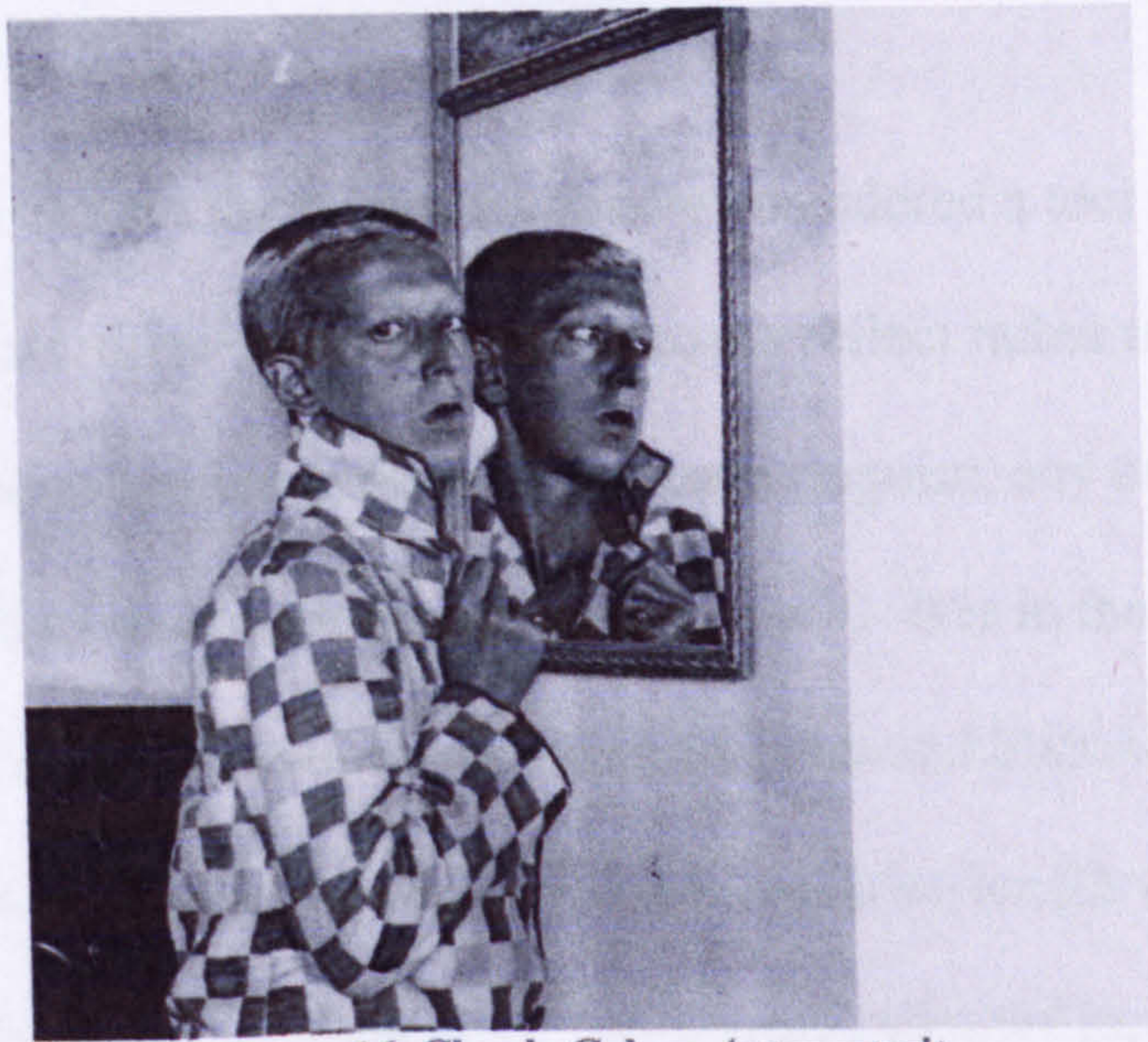


figure 16. Claude Cahun *Autoportrait*
(Self-Portrait), 1928



figure 17. Cindy Sherman,
Untitled Film still # 2, 1977

She also puts herself forward as a variety of male types.' In Kline's view, these early figures refuse to play to any preconceived relation of subject to viewer and return the viewer's inspection with an uncompromising, even confrontational, gaze.

She also states that, though the mask is generally considered a tool of evasion or concealment, Cahun's many masks and manoeuvres reflect rather than deflect, here the artist and the individual are present within each disguise, any one of which represents an aspect of an extraordinarily complex self. 'It is in their degree of participation in, or removal from, the world that Cahun and Sherman will be seen to diverge.'¹⁰⁴ 'Cahun's *Autoportrait* of 1928, a three-quarter-length view of the artist in a masculine tailored jacket standing close before, and reflected in, a mirror. The artist depicts herself as startled and slightly uneasy; she clutches the geometrically patterned, costume close around her neck as if in response to a sudden draft.'¹⁰⁵ In Kline's view, the mirror almost reads as a window onto some external plane. 'The "real" figure registers the presence of the viewer and does not flinch from eye contact. Her other half, the mirror image, however, averts her eyes gazing glassily into the unknown. The brittle gleam of the glass refracted onto the faces cranks up the emotional pitch.' Kline describes the presence of the viewer in the piece: 'The two [mirrored] faces register a shock; they have been interrupted by some intrusion from the outside world in the midst of a private exchange'.¹⁰⁶

Kline then compares the Cahun portrait with Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #2* in which the artist is seen in a narrow three-quarter view reflected in a steamy bathroom mirror. She notices that her nubile body occupies the prominent foreground of the picture plane, but all attention, is riveted upon the closed circle of

¹⁰⁴ Kline, op cit., p.68.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

eyes engaged in the mirror. Although also apparently surprised in the act, this water nymph has eyes only for herself. In her view, the viewer/voyeur representing the outside world is effectively closed out of the self-absorbed conversation.

Rosalind Krauss focuses her observation on the relationship with the viewer and she writes about it in *Untitled Film Still, #2* of 1977:

[...] Sherman sets up the sign of the unseen intruder. A young woman draped in a towel stands before her bathroom mirror, touching her shoulder and following her own gesture in its reflected image. A door jam to the left of the frame places the viewer outside this room. But what if the viewer is constructed as a hidden watcher by means of the signifier that reads as graininess, a diffusion of the image that constructs the signified – the concept of distance – a severing of the psychic space of the watcher from that of the watched and of the camera's concomitant construction of the watcher for whom it is proxy.¹⁰⁷

Krauss discusses the same issue in *Untitled Film Still #81* of 1978 (fig. 18). She finds a remarkably sharp depth of field, which causes a sensation that she expresses by 'such/distance/is gone', despite the fact that doorways are once again an obtrusive part of the image. This would imply that the viewer would *Gaze* at the woman from outside the space she occupies. Krauss writes that also here the woman appears to be in a bathroom and once again she is scantily dressed, wearing only a thin night gown. Yet, in her view, the continuity established by the focal length of the lens creates an unimpeachable sense that her look at herself in the mirror reaches past her reflection to include the viewer as well.

¹⁰⁶ Op cit., p.68.



figure 18. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #81*, 1978

¹⁰⁷ Krauss, R., *Cindy Sherman 1975 – 1993*, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., New York 1993, p. 55.

She suggests that, as opposed to the idea of distance, there is here 'the signified/connection, and what is further cut out as the signified at the level of narrative is a woman chatting to someone [...] in the room outside her bathroom as she is preparing for bed'.¹⁰⁸ Kline points out that both Cahun and Sherman predicate their elaborate *mise-en-scenes* on the notion of unstable subject, but whereas Sherman posits multiple roles, Cahun posits multiple selves, and that Cahun's surrealism was defined by the unknowable at the bottom of her own reality.¹⁰⁹

Another series of work by Cahun is the photomontage as in *Avenux non avenues* (1930) (f. 19). 'Cahun photomontages are frequently elaborations on her own photographic self-portraits. In one photomontage from *Avenux non avenues*, Cahun includes among the self-portraits a column of overlapping heads showing only eyes or mouths, with the inscription: Under this mask, another mask. I shall never finish stripping away all these faces.'¹¹⁰

The multiple self discussed above is just one of the issues arising from embracing concepts of reflection and mirroring. My own concern with the discussion of enactment of the self through self-portraiture and the use of mirrors is here discussed through a revision of various artists's strategies. My understanding is that the mirror idea was used in conceptual art and performance art ontologically and concerned the ideology of representation. This use shifted the attention from the object to the condition of artistic production, to its presentation and perception and also in this has contributed to the erosion of the ocularcentrism.

¹⁰⁸ Krauss, R., op. cit., p.55.

¹⁰⁹ Kline, op. cit., p. 79.

¹¹⁰ Ades, D., 'Surrealism, male-female', in *Surrealism, Desire Unbound*, edited Mundy, J., catalogue of exhibition at Tate Modern, London 20 Sept-1 Jan, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 6 Feb-12 May 2002, Tate Publishing 2001, p.194.



figure 19. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore illustration in *Avex non avenues* 1929-30 (detail)

Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, Vito Acconci, are some of the artists who directly inspired my own artistic production in terms of strategies, content or composition. Their work is investigated, among that of others, by Jaroslav Andel in the catalogue *À travers le miroir de Bonnard à Buren* for the exhibition at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen (October 2000-January 2001). In his view self-reference, symbolising the theme of an image within an image, is expressed by artists also through the concept of reflection and the juxtaposition of mirrors and windows.¹¹¹

Bruce Nauman, worked in San Francisco between 1965-1966, at the time he stated that anything done in the studio is art. The simple quotidian gestures were recorded in the form of video, photography, holograms. More than an object he produced an activity. The portfolio *Eleven colour Photographs* (1966-1967) was realised after the retrospective of Man Ray in Los Angeles in 1966. He produced a number of self-portraits documenting a plurality of forms including performance, writings amongst them *Self-portrait as a Fountain*, *Finger Touch n° 1* and *Finger touch with mirrors* (f. 20). These last two pieces provoke a spatial ambiguity by using the mirror and photographic space.

In the sequences of *Art Make-up nos 1, 2, 3 and 4* (1967-1968) (f. 21), a form of self-portrait, where he was facing the camera-mirror, Nauman covered his face and body with colour – white, pink, green.¹¹² I relate my activity of applying make up in my own piece *Morning Toilette*, later discussed, to Nauman's and understood how different his approach was towards the same activity. In his piece the make up does not constitute the mask, instead the flat screen constitutes the mask. In this piece thus, the screen's flatness has cancelled subjectivity.

¹¹¹ Andel, J., 'Miroir et autoréflexion' in *À travers le miroir de Bonnard à Buren*, Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 2000, p. 85-86 (my translation from French).

¹¹² As discussed by 'Miroir et autoréflexion' in *À travers le miroir de Bonnard à Buren*, Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 2000, p.226.



figure 20. Bruce Nauman, *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* and *Finger touch with mirrors*, 1967

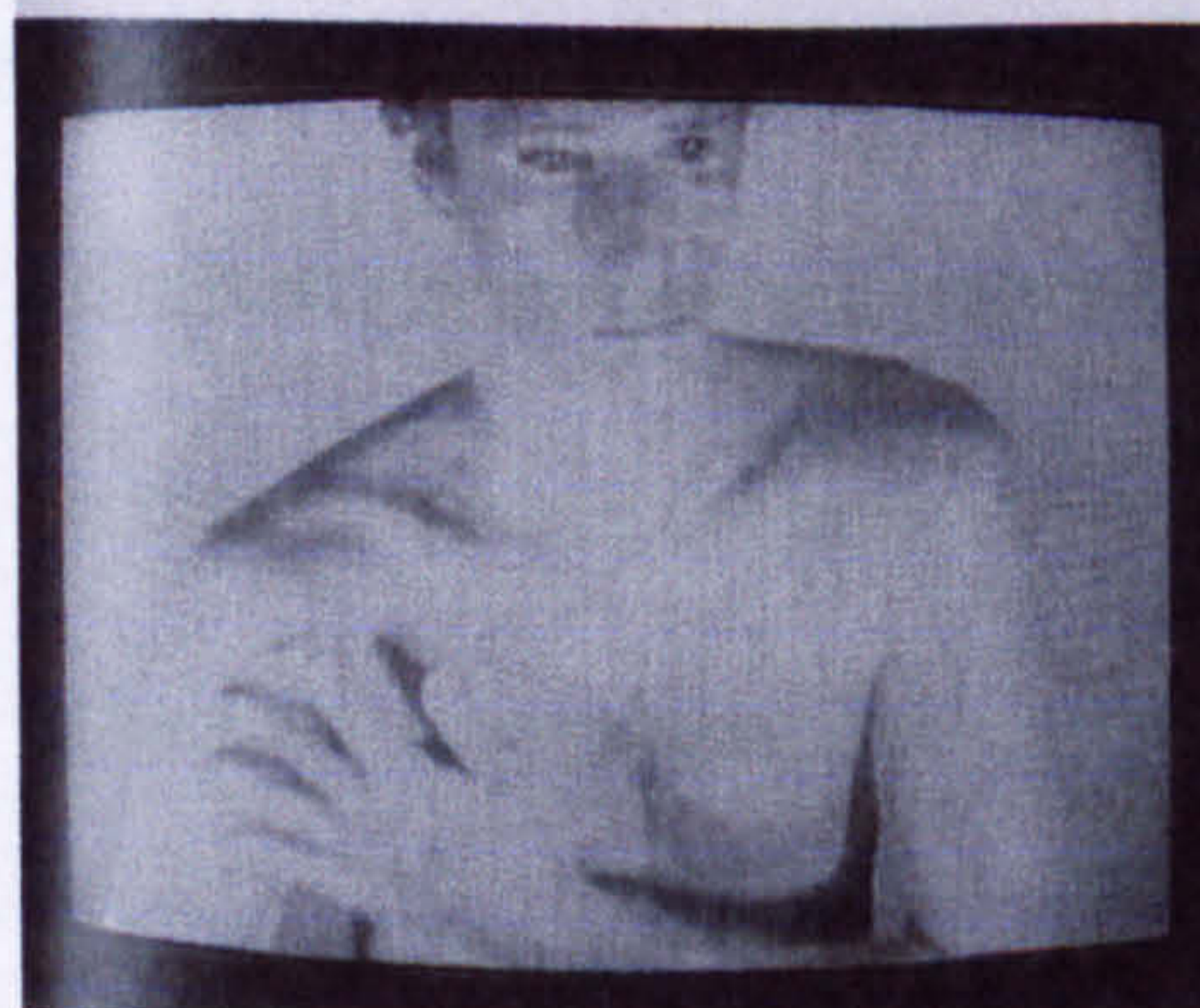
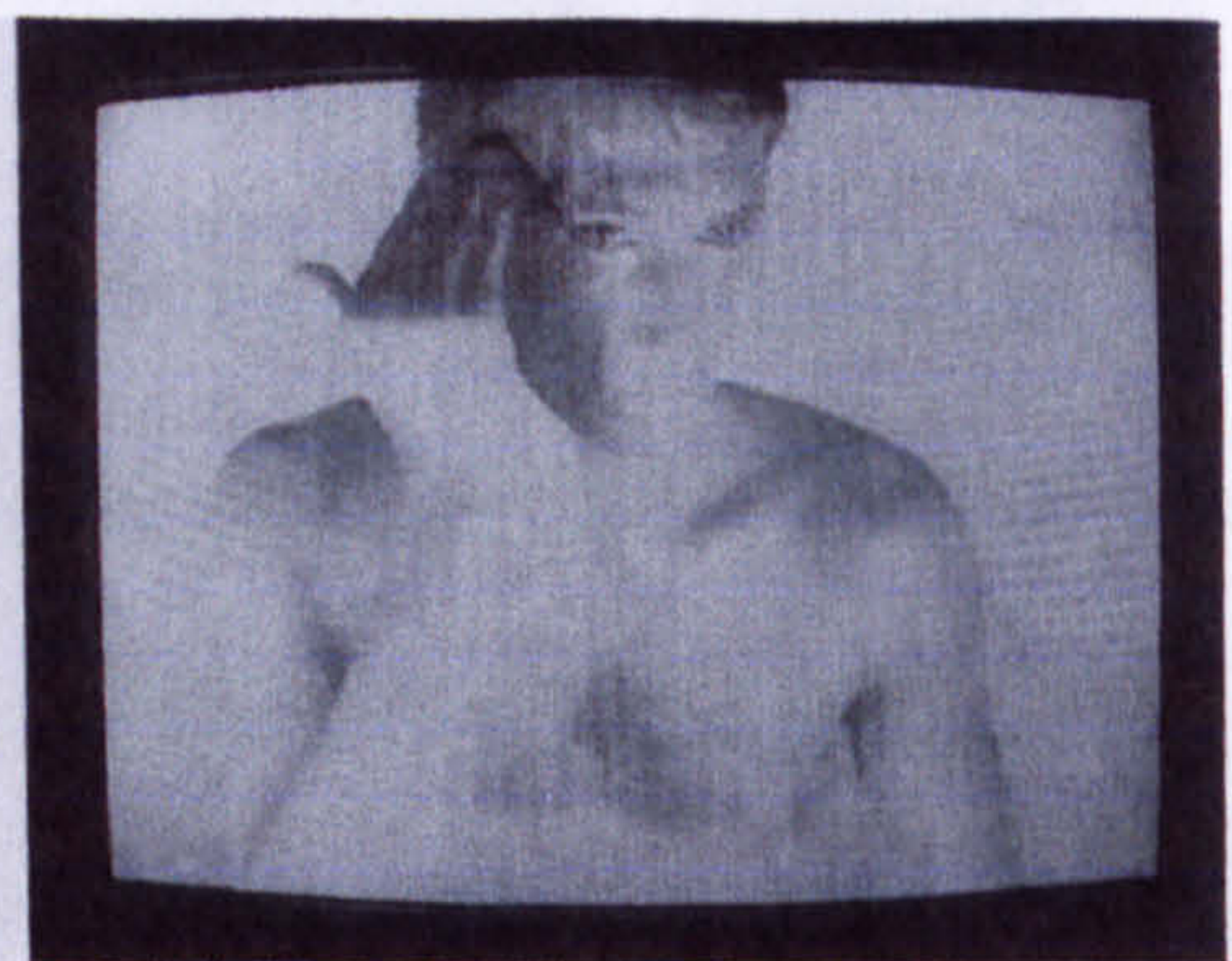
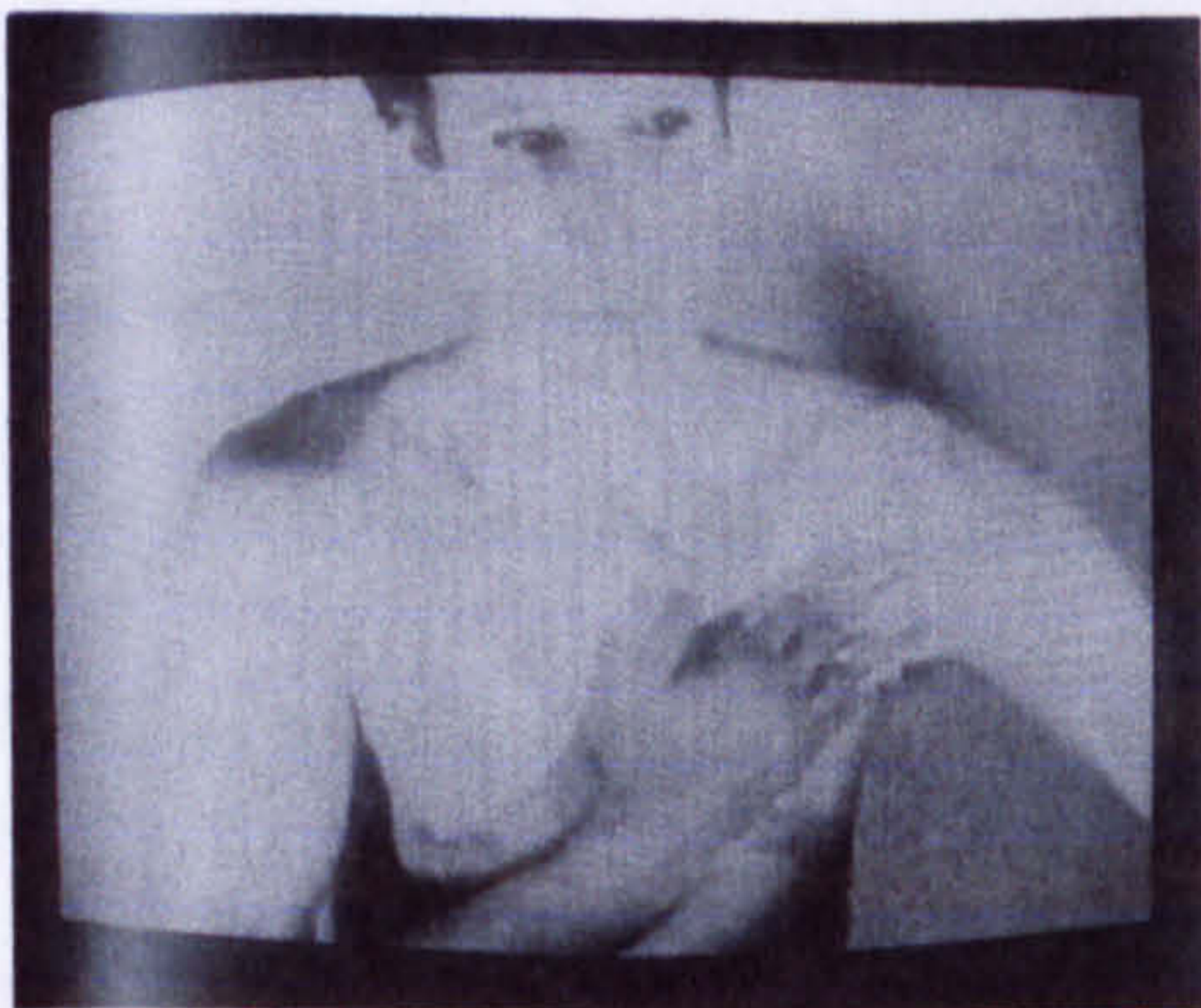


figure 21. Bruce Nauman, *Art Make-up n° 1, 2, 3, 4* (1967-68)

Bruce Nauman says that the film '[...]' which was also later a videotape - has a rather simple story behind it. About 20 years ago - this was in '66 and '67 - I was living in San Francisco [...]' . Nauman describes the process of production of the piece: 'Of course, you put on makeup before you film in the movies. In my case, putting on the makeup became the activity. I started with four colours. I just put one on over the other, so that by the time the last one went on it was almost black. I started with white. Then red on the white, which came out pink; then green on top of that, which came out grey; then something very black on top of that'. He states that while making the film, he noticed that when one takes a solid colour of makeup it flattens the image of the face on film. In his view 'The flatness itself was another kind of mask'.¹¹³

II. 4. The mirror experience through the observation of the shifting position of the artist as viewer in the creative process

This section traces the process of my practical experiments and presentations . It includes a number of diary descriptions and diagrams, some of which were done at the time of production and some subsequently as analytical tools.

On the relationship between artist and camera in self-portraiture, Chadwick states:

The self-portrait turns on the staging of the self (the model) for the self (the artist) [...] while the image itself remains fixed, a complex of looks – those of the artist, the camera. The image the spectator – produces multiple subject positions, and distinction between the seer and the seen, subject of the gaze and object of it, artist and model, begin to break down [...]. Photographic *mise en*

¹¹³ Bruce Nauman, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London, 16 July- 6 September 1998, the South Bank Centre, 1998, p. 111.

scène, the staging of a scene for the camera, encourages the production of intricate fictions, diverse selves, dramas of fantasy and desire [...].¹¹⁴

In my practical understanding of self-portraiture, the position of the artist in relationship to the represented image, functions like a mirror surface. The following account is an attempt to analyse the process involved in the shift of the position of the artist in relation to the viewer, in both the moments of making and perceiving the work, and in the light of the above discussion concerning the perceptual and psychological implications of the concept of the mirror. This is to be linked to the idea of mirrored space of representation in the tradition of perspective in painting, particularly to the concepts often implied of the spectators' perceptual involvement.

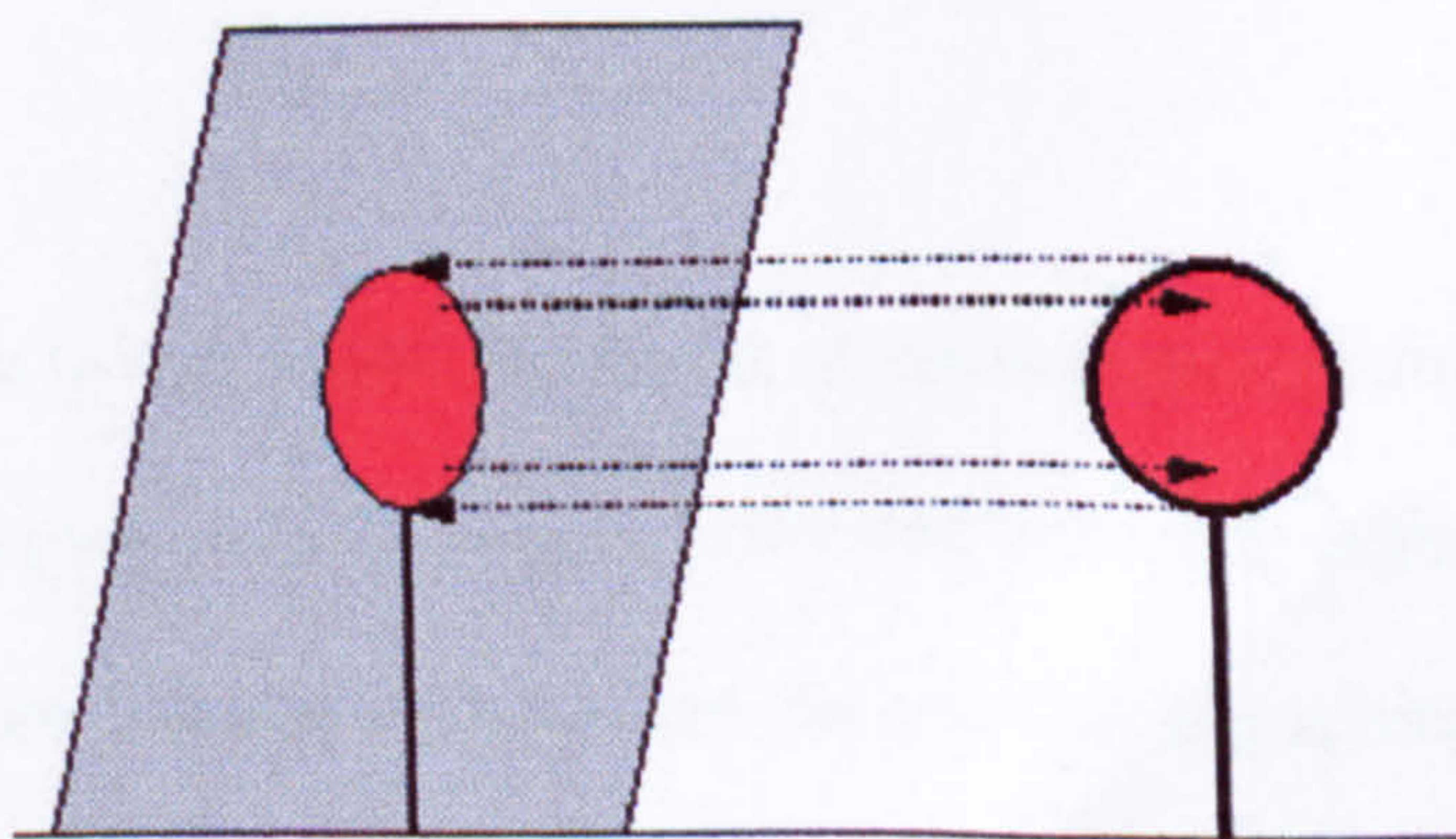
One common element in self-portraiture in works of different media whether painting, photography, video or performance, is the artists' desire to explore their own perception of themselves by portraying their own image. All self-portraits have psychological implications brought about by the coinciding roles of artist, viewer and model. In my work, this relationship is transitional: the audience represents an 'open end' in the work, to which their presence is complementary. This relationship will be described and referred to as a spatial one. Here the physical space is the arena where the relationship takes place in the creative process, and also the symbolic space where the psychological roles are played .

At the start of the research I assumed that a portrait made through photographic media would achieve the mirror-like result and, in a way, would leave less space for the subjective element. In fact, when engaged with taking photographs of myself, I experienced how I could shape the result through the medium.

¹¹⁴ Chadwick, W., 'How do I look?', in Ridel, L., *Mirror Mirror, Self-portraits by Women Artists*, catalogue for



figure 22. *Myme* series, detail 1999



1. My image is reflected
2. I recognize it, I see it reflected

figure 23. 2001

the exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery from 24 October 2001 to 24 February 2002, National Portrait Gallery Publications 2001, p.14.

Through various experiments, I realised that factors such as use a timer or not, the type of camera, the arrangement of lighting, the spatial context, my own mood and thoughts, all affected the outcome and meaning of the work. From these experiments I finally selected a small number of photographs, five of which constitute the *Myme* (fig. 22) series (January 1999).

In *Myme* the intention behind the action of taking a photograph of my body was to gain control over its representation and re-establish freedom from the other's *Gaze*. I found that when another person took the photos, as subject of the photographs, I would respond to the person taking the picture and become the 'object' of that person's *Gaze*. That person automatically took a position of power over me. On the contrary, when I used the timer, no-one else's *Gaze* was involved in the process, and so the photographs show the result of the relation between myself and the camera. There was no 'power game' involved and I felt I had re-gained control over my own image.

Of course, in the practice I was aware that the spectator's *Gaze* was already, in a sense implicit in the act of photography. But in my view, by not sharing the same space and time with the spectator, I keep a distance. They remain outside what I consider my private and creative space.

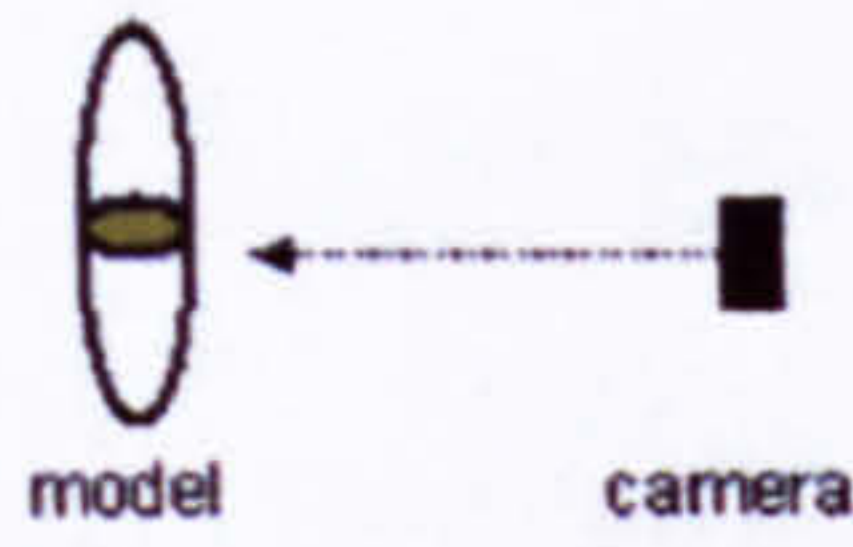
Susan Sontag discusses the 'power to kill' that the act of making a picture involves. She says that is like taking life away from the subject, to become something different as subject in the photographic medium. She also discusses how the act of photographing someone establishes a viewpoint that that person is otherwise not able to adopt. This implies a kind of possession of the subject transforming her/him into an object.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Sontag, S., '*Sulla fotografia, Realtà e immagine nella nostra società*', Einaudi Torino, 1978 and 1992.

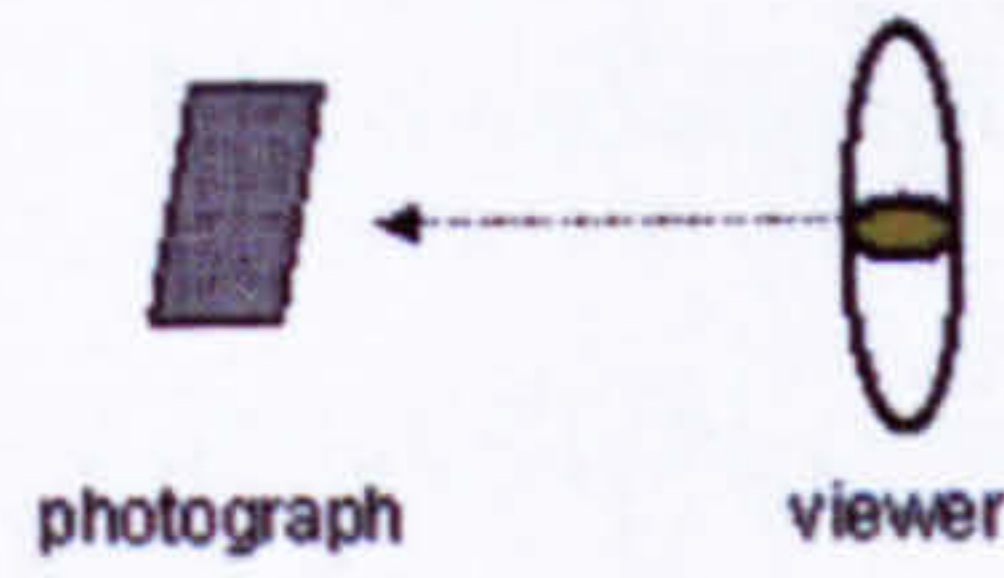
In my research I found the diagrams in figures 24 and 25 very useful to clarify the concept of the two different creative and perceptual moments, to stimulate a reflection on the shift in the position of artist and viewer in spatial terms. This allowed me to define a 'performative space' as the space occupied by the artist in the process of making the work and a 'perceptual space' as the space occupied by the audience's fruition of the work.

A distinction between the two above defined spaces does not necessary imply that they are exclusive to the artist or the audience. But it is by questioning this exclusivity or inclusivity that I was able to relate my work to the two-way direction of a mirror reflected image (fig. 23).

Diagrams of the space of action



Stage 1: the camera take a shot of myself



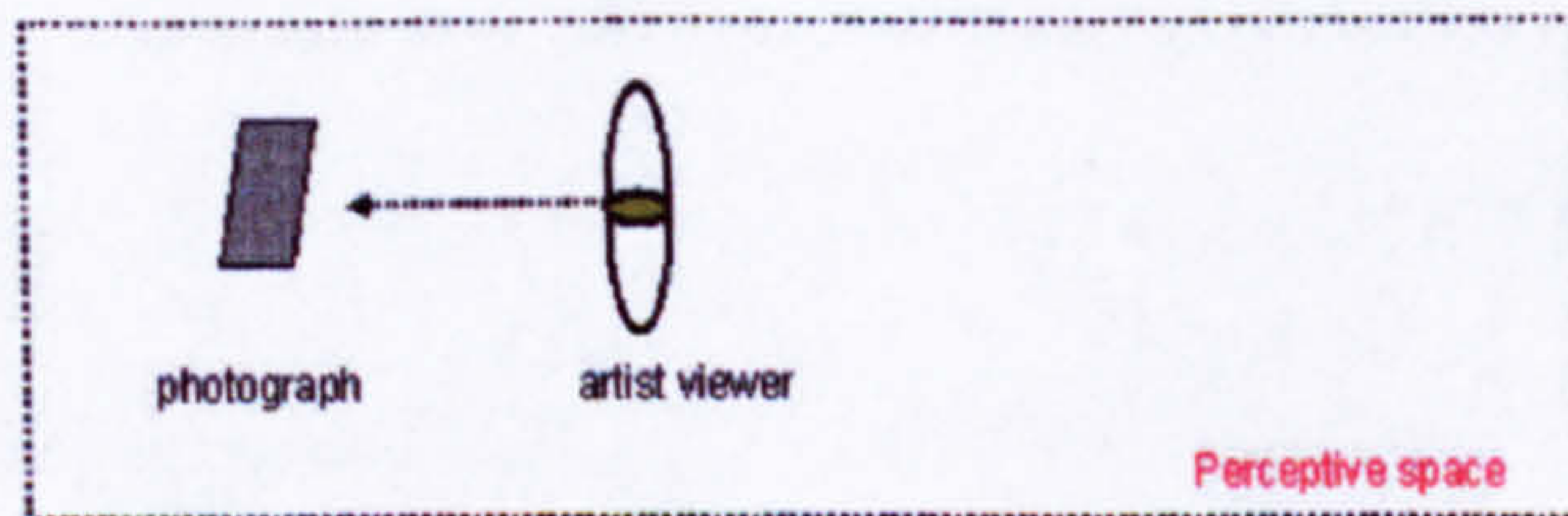
Stage 2: I look at the image of myself in the position of the camera

I step out of the position of model for the camera to become viewer of the image of myself

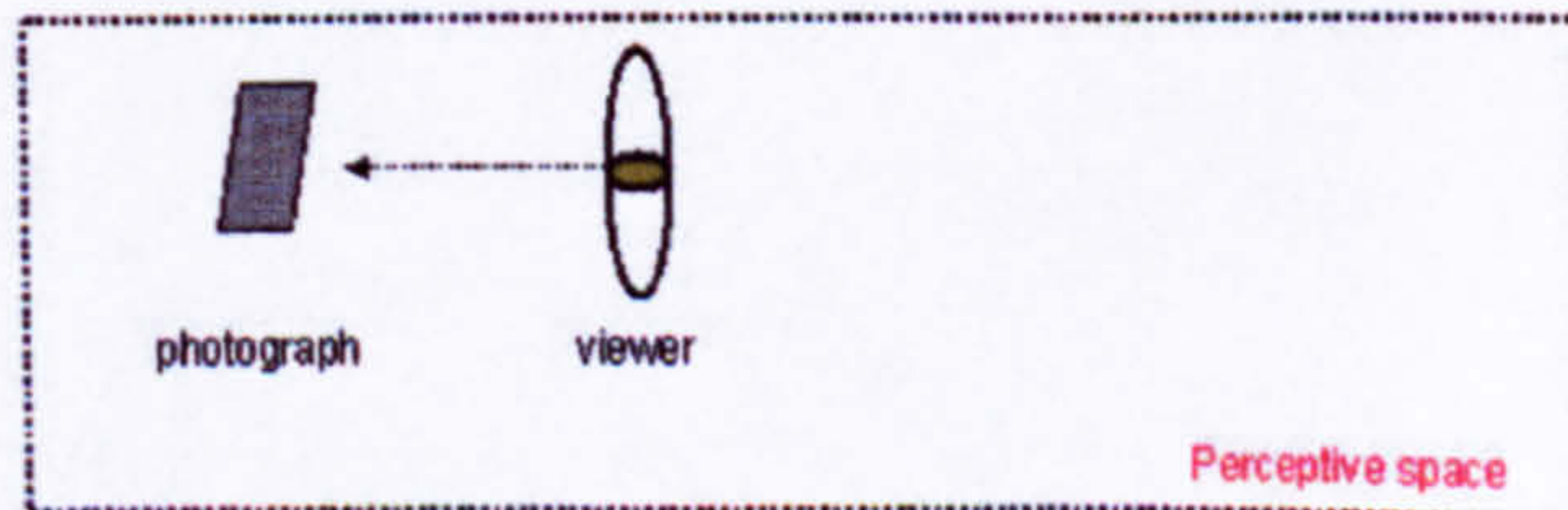
figure 24. Diagrams for analyses of the space of action in my own creative process. a. 2001



Stage 1: the camera take a shot of myself



Stage 2: I look at the image of myself in the position of the camera



Stage 3: the viewer is in the position of myself in the perceptive space

figure 25. Diagrams for analyses of the space of action in my own creative process, b, 2001

I believe my work at this stage included the complexity of shifting roles of artists and viewer, as a 'problematic issue' rather than as a resolution to it.

As it appears in the diagram in figure 25, in the work *Myme* the artist also becomes the viewer of the produced work. To step into the position of the viewer is the condition that enables the artist to see the work (and his/her image) critically from the outside. In my own production process a continuous shift between the two positions takes place. Within it, I have identified two functions: the first, of a conceptual nature, enables me to create compositional constructs where the viewer will participate at a perceptual and fruition (and later at a more active) level; the second function, of a methodological nature, provides me with a position for an analytic investigation.

Madrid (2000) (fig. 26) is a digital video which was taken by another person I asked to operate the camera videoing my own reflected image in the shop windows around the city. The piece represent an attempt to picture myself in the social environment.

The piece *Morning Toilette* directly addresses the concept of the mirror. It raises the question of recognition of the self and its identification with the constructed image.

The DVD installation (June 2000-January 2001) is the result of the development of the basic idea of making use of the video camera to document aspects of my everyday life.



figure 26. *Madrid*, digital video 1'30", still, 2000

'020600
To do a video with my camera as a mirror while I get ready to go out. To wash my face, brush my teeth, put make up on. I will look at myself mirrored in the video-camera screen...'

116

The first of recordings were done on 7 July 2000 and the last on 30 August 2000. When I started this piece I expected a shift in the role of artist and audience. By turning the camcorder's screen around I was able to see what was being recorded: I could see myself. This screen functioned like a mirror surface reversing my gestures. My understanding of the shifting process is traced by adding the character of the space to my diagram convention in the represented way. In relation to the content of the piece in some of my notes I wrote:

'240600. Thinking about myself washing the face. The habit (habit is not repetition) of getting ready every morning. To wash the face and than put make up thinking about the other's gaze. I want to be beautiful and feel attractive to him. When we are upset about something we feel relieved in taking care of ourselves in order to then feel loved. It is a need of love.

The intention is to repeat the action few times, depending on the mood which will make me use different kinds of make up. I will have a number of similar videos. I would like to project all of them while performing the same action in public. (though of the song "I love you babe...") In the composition of the installation the modularity suggests the thought of a mirrored image which repeats itself to the infinite.

060700 dopo la spagna e dopo tutto: ohhhhhhhh!

170700 video # 4: I have a new toothbrush!

300800 video # 5: nice tan

140900 I have being thinking about the composition for the installation of the 5 videos.

091000

to start to work on composition of installation based on the concept of repetition.

117

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.

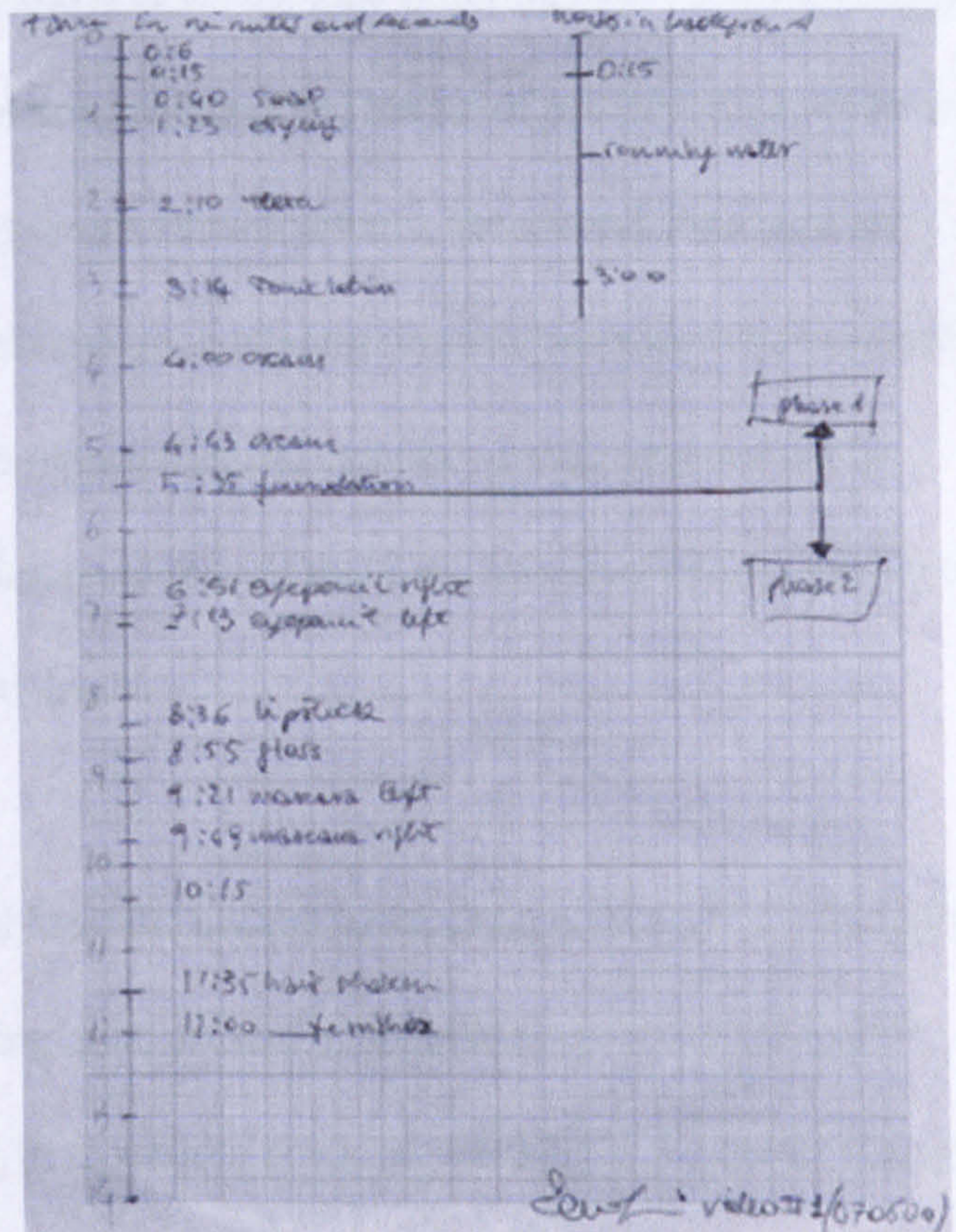
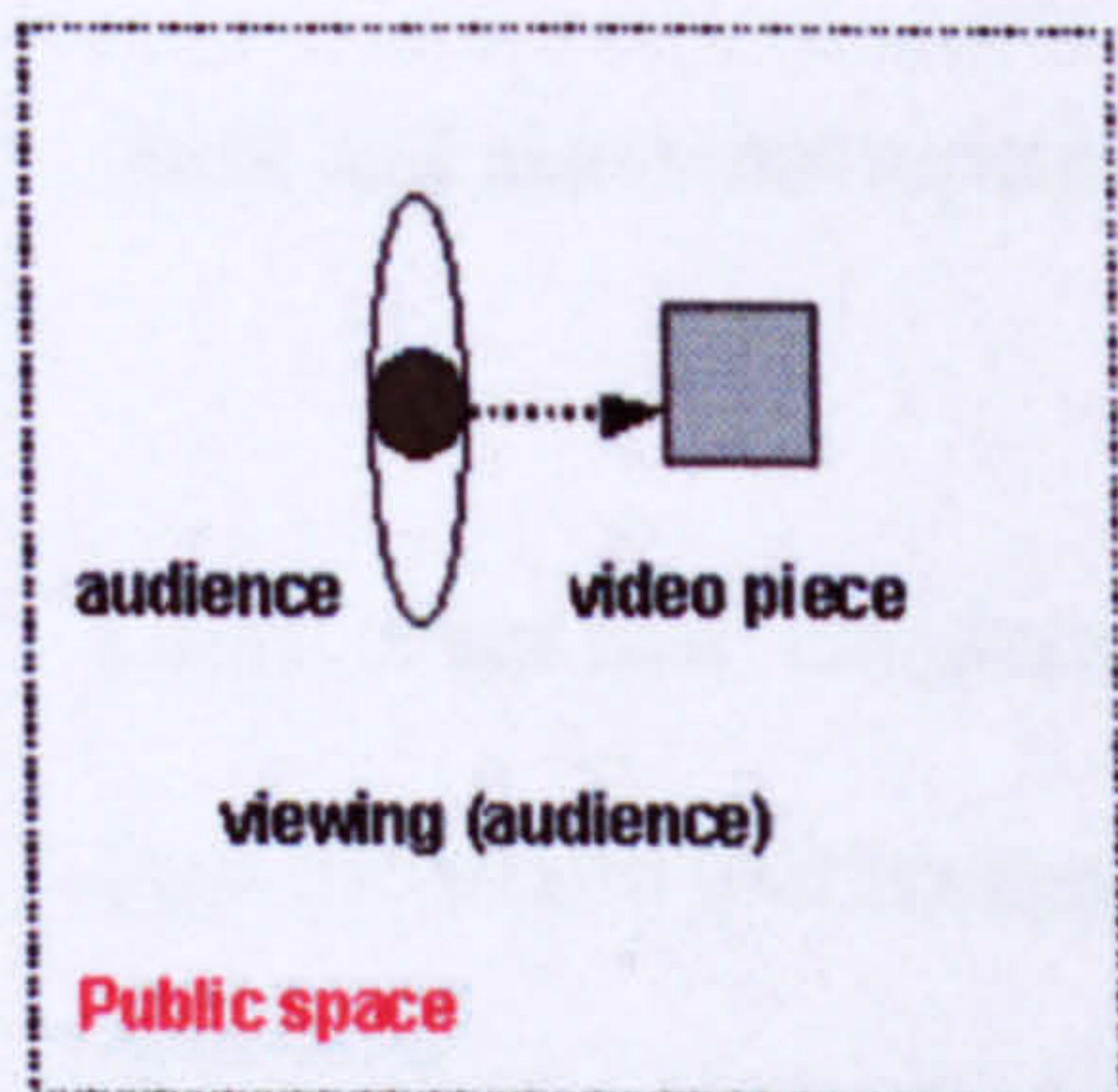
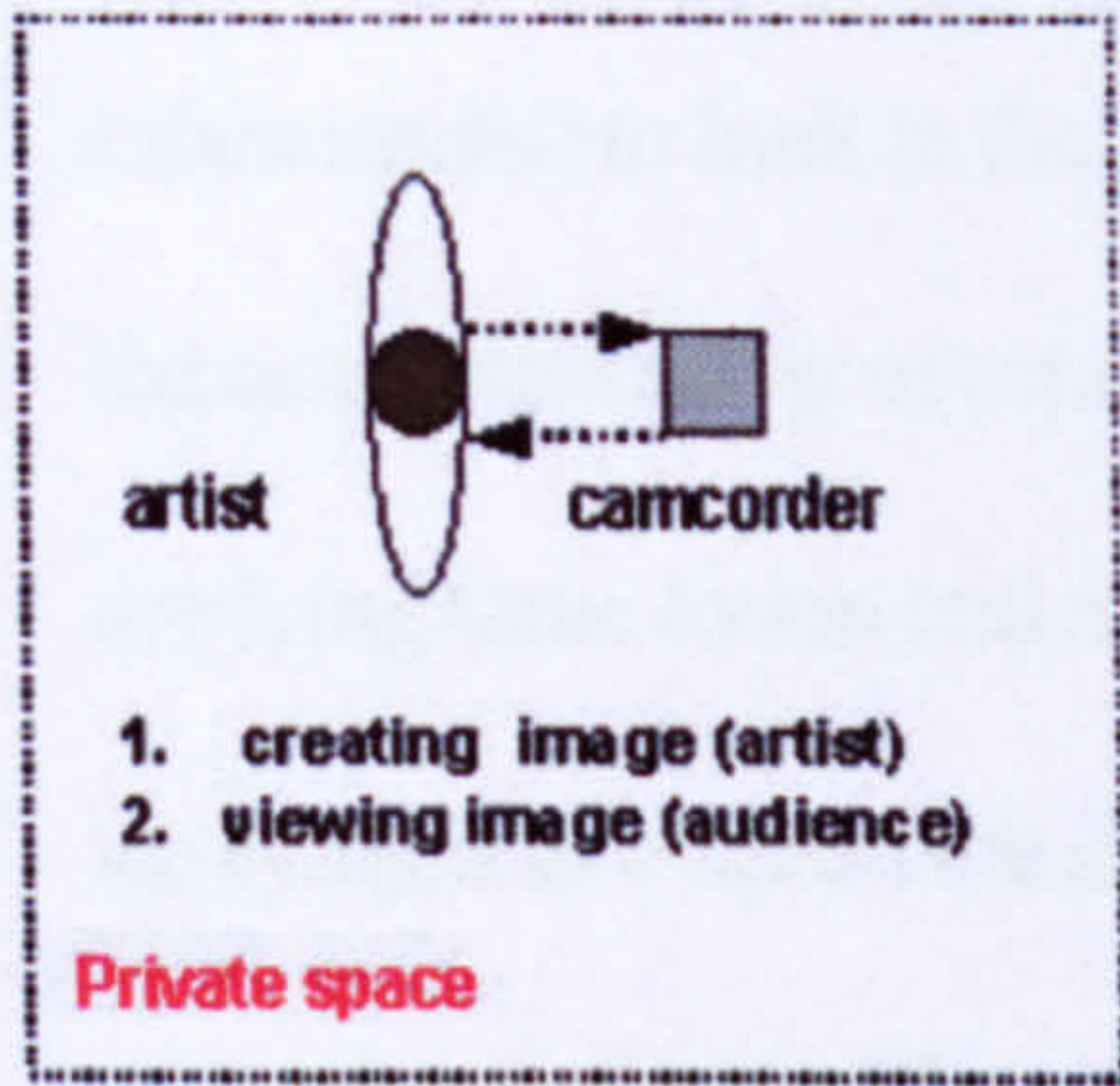


figure 27, Diagram for analyses of *Morning Toilette*, 2002

figure 28, One of the charts of analyses for *Morning Toilette* video clips, November 2000, #1 recorded on 7 June 2000

¹¹⁷ Notes from my diary.

In this work, the action of washing the face and applying make-up is seen as a ritual in a woman's daily routine. I documented the action on five mornings and, although I have not timed myself, the shots are similar in length, between 12 and 14 minutes.

I then started to look at the recordings and noticed the little differences in the same pattern of the acts constituting my quotidian morning toilette. The first set of acts are washing the face, applying tonic lotion and moisturising cream, brushing teeth; the second set of acts are applying make-up on the skin, eyes and mouth. Focusing on such ordinary actions repeated every day in front of the mirror – here replaced by the camera – made me consider the relationship between myself and the image of myself that I see mirrored while applying the mask and also what repeating an action means.

Lacan states that 'the place of the real from the trauma to the fantasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primarily, something determinant in the function of repetition [...] Whatever, in repetition is varied, modulated, is merely alienation of its meaning'.¹¹⁸ In the art making process and in my conceptual compositions repetition is a device that disrupts the very idea of the self contained work. Henry M. Sayre states that 'there is always, in the repeated occurrence of a thing, a *reference* to some former occurrence, and in the *sustained* repetition of a thing, a growing awareness that *duration* alters it.'¹¹⁹

Differences occur when an action is repeated (for example: the tone of voice in repeating a word, the different expression on our face when we wash in the morning due to our different mood). *Morning Toilette* focuses and highlights these differences. Through the act of mirroring, I see differences in the other's image of myself that changes day after day. A difference that depends on the context I am preparing myself for. I became aware that difference is also what saves me from being trapped by repetition. This is maybe a kind of

¹¹⁸ Lacan, J., *Ecrits, A selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Norton & Company, New York-London, 1977, p 60.

différance in Derridas terms, neither a difference nor a deferral. ‘*Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other.’¹²⁰

From observing the material recorded, I defined two stages in the action: the action of cleaning the face and that of applying make-up. This can be seen as a staging of two different relationships. In the first stage, I look at myself on the camera screen and relate to the image of myself in relation to society, heritage and conventions. In the second stage I choose which mask I will wear. Here I meet the other image of myself. The image that would soon come to coincide with the other’s *Gaze*.

The videos that make up the installation *Morning Toilette* are entitled: *to get over it, I love you babe...*, *dopo la spagna e dopo tutto: ohhhhhhhh!*, *I have a new toothbrush!*, *nice tan*.

...Meaning that my life experience becomes inevitably incorporated in between one repetition of the ritual and the next. These have become part of me and added new layers to my experience, and when I look at myself in the mirror I see them in me, or behind me, or parallel to me. It is as if, even though I appear to be mechanically repeating the ritual documented in the videos, in fact the changes occurred make each repetition different from the previous ones. The morning thoughts may be characterised by intentions for the day or thoughts on facts that happened or again people I met. This will be reflected in the composition of the installation, on which I am working at present, that will focus on a modular rhythm in which little differences will appear.’

121

It was my initial idea that the composition of the installation in space would have had a central position for its fruition, as visually explained in the diagram in figure 29-b. But, in fact, it was presented as part of the exhibition *In Between* at the Lethaby

¹¹⁹ Sayre, M.H., *The Object of Performance*, The University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 116.

¹²⁰ Derrida, J., *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, The University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 27.

¹²¹ Dated November 2000, from my personal artistic diary.

Gallery in May-June 2002 (f. 30), and the arrangement in the space was different from how I had previously thought.



figure 29 a. DVD installation, cover, 2001

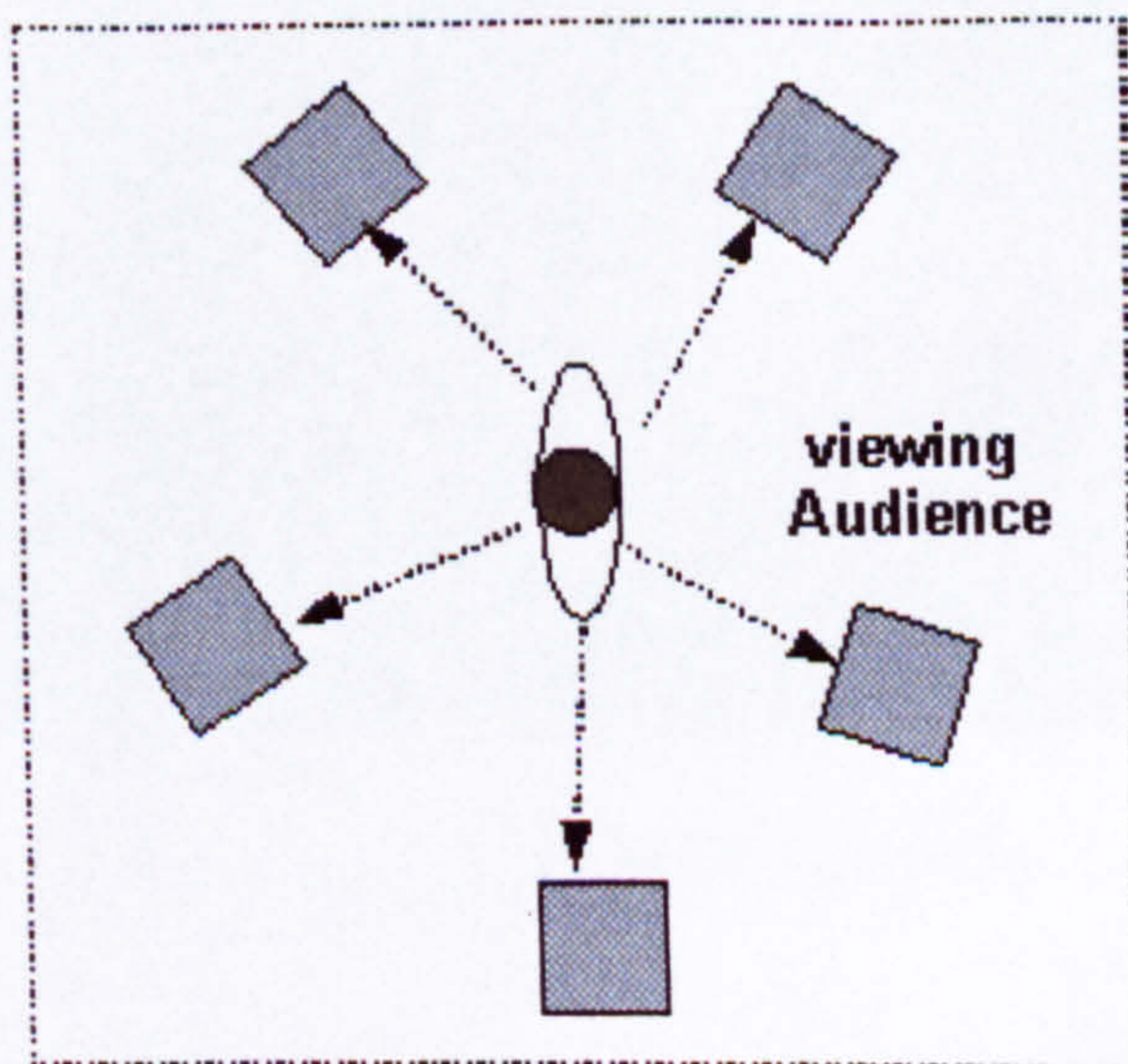


figure 29 b. Installation in space, viewing audience, 2001

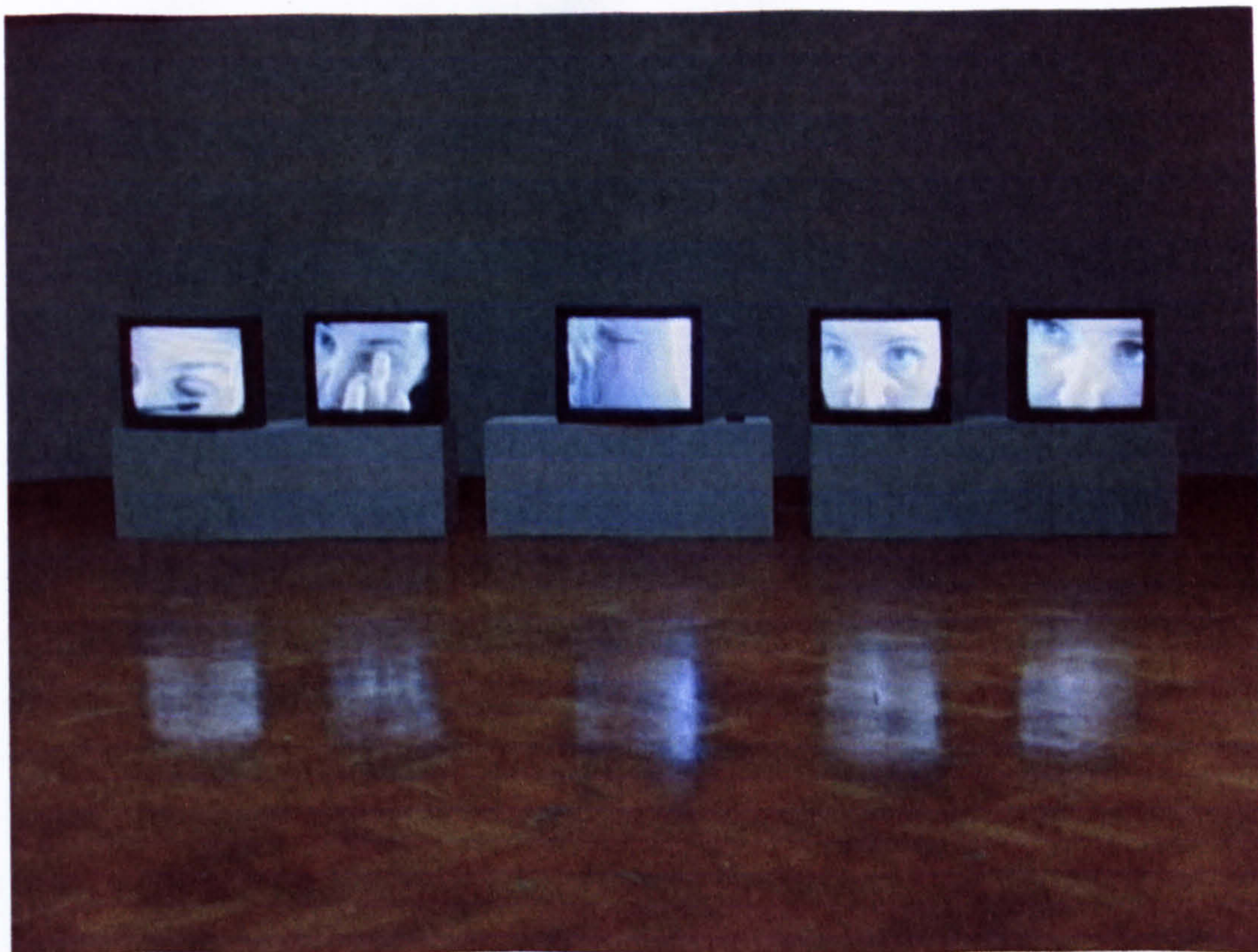


figure 30. *Morning Toilette* DVD installation, Lethaby Gallery, London, 2002



figure 31. *Morning Toilette* video live installation, Tate Modern, 2001

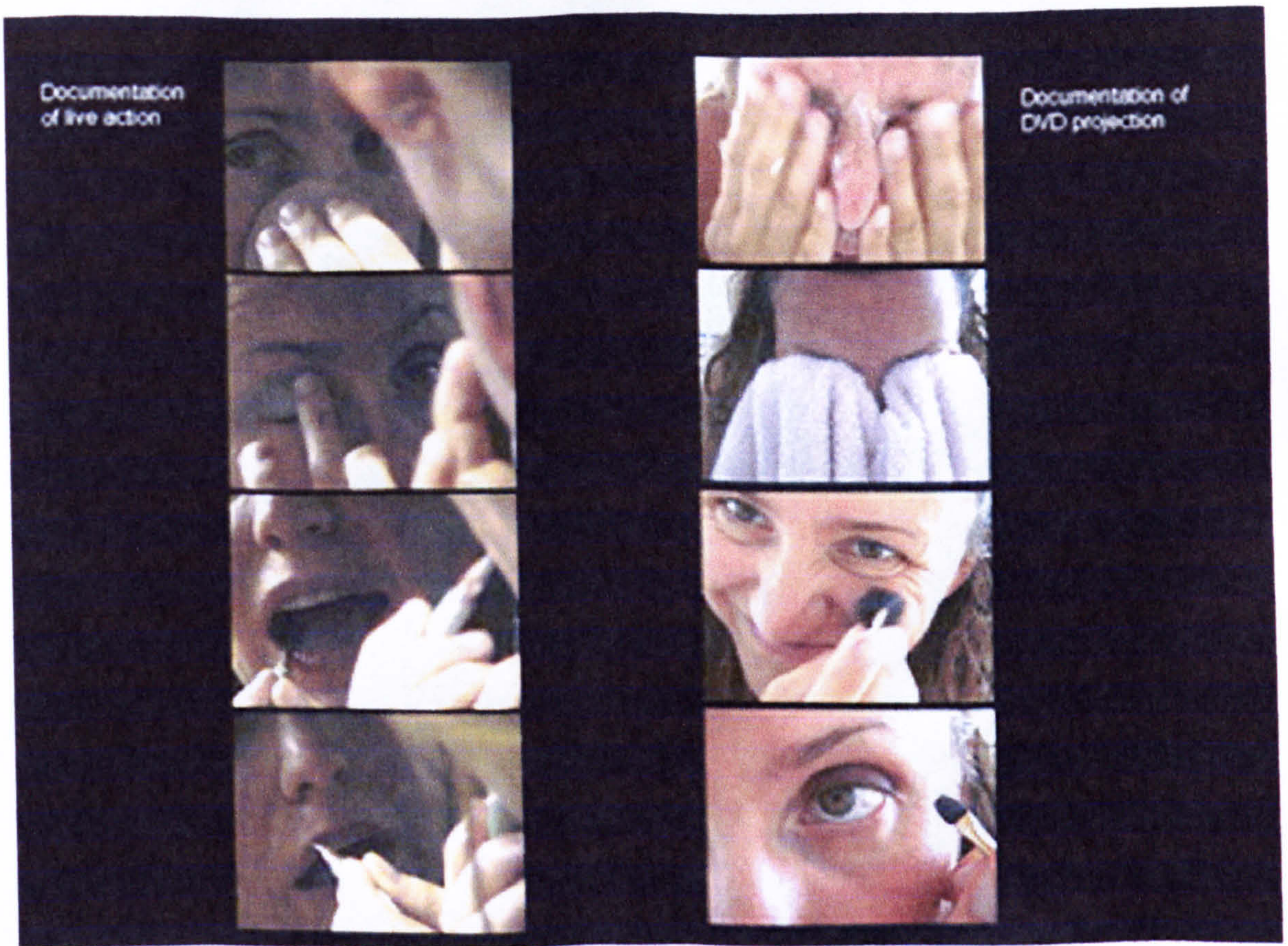


figure 32a. Stills from the two simultaneous projections

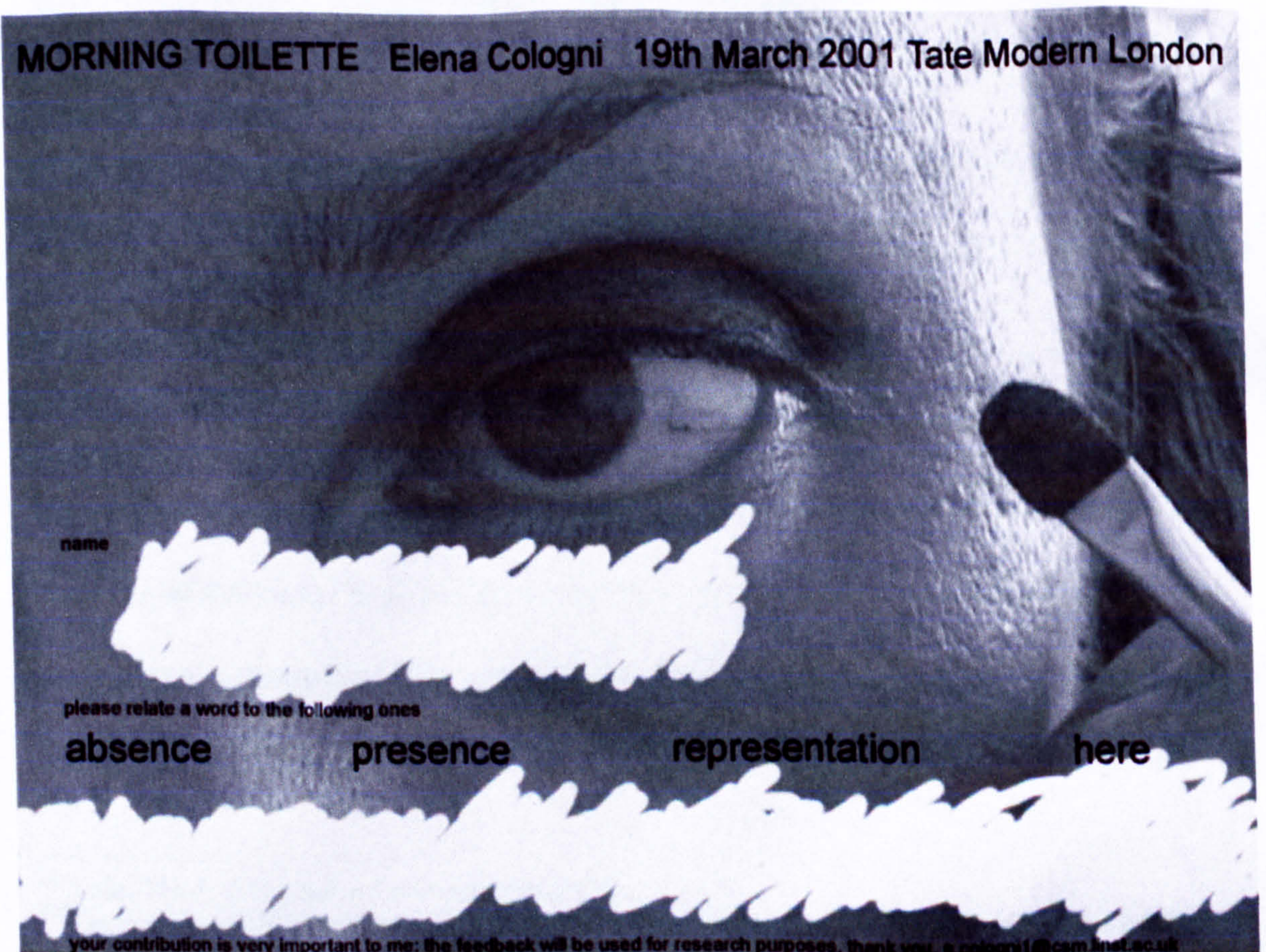


figure 32b. Table given to the audience after the performance at Tate Modern for data collection

Morning Toilette was first presented in a format that I defined as Video Live Installation (fig. 31), at Tate Modern, in the context of a 'Fine Art Research Network' (FARN) event: 'Experience of Space' on 19th March 2001. In some notes I wrote in preparation for the event:

- Institution eye on myself-myself in the environment
- Myself in relation to the audience
- Perception as interaction
- Influence of the context for the artistic event on interaction (context's connotation)

Virtual or real: the presence of the artist through her representation is non-presence. The installation is composed by two projections.

The first is showing the action happening live in a different room of myself and my reflection in a real mirror.

The second is the projection of Video n°3 out of the 5 in DVD. I will have 3 images of myself one of which is looking at the audience and therefore compositionally relating to them.

122

After my experience at Tate Modern I understood how the context could affect the way I performed and therefore the interchange with the audience. The context/place/space in which this relationship takes place influences our mutual perception. As a consequence the result of the event depends upon the connotation of the space as well as each individual's experience of it.¹²³

My own experience of repeating my morning ritual in a public context made me understand the element of fiction involved in performing. The cathartic effect that performing a symbolic action usually has on me, was in this case, not present. I was surprised and at the same time a little disappointed by this absence. Though this

¹²² Dated March 2001, from my personal artistic diary.

¹²³ The video live installation *Morning Toilette* is composed by a *Chiasmus* structure (already referred to in the video performance *BluX* in 2000). *Chiasmus* might be called 'reverse parallelism', since the second part of a grammatical construction is balanced or paralleled by the first part, only in reverse order (this happens also in a mirrored image). The 4 terms, in 2 couples, refer to each other. In the performance the presence of spectators looking at the projections is one of the terms of the relation. A gap of significance is filled with perception. Spectators look at the image of myself looking at them. Simultaneously the projection on the side shows the action happening next door.

feeling was actually a confirming factor of the influence of the environment on the delivery and fruition of the work – that also depend on drawing a boundary between private and public aspects of myself. These thoughts that also address the element of theatricality implicit in performance can be found in some of my diary notes written shortly after the event that I referred to earlier on:

10th April 2001 Glasgow Prestwick Airport
Thinking back at some of the implications of the performance *Morning Toilette* at Tate Modern on the 19th of March.
[...]I felt I was lying to my self and to the audience because I was acting. [...] Although it can be argued that art is representation and, in that sense any action repeated in front of an audience cannot be the spontaneous action of the everyday life but, as much as in a ready made, the artistic context or simply the intention of the artist to express him/herself in a particular context makes the action become an artistic action.[...]I do not act, it is myself. By the fact that I am recording, I am more focused on what I am actually doing.

The repetition of a performance so far has always been a different experience for me who was interacting with a different environment or audience, but while performing I was also detaching myself from the environment and getting in touch with my inner side. As a consequence, the performance worked to me because I felt that it had an effect on myself and therefore the audience[...]

124

As a consequence, I started to work on the effect of public and private contexts and I produced the pieces *Public Private Perception* in London and Bologna and the series of photographs *Public/Private* published at www.insight.org website.

Furthermore, the information I collected after the performance took place, using sheets like the one in figure 32 b, made aware that adopting a composition where my own image prevails over the rest, was possibly taking away the attention from the conceptual element I wanted to deliver. The audience feedback were about my image and not the event as a whole.

¹²⁴ From my artistic diary.



figure 33. *Public Private Perceptions*, Toynbee Studios, London 2001

Each of the projects investigates different aspects of the same issue: how environments affect the delivery of a piece and therefore its fruition. *Public Private Perception* was performed twice in London and Bologna, but it being site-specific, the performance at Neon Gallery in 02 was different from the previous one, as later discussed. After the event in Bologna, I wrote:

'130302 PUBLIC PRIVATE PERCEPTIONS 02 Reactions

I built up a lot of tension due to the various unexpected events happened before the opening that Elisa and Andrea helped me to solve. The dark of the night was falling to allow the video projections to fill the gallery space. I went downstairs, where my stage was all set, the camera on, the right shot, and I started to relax and feel the wall through the sense of touch with my eyes blindfolded. After I did this for nearly one hour, I thought that the cathartic effect of the performance on myself, together with the tension of the live action must have had some sort of impact on the audience. I played back the video of the action and went upstairs where I noticed that the audience was very respectful of the intimate atmosphere created by the two projections in the space and listened carefully to my recorded voice. The loud ones were in the street opposite the gallery entrance. I felt that people understood the work.'

125

¹²⁵ Notes from my diary.

**Part III. A DISCUSSION OF VISION, THE LOOK AND THE GAZE. A
METHODOLOGY FOR THE ARTIST'S INTERCHANGE WITH
AUDIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT**

‘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, and this entails a reciprocity and contingency for the subject(s) in the world [...]’,¹²⁶ states Amelia Jones in her book *Body Art, Performing the Subject*, referring particularly to the phenomenological concept of intertwining by Merleau-Ponty. This is one of the notions that I investigated and related to in my theoretical debate that derived from psychology. My theoretical and practical research though has lately been led towards a much greater understanding of some of the scientific aspects of vision and the other senses, in parallel with, and as a consequence of, the already discussed concerns with the self and the ontology of the mirror image.

Together with the discussion on the *Gaze* by Lacan developed in relation to Sartre’s position on the same topic and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of *Chiasm*, various positions on alternatives to the scopic regime of Western culture are here revised in order to form the context for my own artistic account. The art pieces *Public Private Perceptions* (focusing particularly on the investigation of the relation between artist-environment through touch and non-vision) and *Drawing Scents* (investigating similar issues in relation to smell and vision), represent two different ways to attempt an alternative to the primacy of vision, thus becoming my own response to the anti-ocularcentric discourse. The cross-modal association of senses, synaesthesia referred to in the works, is based on the concepts of rebound, multi-linearity and interaction. This dynamics of the neurological condition can be regarded as a scientific parallel

of the concept of the mirror. The following theoretical discussion, grounding the most recent works I produced, will possibly reveal the overlapping of the ontology of the mirror, synaesthetic dynamics and performative/interactive practice as all contributing to the formation of my position in respect of the anti-ocularcentric discourse.

III.1. Vision-visuality: discussion of alternative scopic regimes

In his introduction to a symposium held at the Dia Art Foundation in New York in 1988, on the critique of the ocularcentric tradition, Hal Foster makes the following distinction between the terms vision and visuality:

Although vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visuality sight as a social fact, the two are not opposed as nature to culture: vision is social and historical too, and visuality involves the body and the psyche. Yet neither are they identical: here, the difference between the terms signals a difference within the visual – between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations – and difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein. With its own rhetoric and representations, each scopic regime seeks to close out these differences: to make of its many social visualities one essential vision, or to order them in a natural hierarchy of sight.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Jones, A., *op. cit.*, p.41.

¹²⁷ Foster, H., *Vision and Visuality*, New York, Dia Art Foundation 1988, New Press Printing 1999, p. ix.

The text published after the symposium contains a number of scripts by various authors. This included a discussion of the physiological substrate of the discourse by Jonathan Crary and on the psychic one by Jacqueline Rose and Rosalind Krauss. All the authors tried to indicate the part that vision has played in the production of subjectivity and its part in the intersubjective, as addressed by Norman Bryson, particularly with reference to the *Gaze*. A historical account of modern vision specifying its dominant practices and its critical resistances was given by Martin Jay.

Martin Jay proposed the following critical variants to the scopic regime and Renaissance perspective : the *art of describing* in seventeenth century Dutch painting and the *madness of vision* developed in baroque art.¹²⁸ Although there is much literature on perspective,¹²⁹ as an introduction to my argument I will refer to the historical account by Jay. He traces a map starting with the Italian Quattrocento with Brunelleschi as the inventor and Alberti as the theoretical interpreter. Jay writes that in relation to the metaphysical implications of light (as divine *lux* rather than perceived *lumen*), linear perspective came to symbolise mathematical regularities in optics and God's will. Jay reminds us that the three-dimensional space of perspective could be rendered on a two-dimensional surface by following all the transformational rules in Alberti's *De Pittura* and later treatises. The transparent window that was the canvas in Alberti's metaphor, could also be understood as a flat mirror reflecting the 'geometricalized' space of the scene depicted back onto the space radiating out from the viewing eye (static monocular vision looking through the peephole at the scene in front of it).

¹²⁸ Jay, M., 'Scopic regimes of modernity' in Foster, H., *Vision and Visuality*, New York, Dia Art Foundation 1988, New Press Printing 1999, pp.3-23.

¹²⁹ William M. Ivins, Jr., *On the Rationalization of Sight*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1938; Panofsky, *Die Perspektive als -symbolischen Form*; Richard Krautheimer, 'Brunelleschi and Linear Perspective', in *Brunelleschi in Perspective*, comp. Isabelle Hyman, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1974; Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., *The Renaissance Discovery of Linear Perspective*, New York, Basic Books, 1975; John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 3rd ed., Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1987; Michael Kubovy, *The Psychology of Perspective and renaissance Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986; Kemp, M., *The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1990.

The abstract coldness of the perspectival *Gaze* meant the withdrawal of the painter's emotional entanglement with the objects depicted in geometricalized space. The participatory involvement of more absorptive visual modes was diminished, if not entirely suppressed, as the gap between spectator and spectacle widened.¹³⁰

According to Jay, the moment of erotic projection in vision – what St. Augustine had anxiously condemned as *ocular desire*, was lost as the bodies of the painter and viewer were forgotten in the name of an allegedly disincarnated, absolute eye. Although such a *Gaze* could still fall on objects of desire, it did so largely in the service of a reifying male look that turned its targets into stone. According to Jay, despite important exceptions, such as Caravaggio's seductive boys or Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, the nudes do not look out at the viewer, radiating no erotic energy in the other direction. He contends it is only with the nudes in Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*, that the crossing of the viewer's gaze with that of the subject finally occurs, but, when the rationalised visual order of Cartesian perspectivalism was already coming under attack in other ways.

In Jay's view Cartesian perspectivalism 'in addition to its *de-eroticizing* of the visual order, had also fostered what might be called *de-narrativization* or *de-textualization*'. Here as abstract, quantitatively conceptualised space became more interesting to the artist than the qualitatively differentiated subjects painted within it.

Cartesian perspectivalism has, in fact, been the target of a widespread philosophical critique, which has denounced its privileging of an a-

historical, disinterested, disembodied subject entirely outside of the world it claims to know only from afar. The questionable assumption of a transcendental subjectivity characteristic of universalist humanism, which ignores our embeddedness in what Maurice Merleau-Ponty liked to call the *flesh of the world*, is thus tied to the 'high altitude' thinking characteristic of this scopic regime. In many accounts, this entire tradition has thus been subjected to wholesale condemnation as both false and pernicious.¹³¹

Jay points out that it is possible to discern internal tensions in Cartesian perspectivalism itself to suggest it was not quite as uniformly coercive as is sometimes assumed. This is done by mentioning John White's distinction between what he terms *artificial perspective*, in which the mirror held up to nature is flat, and *synthetic perspective*, in which that mirror is presumed to be concave, thus producing a curved rather than planar space on the canvas.

The subject position in the Cartesian perspectivalist epistemology is seen by Jay as problematic. For the monocular eye at the apex of beholder's pyramid could be construed as transcendental and universal – that is, exactly the same for any human viewer occupying the same point in time and space – or contingent; solely dependent on the particular, individual vision of distinct beholders, with their own concrete relations to the scene in front of them. Finally, the Cartesian perspectivalist tradition contained a potential for internal contestation in the possible uncoupling of the painter's view of the scene from that of the presumed beholder.

¹³⁰ 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', Jay, M., in Foster, H., *Vision and Visuality*, New York: Dia Art Foundation, New Press Printing 1999, p. 8.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Norman Bryson identifies this development with Vermeer, who represents in his view, a second state of perspectivalism, even more disincarnated than that of Alberti.

Jay makes an observation to suggest an alternative scopic regime that may be understood as more than a variant of Cartesian perspectivalism. He includes the Dutch seventeenth-century art: a visual culture very different from what we associate with a Renaissance perspective, one which Svetlana Alpers has called *The Art of Describing*.¹³²

According to Alpers, the hegemonic role of Italian painting in art history has occluded an appreciation of a second tradition, which was nourished in the seventeenth-century Low Countries. She argues that Italian Renaissance art, for all its fascination with the techniques of perspective, still held fast to the storytelling function for which they were used. In the Renaissance, the world on the other side of Alberti's window was a stage on which human figures performed significant actions based on the texts of the poets. It is a narrative art. Northern art, rejecting the privileged, constitutive role of the monocular subject, emphasises instead the prior existence of a world of objects depicted on the flat canvas, a world indifferent to the beholder's position in front of it. This world is not contained entirely within the frame of the Albertian window, but seems instead to extend beyond it.

Summarising the difference between the art of describing and Cartesian perspectivalism, Alpers posits the following oppositions:

attention to many small things versus a few large ones; light reflected off objects versus objects modelled by light and shadow; the surface of

objects, their colors and textures, dealt with rather than their placement in a legible space; an unframed image versus one that is clearly framed; one with no clearly situated viewer compared to one with such a viewer. The distinction follows a hierarchical model of distinguishing between phenomena commonly referred to as primary and secondary: objects and space versus the surfaces, forms versus the textures of the world.¹³³

Merleau-Ponty's *Eye and the Mind* begins with a comparison between science and painting. Whereas the former looks on things from above, the latter immerses the viewer in the world on view.¹³⁴ He uses the expression *narcissism of sight* because *the world is made of the same stuff as the body* and yet, although at one with the world, the painter is also apart from it, which is the paradoxical, enigmatic *madness* of vision: 'Painting awakens and carries to its highest pitch a delirium which is vision itself, for to see is to have at a distance; painting spreads this strange possession to all aspects of Being, which must in some fashion become visible in order to enter into the work of art'.

In his view, it is precisely the revelation of the oneness and multiplicity of Being that makes painting so remarkable. Merleau-Ponty concluded, by drawing on modernists like Cezanne, Henri Matisse and Paul Klee and also on Dutch art.¹³⁵ Merleau-Ponty extended 'this "defenestration" of the painter's eye to the philosopher's as well. *Eye and Mind* in fact, turns directly from a consideration of Dutch painting to an analysis

¹³² Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago University Press, 1983.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹³⁴ Merleau-Ponty states: 'The painter does not depict representations in his mind, but rather paints with his body, which is mingled with the perceived world. The self revealed by painting is thus 'not a self through transparency, like thought, which only thinks its object by assimilating it, by constituting it, by transforming it into thought. It is a self through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of the one who sees in that which he sees.' In *Eye and Mind*, Translated by Michael Smith. In *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, edited by Galen Johnson, 121-149, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, pp. 162-163.

of Descartes's *Dioptrique*: the latter failed to appreciate the ontological importance of painting. Merleau-Ponty described Dutch art by writing that in it 'the mirror appears because I am seeing-visible, because there is a reflexivity of the sensible; the mirror translates and reproduces that reflexivity'.¹³⁶ The curved mirror was especially powerful in this regard because its tactile dimension helps collapse the seemingly unbridgeable distance between the Albertian painters disembodied eye and the scene before him on the other side of the window-like canvas.

Merleau-Ponty explains that Descartes' mistake 'was to erect it into a positive being, outside all points of view, beyond all latency and all depth, having no true thickness'.¹³⁷ Merleau-Ponty insisted that in our post-Euclidean world, we are now aware that space is no longer what it seemed to Descartes, with his geometer's eye outside and above the scene it surveyed. 'It is, rather, a space reckoned starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me.'¹³⁸

Martin Jay states that if there is a philosophical correlate to Northern art, it is not Cartesianism with its faith in a rationalised concept of space, but rather the more empirical visual experience of observationally oriented Baconian empiricism. The non mathematical impulse of this tradition accords well with the indifference to hierarchy, proportion and analogical resemblances characteristic of Cartesian perspectivalism. Instead, it casts its attentive eye on the fragmentary, detailed and richly articulated surface of a world it is content to describe rather than explain. In

135 Merleau Ponty *Eye and Mind*, p. 186.

136 Merleau-Ponty, M., *Eye and Mind*, p. 168.

137 Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, p. 174.

138 Ibid. p. 178.

two significant ways, the art of describing can be said to have anticipated later visual models, however much it was subordinated to its Cartesian perspectivalist rival.

Jay suggests that both scopic regimes can be said to reveal different aspects of a complex but unified phenomenon, just as Cartesian and Baconian philosophies can be said to be consonant, if in different ways, with the scientific world view.

Martin Jay then posed a third model of vision that he also refers to as 'the second moment of unease in the dominant model' where he sees the possibilities for an even more radical alternative: the Baroque. Since 1888, art historians have been tempted to postulate a perennial oscillation between Renaissance and Baroque in both painting and architecture. In opposition to Renaissance, or as Heinrich Wölfflin later called it, the classical style, the Baroque was painterly, multiple, and open. Derived from the Portuguese word for an irregular, oddly shaped pearl, 'the baroque connoted the bizarre and peculiar, traits which were normally disdained by champions of clarity and transparency of form' Jay explains.¹³⁹

In the recent work of the French philosopher, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *La raison baroque* of 1984 and *Lajolie du voir* of 1986,¹⁴⁰ the explosive power of baroque vision is seen as the most significant alternative to the hegemonic visual style of Cartesian perspectivalism. She emphasises its rejection of the monocular geometricalization of the Cartesian tradition, with its illusion of homogeneous three-dimensional space seen with a God's-eye-view from afar. 'She also tacitly contrasts the Dutch art of describing, with its belief in legible surfaces and faith in the material

¹³⁹ Jay, op. cit., p.

¹⁴⁰ Buci-Glucksmann, C., *La raison baroque: de Baudelaire a Benjamin*, Paris, Editions Galilee, 1984 and *Lajolie du voir: de l'esthetique baroque*, Paris, Editions Galilee, 1986; referred to by Jay, M., 'Scopic regimes of modernity' in Hal Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, p.17.

solidity of the world its paintings map, with the baroque fascination for opacity, unreadability, and the indecipherability of the reality it depicts'.¹⁴¹

For Buci-Glucksmann, the Baroque self-consciously revels in the contradictions between surface and depth, disparaging as a result any attempt to reduce the multiplicity of visual spaces into any one coherent essence. Jay specifies that, the mirror that it holds up to nature is the anamorphosistic mirror, either concave or convex, that distorts the visual image – or, more precisely, ‘reveals the conventional rather than natural quality of ‘normal’ specularly by showing its dependence on the materiality of the medium of reflection.’¹⁴²

III. 2. Anamorphosis in relation to the *Gaze* in Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Lacan

I think that the practice of *anamorphosis* can be considered an alternative for the production of space on a two-dimensional surface, a variant scopic system distinct from the Cartesian perspective, not aiming to represent reality, but to distort it and give way to imagination. This was understood while experimenting with it through art practice in 1997, with pieces like ‘Seeing Through’, before I started this research project. The sculptural piece was constituted by a structure providing the coordinates for the stretched anamorphic image on its surface, referring to the illusionary status of vision.

In the following section a historical introduction of anamorphosis forms the background for a following discussion. This will illustrate how Lacan’s account of vision and the concept of the *Gaze* (coming from the Merleau-Ponty’s notion of

¹⁴¹ Jay, M., ‘Scopic regimes of modernity’ in Hal Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, p.17.

interchange) refer to anamorphosis, particularly as used in the painting *The Ambassadors* by Hans Holbein as a metaphor for Lacan's psycho-analytic concepts.

Art historian Martin Kemp explains that the idea of anamorphosis appears to have arisen for the investigation of oblique images and wide-angle views by Piero della Francesca and Leonardo da Vinci. At the end of his treatise, Piero della Francesca considers the special case of how to paint an illusion of a solid body that is to appear in relief on a plane surface which is above or below the spectator and is viewed obliquely. The examples he illustrates are those of a ball, a hanging ring, and a 'drinking goblet on a stem which is to appear elevated' above the plane of a table (pl. 416 in fig. 34). 'The construction is achieved by the projection of the relevant rays of the visual pyramid past the contours of the object and on to the plane behind it, much as if an adjacent source of light is casting a shadow. When the oddly dislocated outlines are viewed obliquely from the point of projection, they convey the effect of the goblet standing out from the plane surface of the table.'

Kemp writes that Leonardo's awareness of the difficulties caused by wide-angle perspective had led him to experiment with elongated designs, which turned the problems to his advantage. Although his major demonstrations of anamorphosis made in France have disappeared, Kemp suggests that it was his example that inspired the sudden wave of anamorphic designs in Northern Europe. It was in the North, most especially in the work of Erhard Schon, that one of the major potentials of these picture-puzzles began to be realised as symbolic compositions. Schon may have been the first to give the frontal, distorted image a coherence of its own by the transformation of the otherwise

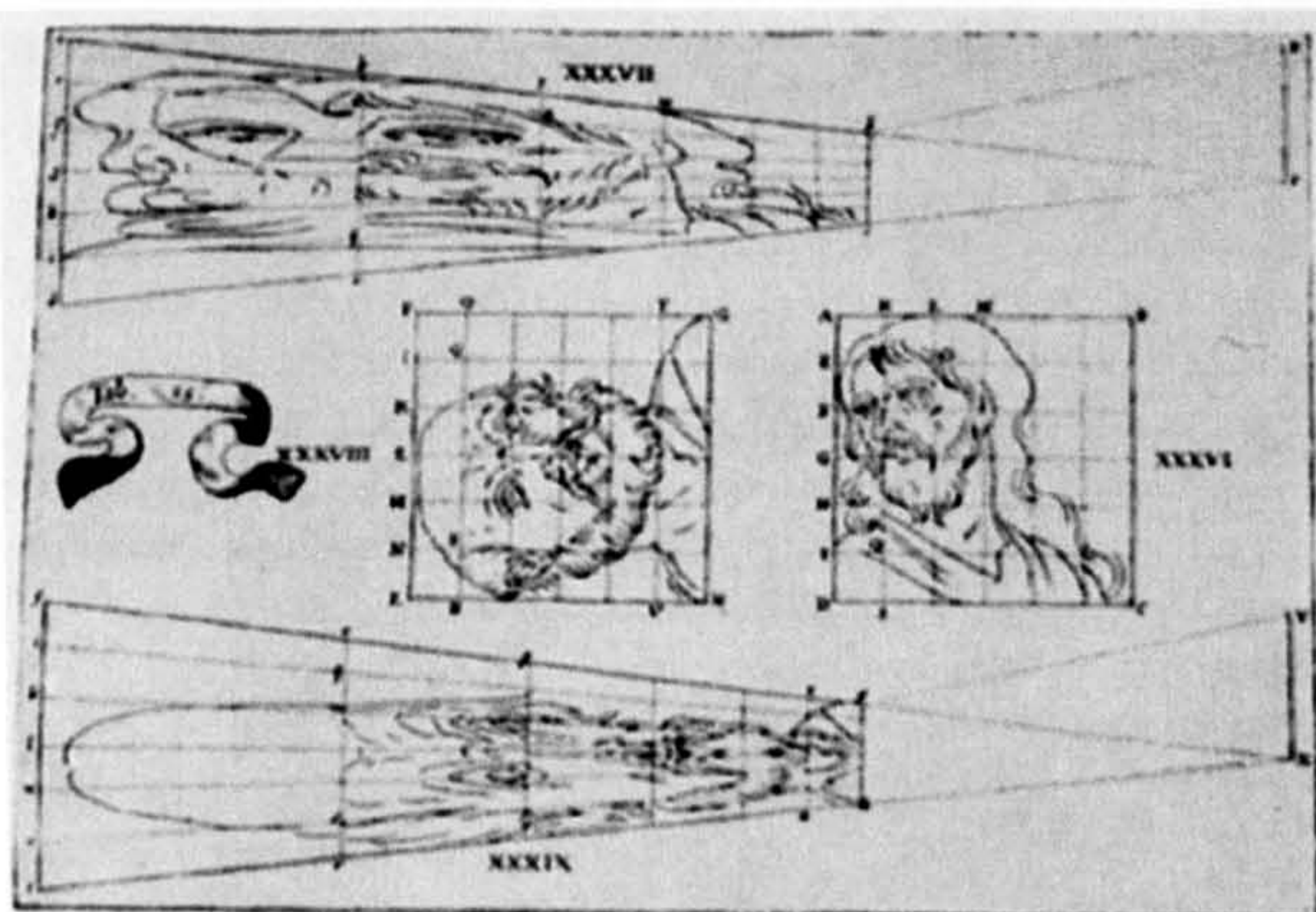
¹⁴² *ibid.*

incomprehensible outlines into the contours of a landscape peopled by tiny figures (pl 417 in fig. 34).¹⁴³

Kemp explains that the classic phase of anamorphosis, during which it came to relate vitally to a series of scientific and theological concerns, occurred in France and Rome in the 1630s and 1640s, with theorist Jean-Francois Niceron. 'The second part of his *Thaumaturfus Opticus* (1646) is dedicated to a comprehensive treatment of anamorphic images and related varieties of 'artificial magic' to use his own term [...]. He provides lucid accounts of how to project anamorphic images using a perspectively distorted grid [pl. 419 in fig. 34], of the kind that had probably underlain the most optical of the earlier images, such as those by Schon and Holbein.' Kemp writes that he also gives mathematical instructions for the design of other forms of anamorphosis: on surfaces which are pyramidal or conical [pl. 420 in fig. 34]; and curvilinear images which are designed to be viewed in cylindrical or conical mirrors. The curvilinear types became particularly popular as optical toys during succeeding centuries.¹⁴⁴

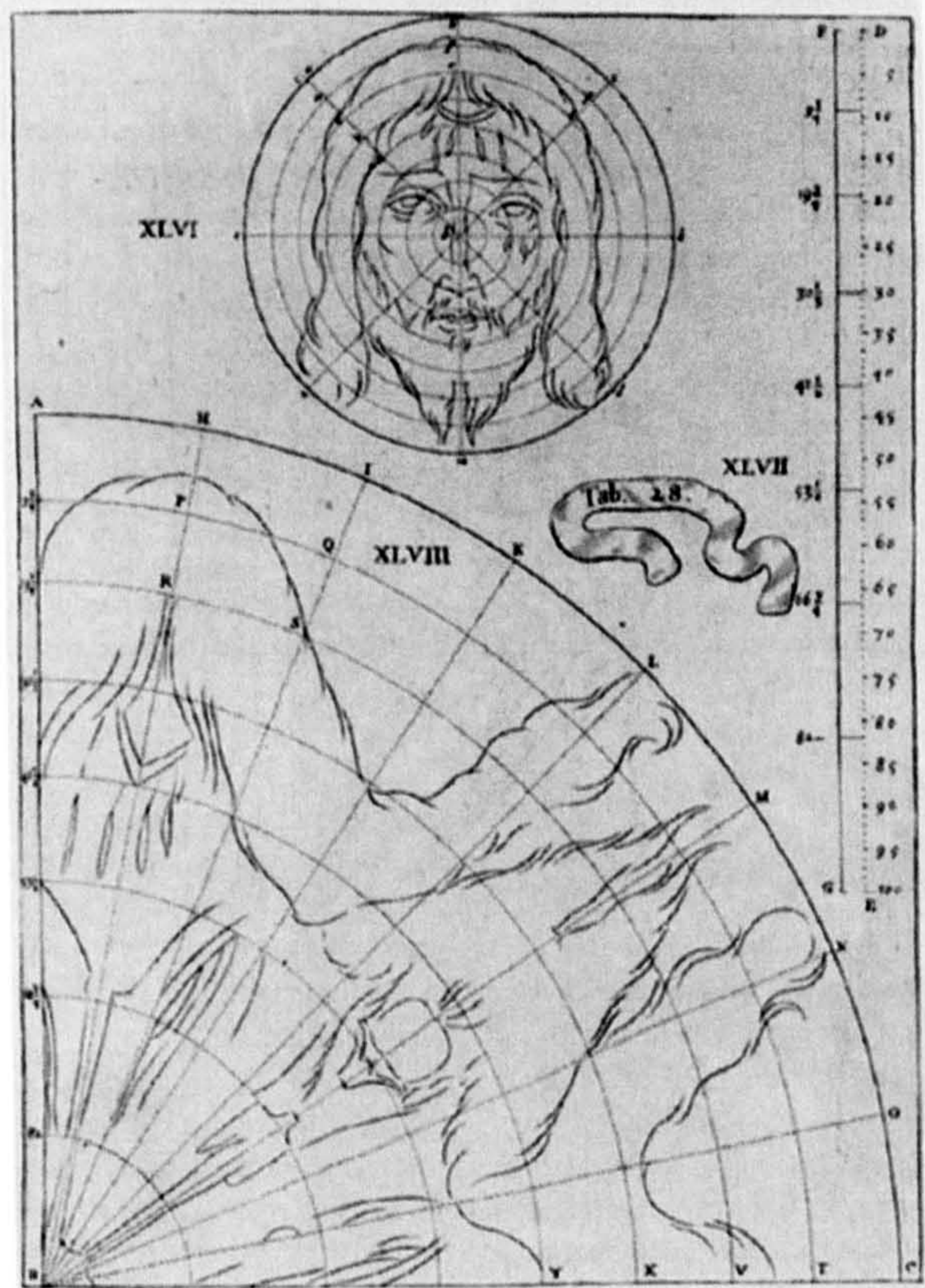
¹⁴³ Kemp, M., *The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, pp. 208.

¹⁴⁴ Kemp, M., pp. 208-210. He continues by writing that there is an element of sheer entertainment in such images. The Chateau d' Esonnes of Ludovic Hesselin owner of a Cigoh perspectograph, was a treasure house of illusions and curiosities, designed to astonish even a sophisticated observer like Queen Christina of Sweden who was treated to such visions as burning cities and vast caverns. But there were also serious sides to these visions – theologically and scientifically. Just as Pozzo was concerned to place extreme illusionism in the service of reverence, so was Nicer.

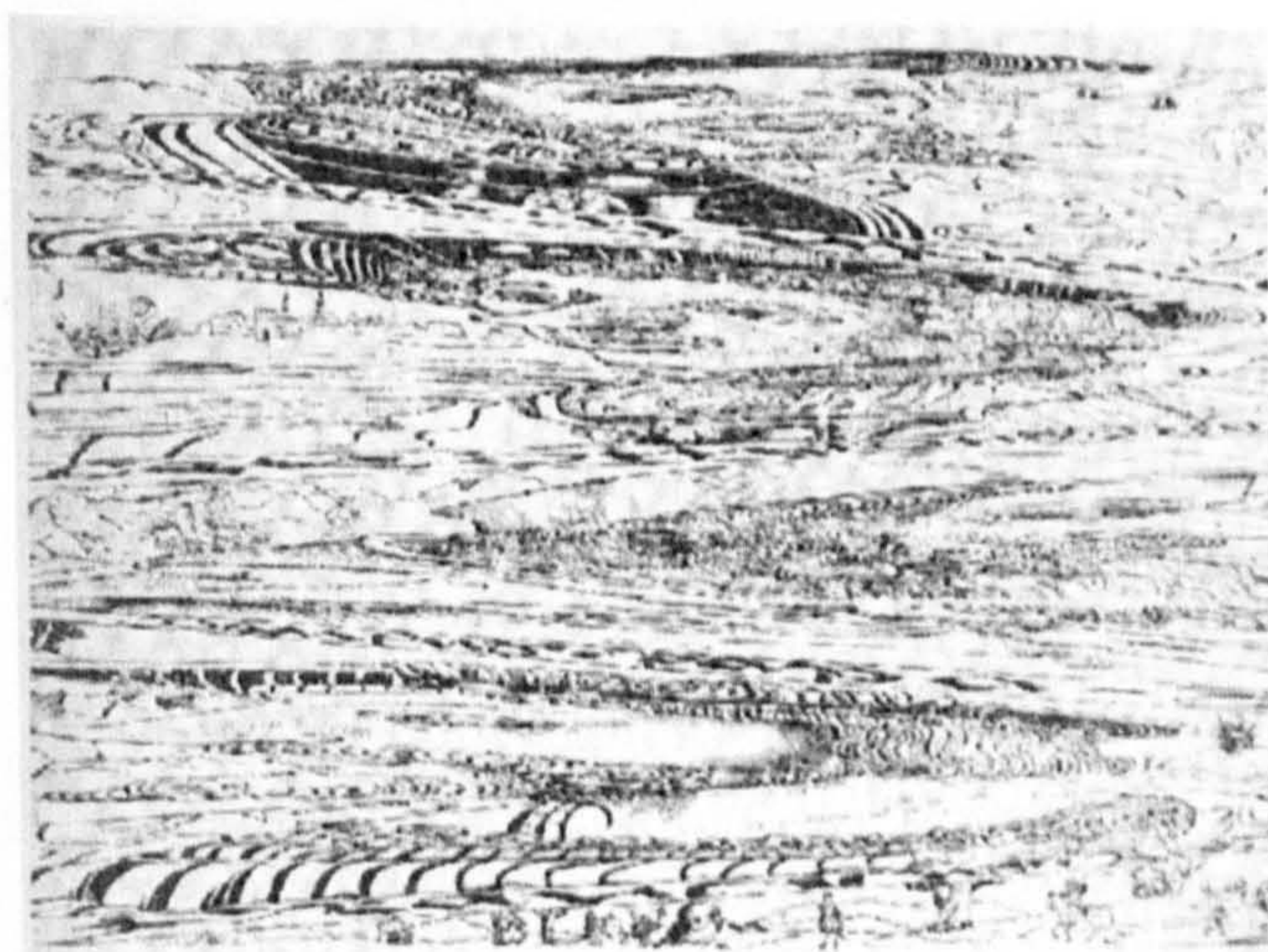
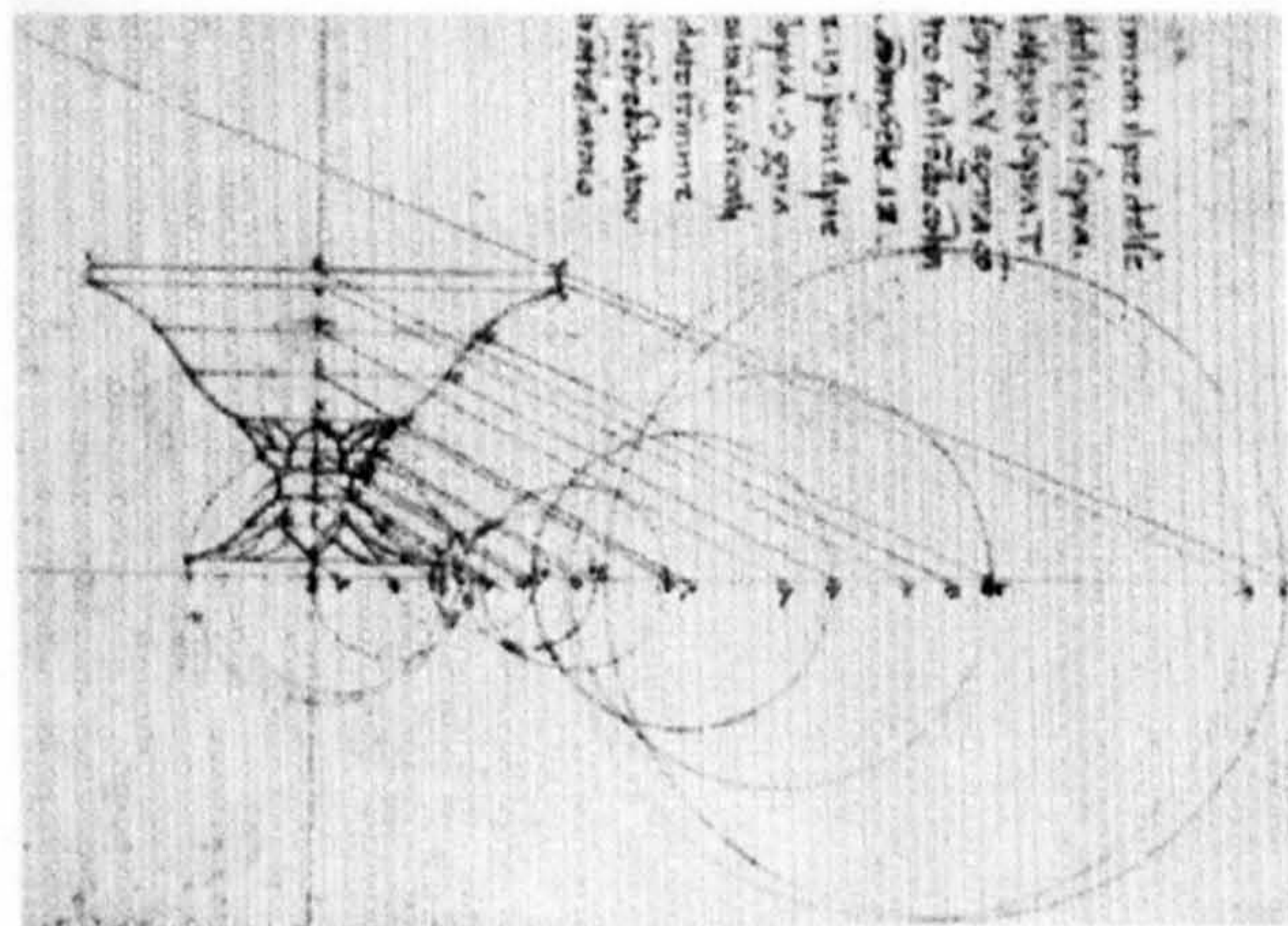


419. Technique for the anamorphic distortion of faces from Niccron's *Thaumaturgus opticus*.

420. Design for a conical anamorphosis, from Niccron's *Thaumaturgus opticus*.



416. Perspectival projection of a goblet laterally on to a plane from Piet della Francesca's *De Prospectiva pingendi*.



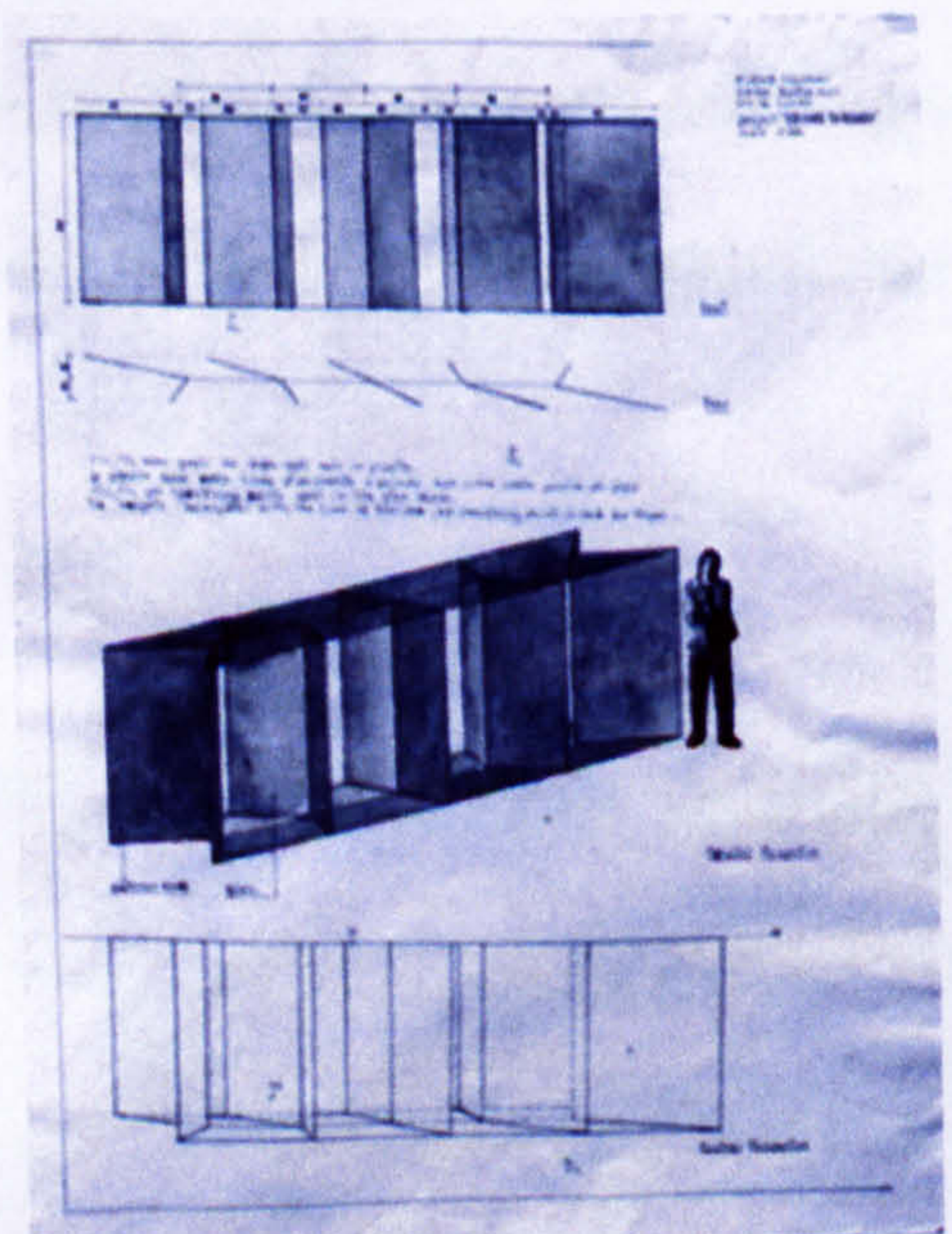
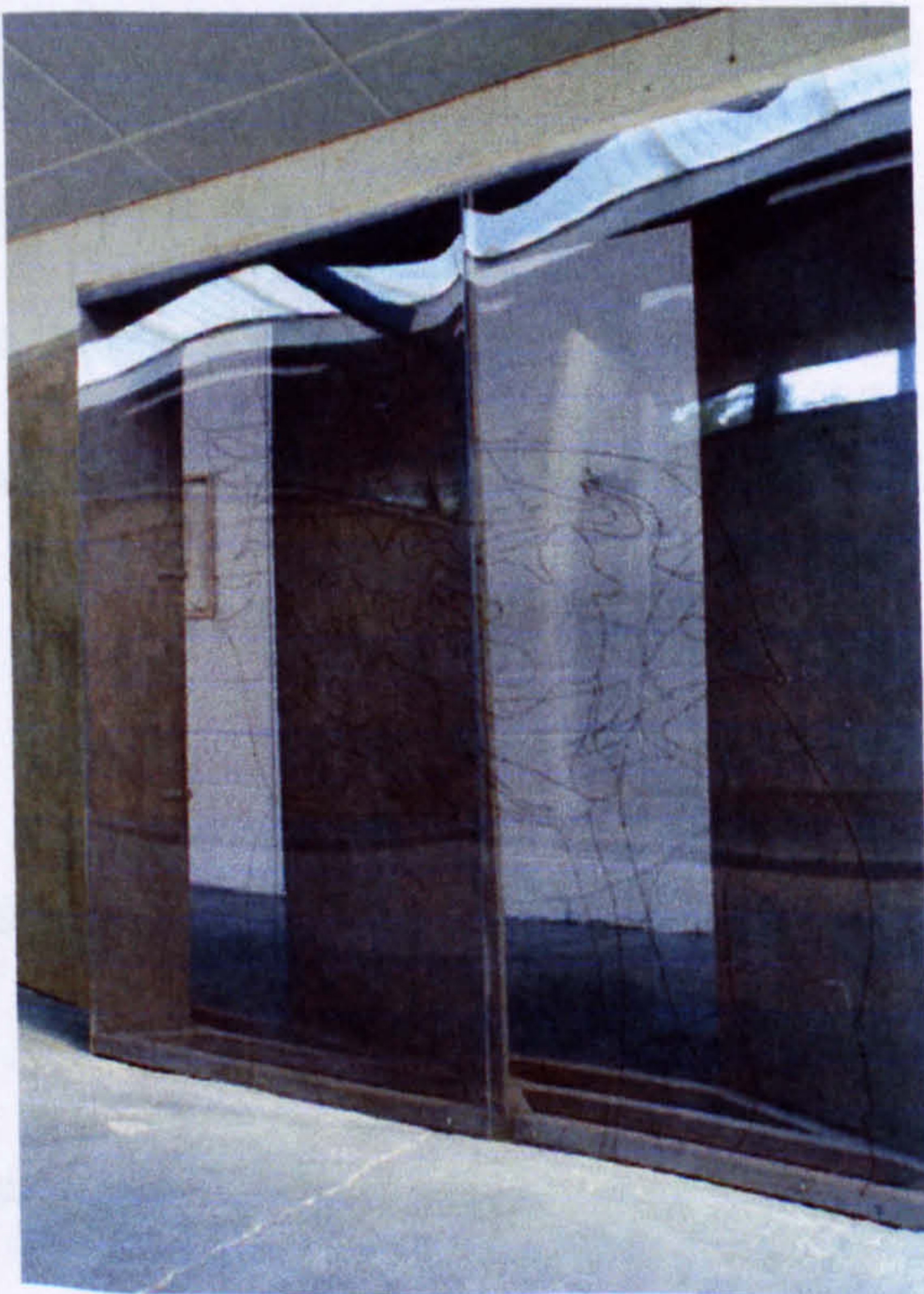
417. Erhard Schön, *Anamorphic Print of Four Portraits* (Charles V, Ferdi I, Pope Paul III and Francis I).

figure 34. Tables on anamorphosis from Kemp, M., *The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990.



figure 35. Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, 1533

figure 35 b. *Seeing Through*, 1997, detail of anamorphic dotted image on surface and design for it.



Kemp explains that Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* of 1533 represents the classic early example of anamorphosis '[...] exploited at the highest level of seriousness for symbolic purposes occurs in the two Frenchmen, Jean de Denteville and Georges de Selve, stand in front of a table loaded with the paraphernalia of various aspects of human learning which relate to practical mathematics [...]. Kemp then by illustrating the significance of the anamorphic skull. This, 'smeared diagonally across the perspectival floor', assumes full coherence when 'viewed from a particular position to the right of the picture at the level of the ambassador's heads, at about one picture's width from the edge of the painting, and at a short distance from the plane of the picture surface'. He also suggests that this position could have been one of the axes along which the viewer would have approached the picture in its original setting, through a door abutting on the end of the wall on which the picture was hung. Kemp suggests that the semi-concealed skull relates to the other partly-concealed symbol, the sculpted crucifix half-hidden by the curtain in the upper right corner. In his view, if the skull serves to remind us of the ultimate triumph of death over all human pursuits the silver crucifix represents our only legitimate chance of salvation in the next life.

Lacan's reading of the function of the skull in the painting is for him a useful example for what he defines as the *objet-a* in relation to the *Gaze*. Lacan suggested that anamorphosis corresponded to the Cartesian subject's geometrical mapping of space, a geometricalisation that could be based, as Diderot had noted in his *Letter on the Blind*, on a sightless man's touch.

Such a rigid and linear reduction of vision invited comparison, Lacan suggested, with an erect penis, that which appeared as the lack-fulfilling phallus in the mother's Imaginary: 'How can we not see here, immanent in the geometral dimension – a

partial dimension in the field of the gaze, a dimension that has nothing to do with vision as such – something symbolic of the function of the lack, of the appearance of the phallic ghost?’¹⁴⁵

Lacan, in the series of seminars published in *The Four Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, developed his argument of the *Gaze* in relation to anamorphosis in Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*. In the painting, the *Gaze* of the dominant Cartesian perspectivalist scopic regime was challenged by another, which was expressed by the distorted skull at the bottom of the canvas, a skull whose natural shape could be restored only by an oblique glance from the painting’s edge. In Lacan’s view, such an object expressed the desire of the Symbolic realm in which the subject is decentered, split, and comes to terms with its own incompleteness. ‘Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated - in the form, that is, strictly speaking the imaged embodiment of the *minus-phi* $[(- \emptyset)]$ of castration, which for us, centers the whole organization of the desires through the framework of the fundamental drives[...]’¹⁴⁶ Lacan explains that rather than an image in the phallic eye of the geometricalized subject, the anamorphic skull thus is to be found in the impersonal, diffuse ‘gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling and spread out function, as it is in this picture’.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Lacan, J., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

As Jay puts it, 'the eye is that of the specular, Cartesian subject desiring specular plenitude and phallic wholeness, and believing it can find it in a mirror image of itself, whereas the gaze is that of an objective other in a field of pure monstrosity'.¹⁴⁸

In order to fully understand Lacan's reference to anamorphosis as used in Holbein's painting, I think it is necessary to introduce the broader discourse within which this is located. Furthermore, the links I will illustrate within the cultural context, will contribute to present Lacan and Merleau-Ponty's thoughts influencing each other, particularly in relation to the concepts of *Gaze* and *Chiasm*. I can see that also in my artistic research the same reciprocal influence of related notions allows me to find space for the creative input in the transitional position, a position in constant development as it will be illustrated at a later stage.

Martin Jay in his book *Downcast Eyes, the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth – Century French Thought* suggests that many contributors to the denigration of vision, such as Lacan and Foucault, cannot be understood without recognising the residues of Sartre's critique in theirs.¹⁴⁹ Particularly, although diverging on many

¹⁴⁸ Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes, the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth – Century French Thought*, University of California Press, 1994, p. 363.

¹⁴⁹ The nature of that critique took many forms. Although Sartre was deeply indebted to Husserl's phenomenology, he immediately detected problems with the idea of a transcendental ego, which he interpreted in visual terms. In Sartre's first major work, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, written in 1936, he complained that Husserl's strong notion of an 'I' introduced opacity into consciousness. Instead, true consciousness was pure translucence, unburdened by positivity. Pure consciousness were understood as transparency rather than opacity, but a more anti visual position appeared in his next two works of philosophy, which dealt with the issue of images and the imagination, *Imagination: A Psychological Critique* (1936) and *The Psychology of Imagination* (1940). Here Sartre posited a radical difference between sense perception and the imagination. He criticised the belief that images were only likenesses of external objects reflected in consciousness. For Sartre, although images may draw on analogies with objects of perception, they themselves are unreal. In fact, imagination is precisely the active function of consciousness that transcends or nihilates the reality of the perceived world. As such, it serves as a model for the negation and lack that Sartre would soon identify with the 'for-itself' in *Being and Nothingness*. What is vital for understanding his larger argument is that Sartre distinguished images from perception, visual or otherwise, and identified them with the intentionality of action instead. As a result, he was able to describe consciousness less in terms of visual transparency than in those of pure nihilating action.

basic points, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty shared a suspicion of the Cartesian perspectivalist gaze, which often extended to the primacy of vision itself. For their generation the main inspiration came from the movement known as phenomenology, in particular the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.¹⁵⁰

In Jay's view, Sartre's critique of ocularcentrism was especially powerful because he conflated many of the complaints expressed by other critics into one relentless, overwhelming indictment. 'Not only' he claimed 'does the hypertrophy of the visual lead to a problematic epistemology, abet the domination of nature, and support the hegemony of space over time, but it also produces profoundly disturbing intersubjective relations and the construction of a dangerously inauthentic version of the self.'¹⁵¹ Sartre's interrogation of the eye in the social, psychological, existential dimensions, was described in the most negative terms.¹⁵² He was very sensitive to the

Invisibility of non-perceptual images suggests a critical link to human freedom, as Sartre interpreted it. In short, the Sartre who could escape from the play of mirrors and the defining power of adult gazes by immersing himself in words—'imaginary child that I was,' he wrote in his autobiography, 'I defended myself with my imagination's' - now posited a radical break between sight and consciousness, which directly challenged the ocularcentric traditions equation of the 'I' and the 'eye'. Before Sartre spelled out the full ontological implications of this new view of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness*, he anticipated certain of its arguments in *Nausea*, the literary work published in 1938. Here too visual themes play a prominent role, Sartre contrasted tactile with visual experience.

¹⁵⁰ As explained by Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes, the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, 1994, p.276, in works like *Cartesian Meditations*, 1931, Husserl defines phenomenology as a kind of neo-Cartesianism, concerned with the scientific investigation of ideas in all their conceptual clarity and distinctiveness, and needing to purify philosophy of the psychological residues, he found in Descartes a path for it to become transcendental. Phenomenology should be what he called "eidetic science", able to gain intuitive insights into essences. Intuition could reveal more than the interior experience of lived temporality. The phenomenological 'reduction' (epoché) led back to the source of existence and meaning. In Jay's view the fact that Husserl chose to call eidetic intuition a *Wesenschau* (a look into essences) may suggest the persistence of ocularcentric premises in his thought. This central role of vision in Husserl's thought has been the target of certain French critics: Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida, Marc Richir. In Jay's view, Husserl's thought influenced Merleau-Ponty and Sartre for the following reasons: although Husserl's retained a visual bias in the idea of *Wesenschau*, he radically undermined the spectatorial distance between viewing object and viewed object in the Cartesian epistemological tradition. Although his early work sought to defend the concept of the transcendental ego, (residue of the Cartesian *cogito*) his later work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* of 1936, put the stress on the pre-reflective *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) instead. Here both the cultural/historical variations of everyday life and the lived body played a central role. Merleau-Ponty was able to seize on it as a means to strip phenomenology of its Cartesian residues, also thanks to the critic of visual primacy present in Heidegger's phenomenology, entered in the French debate in the 30's.

¹⁵¹ Jay, M., op.cit. p.277.

¹⁵² Sartre was profoundly curious in the sense of that term defined by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. He passionately wanted to penetrate the world's secrets and reveal them to his pitiless gaze.

dangers of visually incited curiosity, both for the gazer and the object of the gaze.

The result was a personal and intellectual dialectic of attraction and repulsion.¹⁵³

Martin Jay identified three main manifestations of Sartre's critique of sight. The first is his rejection of an opaque transcendental ego intruding into the translucency of pure, active consciousness. The second is his radical separation of perception, visual or otherwise, from the nihilating imagination, which proves in *Nausea* not to be so radically pure after all. And the third is the failed attempt of vision to impose concepts and ideas on the recalcitrant meaningfulness of the material world, which is more directly available to our other senses, or better put, 'is a primordial reality prior to the very differentiation of the senses'. Vision is thus insufficient as a means to conceive the subject, or what he will call the 'for-itself', and no less problematic in its attempts to conceptualise the object, or the 'in-itself'.¹⁵⁴ Sartre distinguishes between the eye as the object of a look and the look itself (a distinction repeated by Lacan), between perception and imagination, which he had examined in *The Psychology of Imagination*.¹⁵⁵

Jay's introduction of Merleau-Ponty's thought states that his 'version of phenomenology maybe called a heroic attempt to reaffirm the nobility of vision on new and firmer grounds than those provided by the discredited Cartesian

¹⁵³ Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes, The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, 1994, p.276.

¹⁵⁴ Jay illustrates that the opposition between 'for-itself' and 'in-itself' was most clearly developed in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943), where Sartre reprised all of these themes and fleshed them out by offering the detailed ontology absent from his earlier work. In addition, he provided a profoundly troubling discussion of inter-subjective and intra-subjective interactions based on the exchange of gazes. For Sartre, the domination of the object world by a distant subject, facilitated by the hegemony of sight, became a model as well for inter-subjective relations. Departing from Husserl, whose treatment of interpersonal interaction depended on reciprocal empathy, Sartre emphasised the hostile contest of wills between competing subjects.

¹⁵⁵ Perception is understood as an act in the sense that it transforms the object of the gaze, whereas imagination is identified less with derealising freedom than with the paralysing internalisation of the other's gaze. The non reciprocity between look and eye, between being the subject and object of the gaze, is in fact related to a fundamental struggle for power. For the one who casts the look is always subject and the one who is its target is always turned into an object. Or at least, objectification is the telos of the look, even if it comes up against the ultimate barrier of the 'for-itself's' constitutive nothingness. That fundamental property of the subject is, however,

perspectivalist tradition'.¹⁵⁶ By registering the collapse of the dominant scopic regime, he attempted to defend an alternative philosophy of the visual, which would have beneficial social implications as well. Jay divides the development of his thought in two major phases. The first, were the *Structure of Behavior*, published in 1942, and *Phenomenology of Perception* published in 1945, expressed his hopes in a possibility of post-Cartesian philosophy grounded in perception. The second part in *The Eye and the Mind* of 1961 and the incomplete manuscript known as *The Visible and the Invisible*, that I will refer to more specifically.

Merleau-Ponty insisted that the structural dimension of perception was fully compatible with the meaningfulness that we perceive in the world. He believed that at least in the human order formal structure and subjective meaning were intertwined. Merleau-Ponty reached several arresting conclusions about its visual component in *The Structure of Behaviour*.¹⁵⁷ Among them, he contended that the Gestaltist nature of non-scientific perception meant that a continuum existed between them, science grew out of natural perception, rather than being its antithesis or corrective. As Jay illustrates, Merleau-Ponty discussed the implications of the inevitably perspectivalist dimensions of all seeing.¹⁵⁸ 'Perspective does not appear to me a subjective deformation of things', he argued, 'but, on the contrary, to be one of their properties, perhaps their essential property'.¹⁵⁹

threatened when the self identifies with the other's look. Here the Cartesian self-reflecting cogito is replaced by a self that is constituted by the gaze of the other. In Martin Jay, op cit., p. 285

156 Ibid., p. 298.

157 Where he began with an account of the distinction between the scientific understanding of light, which he called 'reallight' and which the medieval world knew as lumen, and the qualitative experience of light in naive consciousness, which he termed 'phenomenal light' and the medieval thinkers lux. The seeming inconsistency between two notions of light did not mean that vision was self-contradictory and even in some sense "irrational," but rather that subjective visual experience and its scientific description were ultimately part of the same order of signification.

158 He followed Husserl in arguing that multiple profiles (*Abschattungen*) indicated the existence of an actual "thing" in the world transcending all of its aspects.

159 Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 186. Nontranscendental perspectivalism reunited humans with the objective world. He continues by stating 'Far from introducing a coefficient of subjectivity into perception, it provides it on the contrary with the assurance of communicating with a world which is richer than what we know of it, that is, of communicating with a real world.'

Merleau-Ponty became suspicious of some of Sartre's thought implications. Whereas Sartre, as previously stated, separated imagination from perception, Merleau-Ponty refused to separate the two realms so categorically.¹⁶⁰ Jay states that in Merleau-Ponty's thought, perception was intertwined not only with the scientific and rational intellect, but also with the artistic imagination.¹⁶¹ In Merleau-Ponty intersubjective relations are not constituted by a duel of objectifying gazes and they cannot be reduced to their visual component alone. Sight for him had to be integrated with the other senses in order for us to 'make sense' of our experience of the world. In *Phenomenology of Perception*,¹⁶² Merleau-Ponty conceptualised perceptual experience. In this work, by criticising both *empiricist* and *intellectualist*, because factoring out the actual phenomenon of perception itself and for whom the world was construed as a spectacle to be observed from afar by a disembodied mind, he intended to place the experience of perception prior to the constitution of the body as object and the cogito as rational subject. This was done by investigating pre-reflexive phenomenal field he called 'being in the world'.¹⁶³

In *Phenomenology of Perception* as much as in the book *The Structure of Behavior*, he frequently emphasised the imbrication of the senses, each of which creates its own perceived world and at the same time contributes to an integrated world of experience. In Jay's view he sought to level the traditional sensual hierarchy and question the elevation of sight above the other senses. In particular, the role of touch

160 Ibid., p. 305.

161 In his essay on Cezanne, for Merleau-Ponty, the great artist does not negate perception; he or she renews it by returning us to that primordial experience before the split between imagination and sensation, expression and imitation.

162 Amongst the publications commenting on Merleau-Ponty's work: Monika M. Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary*, London, 1989. Other useful treatments can be found in Gary Brent Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: A Search for the Limits of Consciousness*, Athens, Ohio, 1981; Remy C. Kwant, *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, Pittsburgh, 1963; Garth Gillan, ed., *The Horizon of the Flesh: Critical Perspectives on the Thought of Merleau-Ponty*, Carbondale, 111.,

needed emphasis, Merleau-Ponty going so far as to claim that it even played a role in our perception of colour, which was dependent on light cast on the textured surface of objects in the world.¹⁶⁴ ‘The senses,’ wrote Merleau-Ponty, ‘translate each other without any need of an interpreter, and are mutually comprehensible without the intervention of any idea.’¹⁶⁵

If the phenomenal field linking, but not fully uniting, lived body and natural environment was based on the communication of the senses, so too the human *Lebenswelt* entailed reciprocity rather than conflict. Indeed, the very bodily experience of being at once viewer and viewed, toucher and object of the touch, was an ontological prerequisite for that internalisation of otherness underlying human intersubjectivity.

This concept was by Merleau-Ponty defined as the *Chiasm* or *intertwining*: ‘*Chiasm*, instead of the For the Other: that means that there is not only a me-other rivalry, but a co-functioning. We function as a one unique body’. He continues by stating: ‘The *Chiasm* is not only a me other exchange, it is also an exchange between me and the world, between the perceiving and the perceived: what begins as a thing ends as consciousness of the thing, what begins as a “state of consciousness” ends as a thing.’¹⁶⁶

In contrast with Sartre, Merleau-Ponty posited a co-operative, complementary world of intersubjectivity in which mutual regard is a visual as well as emotional phenomenon.

What he would call *tele-vision*¹⁶⁷ meant a kind of transcendence of the isolated subject and a sympathetic entry into the subjectivity of others. The objectifying look of the other

1973; Samuel B. Mallm, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*, New Haven, 1979; Albert Rabil, Jr., *Merleau-Ponty: Existentialist of the Social World*, New York, 1967.

¹⁶³ Jay, M., op. cit., p. 308.

¹⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 209.

¹⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 235.

¹⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968, p.215 (my italic of *Chiasm*).

was unbearable, he insisted, only 'because it takes the place of possible communication,' but 'the refusal to communicate... is still a form of communication.'¹⁶⁸

After *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty returned to his initial formulations about the primacy of perception and was in the process of a major revision of his thought when his work was abruptly interrupted in May of 1961.¹⁶⁹ In 1960, *Eye and Mind* presented what appeared to be a preliminary statement of his general conclusions. After his death, Claude Lefort collected the first part of his manuscript and the notes for the second as *The Visible and the Invisible*.

Fragmentary, uncompleted, and often obscure, this body of work is not easy to interpret in an unequivocal way; Jay argues that Merleau-Ponty continued his search for a redemption of sight, even for a new ocularcentric ontology. Rather than talking of perception in general, with its implicit levelling of the hierarchy of the senses, he now concentrated on the sense of sight more than any other.

In the later stage of my research, this process of thinking became an important reference in that, similarly, as I started to approach the subject of all senses, aiming to go beyond the primacy of vision, I found my own investigation going back and focusing again on vision through investigating the consequences of the absence of it.

Merleau-Ponty's account on the enigmas of visibility and invisibility was the privileged avenue of entry into the question of Being and he did so while still defending the special role of painting as opposed to other arts like music. The text

¹⁶⁷ Term he used in various places throughout his work e.g. in *Visible and the Invisible*, p. 273.

¹⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 361

¹⁶⁹ The earliest effort to realise his project, the unfinished manuscript written before 1952 called *The Prose of the World*, produced one lengthy article entitled *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*, published in his lifetime.

that best supports this interpretation is *Eye and the Mind*, which begins with a comparison between science and painting. Jay suggests¹⁷⁰ that *Eye and Mind* would seem like an apotheosis of vision and in three ways, Merleau-Ponty's later work can be interpreted as anticipating some of the themes of later contributors to the anti-ocularcentric discourse. First, his new emphasis on the *'flesh of the world'* rather than the lived, perceiving body meant that the notion of vision itself began to assume a post-humanist inflection. Second, Merleau-Ponty's increasingly sympathetic interest in psychoanalysis, especially the work of Lacan, meant that he came to acknowledge certain of the problematic implications of the visual constitution of the self. And finally, his growing fascination with language would introduce a potential tension between perception and expression, which later thinkers would explicitly develop in anti-ocularcentric directions.

The post-humanist implications of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the *flesh of the world* were anticipated in several ways before *The Visible and the Invisible*.

Philosophers have at times thought to account for our vision by the image or reflection things form upon our retina. This was because they presupposed a second man behind the retinal image who had different eyes and a different retinal image responsible for seeing the first. Merleau-Ponty added in *The Visible and the Invisible* that 'the analytic of *Being and Nothingness* is the seer who forgets that he has a body and that what he sees is always beneath what he sees, who tries to force the passage toward pure being and pure nothingness by installing himself in pure vision, who makes himself a visionary, but who is thrown back to his own opacity as a seer and to the depth of being'.¹⁷¹ Jay states that Merleau-Ponty's dethroning of the observing subject, whether Cartesian, Sartrean, Husserlian, or Marxist, went so far that at times he seemed to deny not only the link

170 Op. cit., p. 316

171 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 88.

between vision and the mind, but also between vision and the lived body.¹⁷² In *The Visible and the Invisible* he would write:

There is here no problem of the alter ego because it is not/who sees, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal.¹⁷³

It is precisely because of this remarkable anonymity that Merleau-Ponty began to talk of 'the visible and the invisible', 'those utterly impersonal phenomena, rather than the viewer and the viewed'. He thus contested the assumption that representation by itself could adequately capture the world, and contended that 'what I want to do is to restore the world as a meaning of Being absolutely different from the *represented*, that is, as the vertical Being which none of the *representations* exhaust and which all 'reach,' the wild Being'.¹⁷⁴

Wild Being, the flesh of the world, thus became the fundamental category for Merleau-Ponty, grounding both subject and object, viewer and viewed, mind and body. But although ultimately one, thus allowing the narcissism of vision, the flesh is not a specular unity or Idealist identity. Instead, it contains internal articulations and differentiations, which Merleau-Ponty struggled to capture with terms like dehiscence, separation, latency, reversibility, and circularity.¹⁷⁵ Neither purely transparent nor completely opaque, the flesh is an interplay of dimensionalities of light and shadow. Consciousness can never have a

172 Jay, op. cit. p. 318.

173 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.142

174 Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, p. 253

175 Jay, op.cit., p.319.

completely positive vision of reality as full presence, because it inevitably has a blind spot (*punctum caecum*):

What it does not see is what makes it see, is its tie to Being, its corporeity, are the existentials by which the world becomes visible, is the flesh wherein the object is born. It is inevitable that the consciousness be mystified, inverted, indirect, in principle it sees the things through the other end, in principle it disregards Being and prefers the object to it.¹⁷⁶

Being was the larger context in which the object was situated. Being is in the interplay of the visible and invisible, which no humanist subject can ever truly see.

If Merleau-Ponty's meditations on the flesh of the world thus undermined traditional notions of a coherent viewing subject and raised invisibility to the same ontological status as visibility, so too did his cautious embrace of psychoanalysis. Particularly, Merleau-Ponty took from Lacan the recognition that the *Mirror Stage* could well be the source of an alienate self and conflict between visually constituted selves.¹⁷⁷

On the other hand, Lacan referred to Merleau-Ponty, particularly to the notes on *the glove* stating that they correspond : '[...] very exactly to the schemata [...] for example, the note concerning what he calls the turning inside-out of the finger of a glove, in as much as it seems to appear there-note the way in which the leather envelopes the fur in a winter glove-that consciousness in its illusion of seeing itself seeing itself, finds its basis in the inside-out structure of the gaze [...]'.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Merleau Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, p. 248.

¹⁷⁷ He began to appreciate its substantive contribution to the philosophical problems he so obsessively explored. One aspect of the unconscious which Merleau-Ponty found especially congenial complemented his earlier interests in the cognitive development of children, the role of the so-called mirror stage in creating the knowing self.

¹⁷⁸ Lacan, J., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 82

Lacan investigated the theme of vision when he integrated the concept of *scotomization* into his analysis of psychosis and when he critically appropriated Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic ontology of the visible and the invisible, which he redescribed in terms of *the eye* and *the gaze*.

Lacan specifically referred to Merleau-Ponty's concept of the chiasmic intertwining of *the eye* and *the gaze* in four seminars he gave in 1964 in the collection called *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* under the rubric, *Of the Gaze as Objet Petit a*. Lacan began the first seminar *The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze* by paying tribute to Merleau-Ponty's pioneering interrogation of vision, in particular the recently published *The Visible and the Invisible*.

This work, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, may indicate for us the moment of arrival of the philosophical tradition – the tradition that begins with Plato with the promulgation of the idea, of which one may say that, setting out from an aesthetic world, it is determined by an end given to being as sovereign good, thus attaining a beauty that is also its limit. And it is not by chance that Maurice Merleau-Ponty recognised its guide in the eye. In this work, which is both an end and a beginning, you will find both a recapitulation and a step forward in the path of what had first been formulated in Merleau-Ponty's *La Phenomenologie de la perception* [... This] brings us back, then, to the regulation of form, which is governed, not only by the subject's eye, but by his expectation's, his movement, his grip, his muscular and visceral emotion – in

short, his constitutive presence, directed in what is called his total intentionality.¹⁷⁹

For Lacan, Merleau-Ponty was right in dividing the scopic field, but he was mistaken in interpreting it as a *Chiasm* of visibility and invisibility, that which Lacan conceptualised in terms of *the eye* and *the Gaze*. Lacan by stating ‘I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides’, indicates to us the pre-existence of a gaze.¹⁸⁰

To explore the implications of the scopic drive, Lacan turned, in the next seminar to the theme of anamorphosis through Holbein’s painting of *The Ambassadors*. Before treating it directly, he began by commenting on Paul Valery’s *La Jeune Parque*, in which the main character talks of seeing himself seeing. The problem with this formulation, Lacan suggested, was that it still remained indebted to a Cartesian notion of the subject as constituted by the eye alone: ‘The privilege of the subject seems to be established here from that bipolar reflexive relation by which, as soon as I perceive, my representations belong to me.’¹⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological alternative, according to Lacan, lacked the courage to take its *Chiasmic* conclusions to their nonreciprocal end. Merleau-Ponty, he charged, had fallen back on an alleged substratum prior to reflection: ‘For him, it is a question of restoring ... of reconstituting the way by which, not from the body, but from something that he calls the flesh of the world, the original point of vision was able to emerge . . . what I would like to call the function of seeingness (voyeur).’¹⁸²

Psychoanalysis searches for a primordial voyeur, anterior to the split between the eye and

179 Lacan, J., *The four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, translated by Sheridan, A., Penguin Books London first published 1979, 1994, p.71. This is how Lacan talks about Merleau Ponty’s thought to show the dependence of the visible on that which places under the eye of the seer. The eye is only the metaphor for something that is prior to the eye, the pre-existence of the *Gaze*: ‘I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides’.

180 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 72.

181 Lacan, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

the *Gaze* and it does so because it regards consciousness as irremediably limited, and institutes it as a principle of idealisation and *meconnaissance*. The importance of construing vision as a scopic drive is that it then must seek an erotic object outside of itself for fulfilment: this is the role of the *Gaze*. For Lacan, the object of drives cannot be realised, which is why the eye and the *Gaze* are shown in perpetual disharmony.

Lacan reintroduced the visually inflected not merely as an explanation for psychosis, but as a dimension of the psyche per se. Blind spots, he implied, were incurable. The misprision of visually constituted consciousness operates, as Lacan had earlier claimed with reference to the mechanism of foreclosure, by seeking to overcome its sense of incompleteness through identification: ‘The interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it – namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real, whose name, in our algebra, is the *objet a*’.¹⁸³ Martin Jay explains that ‘the *objet a* (object small a) was Lacan’s term for the object of lack or the missing object that will seemingly satisfy the drive for plenitude, “a” being the first letter of the French word for “other” (*l’autrui*)’.¹⁸⁴

To explicate his assertion that in scopic relations the *Gaze* functions as the *objet a*, Lacan turned to Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* in which the reifying power of the *Gaze* was explored. Although he challenged Sartre’s claim that the eye cannot see the eye that looks at it, he agreed that the *Gaze* had the quality of being unseen: ‘The gaze I encounter – you

182 Lacan, op. cit., pp 81-82.

183 Lacan, op. cit., p. 83.

184 Jay, op. cit., p.361. He also explains that at its most fundamental level, it is the phallus which the child (of whatever sex, according to Lacan) wishes to be in order to make up for the mother’s alleged lack, her apparent castration. It can then be transformed into the Symbolic register as the metonymic object of desire which motivates the split subject’s interminable search for a unity it can never achieve. But it operates as well in the realm of the Imaginary, where ‘the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation is the *Gaze*. . . . From the moment that this *Gaze* appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure’.

can find this in Sartre's own writings, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.¹⁸⁵

In his seminar, entitled *The Line and the Light*, Lacan reformulated and expanded his argument of the *Gaze*, using triangulated schemas to illustrate the chiasmic intertwining of eye and *Gaze* (fig. 36a). The first, that of the eye, signified Cartesian perspectivalist vision, in which the viewer's monocular eye was at the apex and the object at the far wall of the triangle. The image was on another line parallel to that wall, but halfway between it and the eye/apex. The second schema, that of the *Gaze*, put a point of light at the apex, the picture at the far wall, and what Lacan called the screen halfway between. Here the subject is placed not at the apex, but at the midpoint, as if it were an image on a screen in a generalised perceptual field, not a seeing eye. This subject, Lacan contended, 'is caught, manipulated, captured in the field of vision'.¹⁸⁶

185 Lacan, *op.cit.*, p.84.

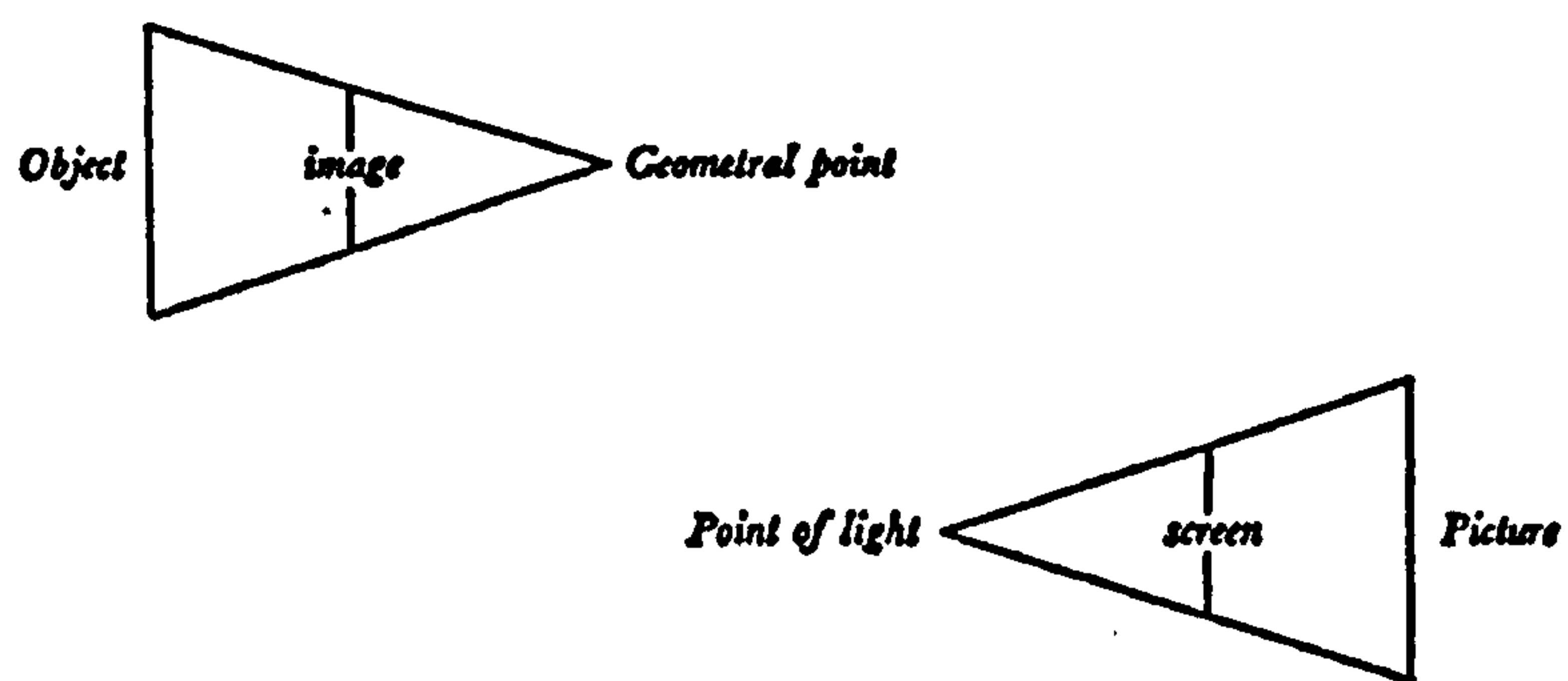


figure 36a. Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, pag 91

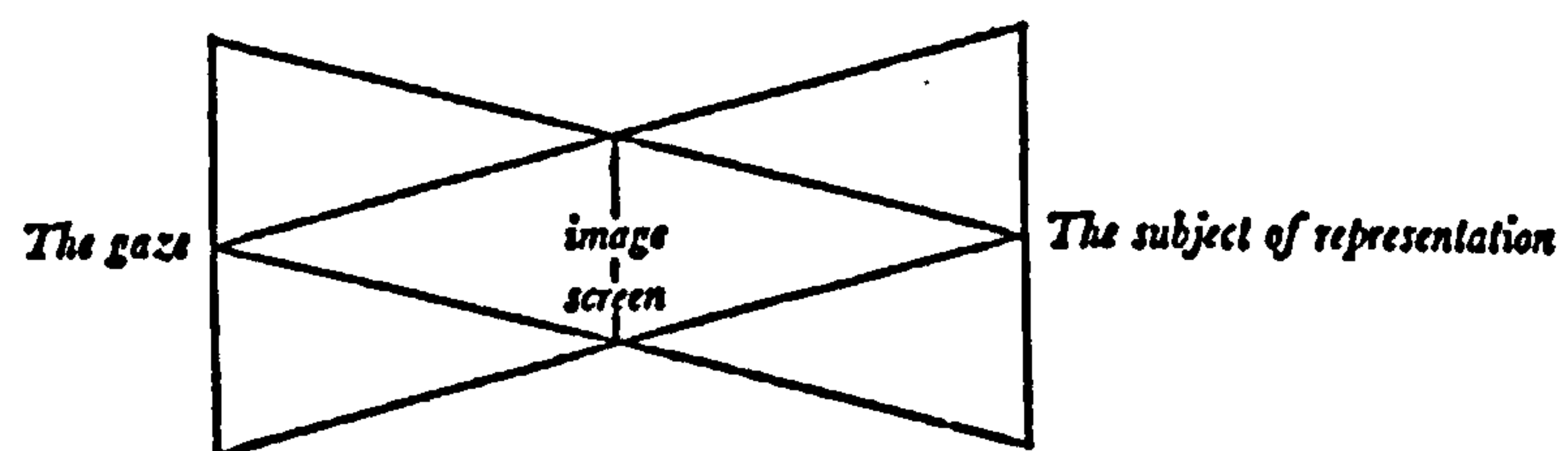


figure 36b. Lacan, op. cit., pag 106

¹⁸⁶ Lacan, op. cit., p. 92.

Developing his argument in relationship to anamorphosis, Lacan understood that Holbein's anamorphosed skull with its invocation of the nothingness of death expresses this subject trapped in a visual field it cannot master.

The figure of the dihedron (fig. 36b), introduced by one of Lacan's friends, Roger Caillois, resurfaced in his attempt to clarify the relation between eye and *Gaze*: the intersection of two planes. Lacan used the dihedron to superimpose his two visual triangles in inverted form. The chiasmic interposition of the two planes created a new figure in which the middle sections of both triangles, the image in that of the eye, the screen in that of the *Gaze*, coincided in the form of a divided subject. At its centre was an opaque line that as Jay suggests was very different from the transparent window typical of the Albertian subject's view on the world.¹⁸⁷

To clarify its implications, Lacan offered the anecdote, which he claimed was true, of himself fishing in Brittany. A friend pointed to a sardine can in the water and said laughingly, 'You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!'. Ruminating on the lesson his friend had drawn from the floating can, Lacan concluded that it was mistaken, for the can 'was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically'.¹⁸⁸ Lacan, in other words, felt that he was indeed in the centre of a conflictual visual field, at once the eye looking at the can and the screen in an impersonal field of pure monstrosity.

¹⁸⁷ In Jay, *op. cit.*, p.365.

¹⁸⁸ Lacan, *op. cit.*, p. 95

Jay explains that his subjectivity was thus split between the apex at the end of the triangle of the eye and the line in the middle of the triangle of the *Gaze*. He was both the viewer of Holbein's painting and the smeared skull in its visual field.

Norman Bryson discusses¹⁸⁹ the same anecdote in relation to *The Ambassadors*:

'What is the source of this strangely empowered look back Lacan's account depends, not on the irruption of another personal viewer but the irruption, in the visual field, of the Signifier'.¹⁹⁰ Bryson suggests that for human beings collectively to orchestrate their visual experience together it is required that each submit his or her retinal experience to the socially agreed description(s) of an intelligible world. Vision is socialised, and thereafter deviation from this social construction of visual reality can be measured and named, variously, as hallucination, misrecognition, or 'visual disturbance' Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience. Between retina and world is inserted a screen of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena. This screen casts a shadow: sometimes Lacan calls it a scotoma, sometimes a stain. For when we look through the screen, what we see is caught up in a network that comes to us from the outside. Bryson argues that when we learn to speak, we are inserted into systems of discourse that were there before we were, and will remain after we will be gone. Similarly, when we learn to see socially, that is, when we begin to articulate our retinal experience with the codes of recognition that come to us from our social milieu(s), we are inserted into systems of visual discourse that saw the world before we did,

¹⁸⁹ Bryson, N., 'The Gaze in the Expanded Field', Foster, H. ed., *Vision and Visuality*, New York, Dia Art Foundation 1988, New Press Printing 1999, pp.87-108.

¹⁹⁰ Bryson, N., op. cit., p.89.

and will go on seeing after we see no longer. Into our visual field something cuts, cuts across, namely the network of signifiers.

In referring directly to Lacan's example from Holbein, Bryson states that Lacan's analysis of vision unfolds in the following terms: the viewing subject does not stand at the centre of a perceptual horizon, and cannot command the chains and series of signifiers passing across the visual domain. Vision unfolds to the side of, in tangent to, the field of the other. And to that form of seeing Lacan gives a name: seeing in the field of the other, seeing under the *Gaze*. 'In Lacan, something cuts across the space of sight and darkens it: the *Gaze*.' Bryson questions the paranoid coloration given to the *Gaze* by Lacan's account of vision and painting.¹⁹¹ He compares it with Eastern painter Ch'an's examples that point to regimes of visuality in which the decentering of the subject may be thought in terms that are not essentially catastrophic. Bryson then insists: 'if, in certain "alternative" scopic regimes, decentering is unaccompanied by the sense of menace or persecution, why does Lacan provide only one model of vision and of painting, that of the negative or terrorizing gaze?' Bryson gives two answers. The first concerns a rather deep uncertainty in Lacan concerning the role of cultural variation in the construction of subjectivity.¹⁹² Bryson continues by illustrating the second answer as an extension of the first '[...] Lacan's portrayal of the Imaginary gives a centrality to his argument that is culturally specific, not universal [...]'¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Although in the discussion after the presentation Martin Jay says 'I think his early discussion of the "mirror stage" as the source of a false notion of the integrity of the ego does reflect a general hostility to the *Gaze* as a source of ideological notions of selfhood. But in the later *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, a very difficult text, Lacan perhaps moves away from an idea of vision as strictly paranoid and terroristic, and this maybe why he draws on Merleau-Ponty to nuance the problem[...]' in Hal Foster, op. cit. p. 110.

¹⁹² In Bryson's view, Lacan's description of how the subject is formed unfolds in terms of culture: it is in the irruption of the symbolic order and of signification that human subjectivity is precipitated, and since the composition of the symbolic order and of the codes of signification are historically and culturally variable, the subject in Lacan is given by culture and history, not by nature. In Bryson's view, we are invited to think of Lacan's terms, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, as operating in all of these adult arenas (workplace and the family, in the institutions of education, medicine, law, property, religion, government), and not only at the stage of the subject's initial formation (in childhood). Yet Lacan's descriptions tend to privilege the genetic and formative moment, not the long and diverse elaborations of adult life. This concentration on subjective genesis makes it difficult to think through the question of cultural variation.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 104.

Lacan turned to the realm of painting particularly in the seminar *What Is a Picture?*¹⁹⁴ when he argued that in pictures, something of the *Gaze* is always manifested, but the spectator is invited by the artist to ‘lay down his gaze there as one lays down one’s weapons. This is the pacifying Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the laying down, of the gaze’. There is, however, a certain duplicity in all of this, which Lacan suggested with the concept of the *lure*. In trompe l’oeil paintings in particular, the *Gaze* in fact triumphs over the eye.

Martin Jay suggests that the discourse on the *Gaze* is similar to the negative dialectic of lovers described by Sartre: ‘When in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that – You never look at me from the place from which I see you. Conversely, what I look at is never what I wish to see. . . . The relation . . . between painter and the spectator is a play of trompe l’oeil, whatever one says.’ The defeat of the mastering eye in trompe-l’oeil art Lacan dubbed “dompte-regard”.¹⁹⁵ Jay summarising Lacan’s complicated dialectic of the eye and the *Gaze* suggests that his thinking had moved beyond his early discussion of the *Mirror Stage*.¹⁹⁶ The *objet a* Lacan called the *Gaze* is not a mirror image of the subject: it is *Chiasmically* crossed with the subject’s eye. The dyad of specular projection is replaced by a dual and inverted triangulation. ‘Not only have we moved beyond the Imaginary realm of specular doubling into that of the disjunction between desiring subject and its unattainable object, but we are also now on the threshold of explicitly

¹⁹⁴ It was by looking at the art of painters like Cezanne, he reminded his audience, that Merleau-Ponty had overthrown the traditional identity of *Eye and Mind*, in op. cit. p. 101.

¹⁹⁵ Jay, M., op. cit. p. 366.

¹⁹⁶ Jay., op. cit., p.p. 366-368.

intersubjective relations.’¹⁹⁷

I believe that in my own work , as much as in this discussion, vision may be understood as a conflictual field in which the looker is always a body to be observed. Even though on one level the impersonal *Gaze* is a function of the split subject’s internal dynamics, his/her desire for the *objet a* as a way to compensate for a lack, on another level, it expresses the unsublated dialectic of inter-subjective gazes, that dihedron of superimposed visual triangles. As such, vision necessarily enters the realm of the Symbolic.

III.3. From *Gaze* to *Chiasm* in the artist’s work

The relationship of the understanding of theory of the *Gaze* to my practical work was first approached in the piece *Stretched Mirror* exhibited at the Centre for Sculpture of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park as part of the exhibition *A Ritentiva*¹⁹⁸ (September 1997) undertaken before this research project.

Having designed a project for an installation ‘*3D Mirror*’ based on a crossed perspective composition, and having discussed it with an art critic, I realised I had designed a 3D model appropriation of the Lacanian concept.

I started to understand the implications of this in my intention in making the piece, which was also very much grounded in the phenomenological concept of Kinaesthesia (knowing space through movement) of the spectator’s perception of it. I

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 368.

then worked on it with the intention of eliminating the symmetry of that design by stretching one of its sides, so that the inhabiting viewers entering from different sites would have a different view of the illusory inside depth. What I think came out was an appropriation and interpretation of that concept where the *Gaze* was outside, but also very much in the eyes of the other.

The aim of the piece was to investigate the relationship between the viewer and the spatial aspects of my work, particularly his/her experience of it through movement, but when exhibiting the work I noticed mostly how people interacted with each other when inside the built environment, but divided by a transparent screen. In a way each viewer became the other person's mirrored image.

On the other hand the partition stopped the viewer from walking through it, the desire to walk through the other half of the piece seen from the outside remained unfulfilled. It is the desire emerging from the lack of that experience that involves the viewer physically and conceptually, since he or she can only imagine what the view would be like, if he or she were in the position of the other.

¹⁹⁸ Cologni, E., *A Ritentiva*, exhibition catalogue, September 1997, was published on paper and also on the internet online <http://www.pinkink.net/newart/elena.htm>

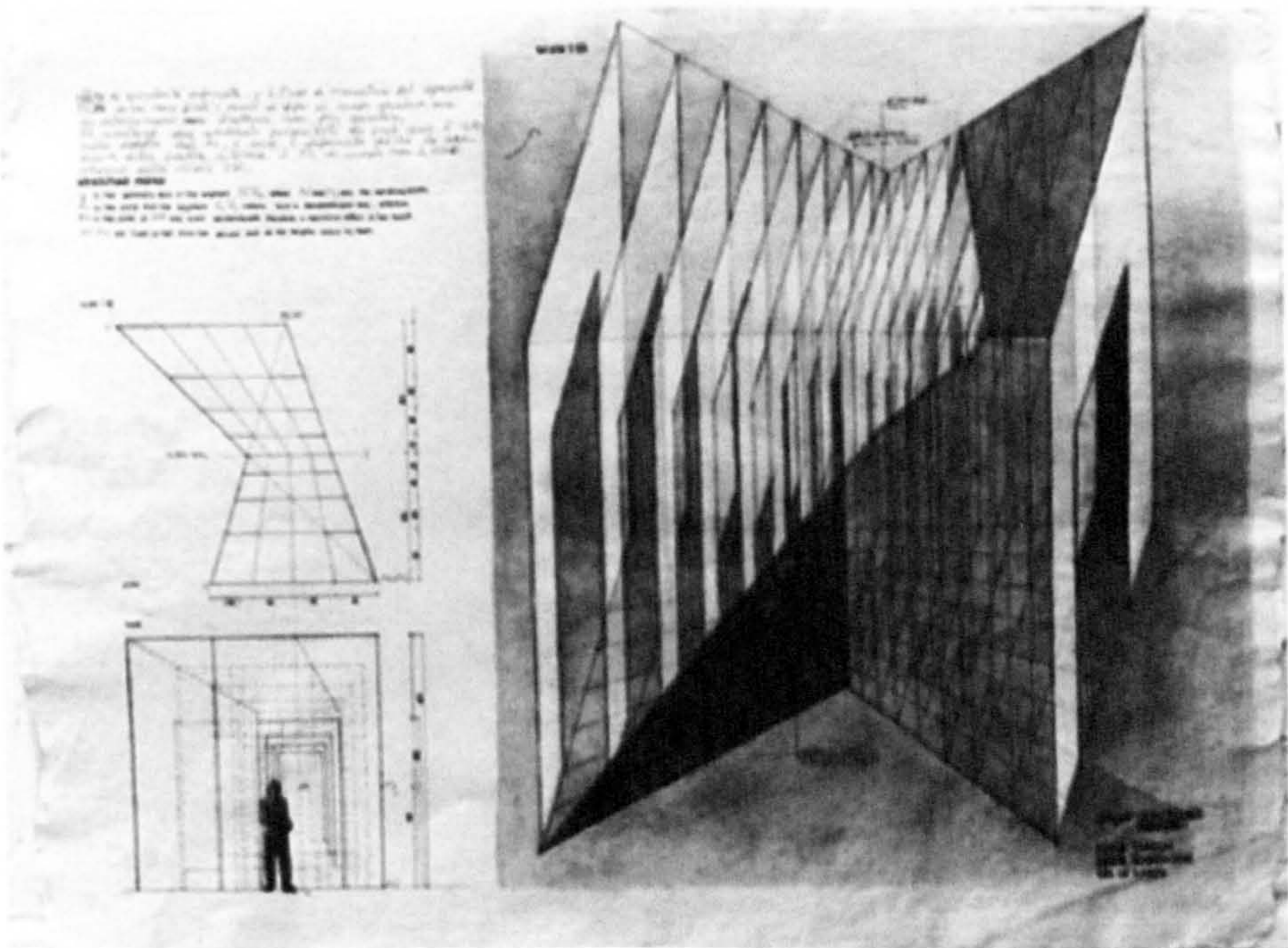
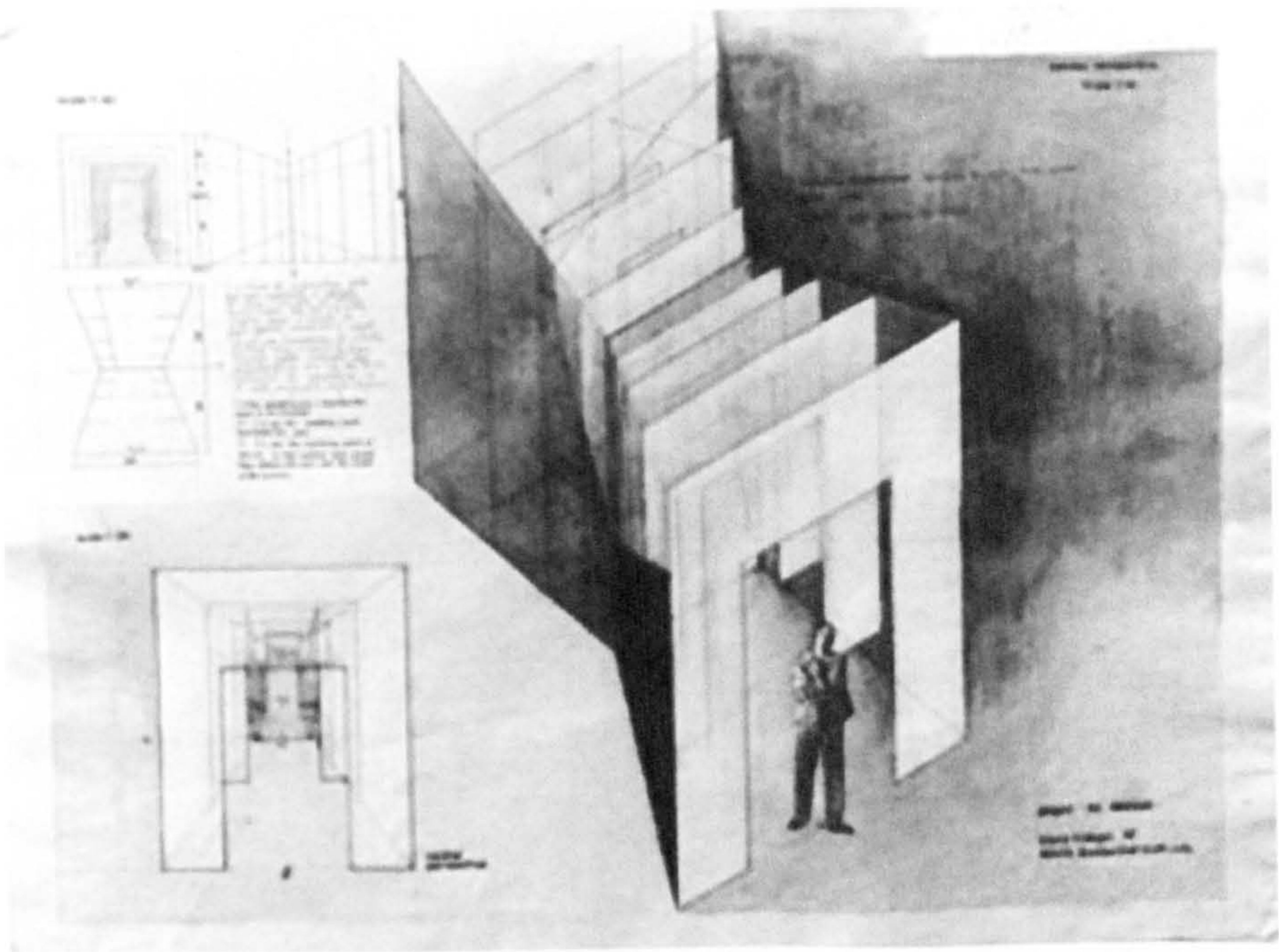


figure 37 Designs for *3D Mirror* and *Stretched Mirror*, 1997

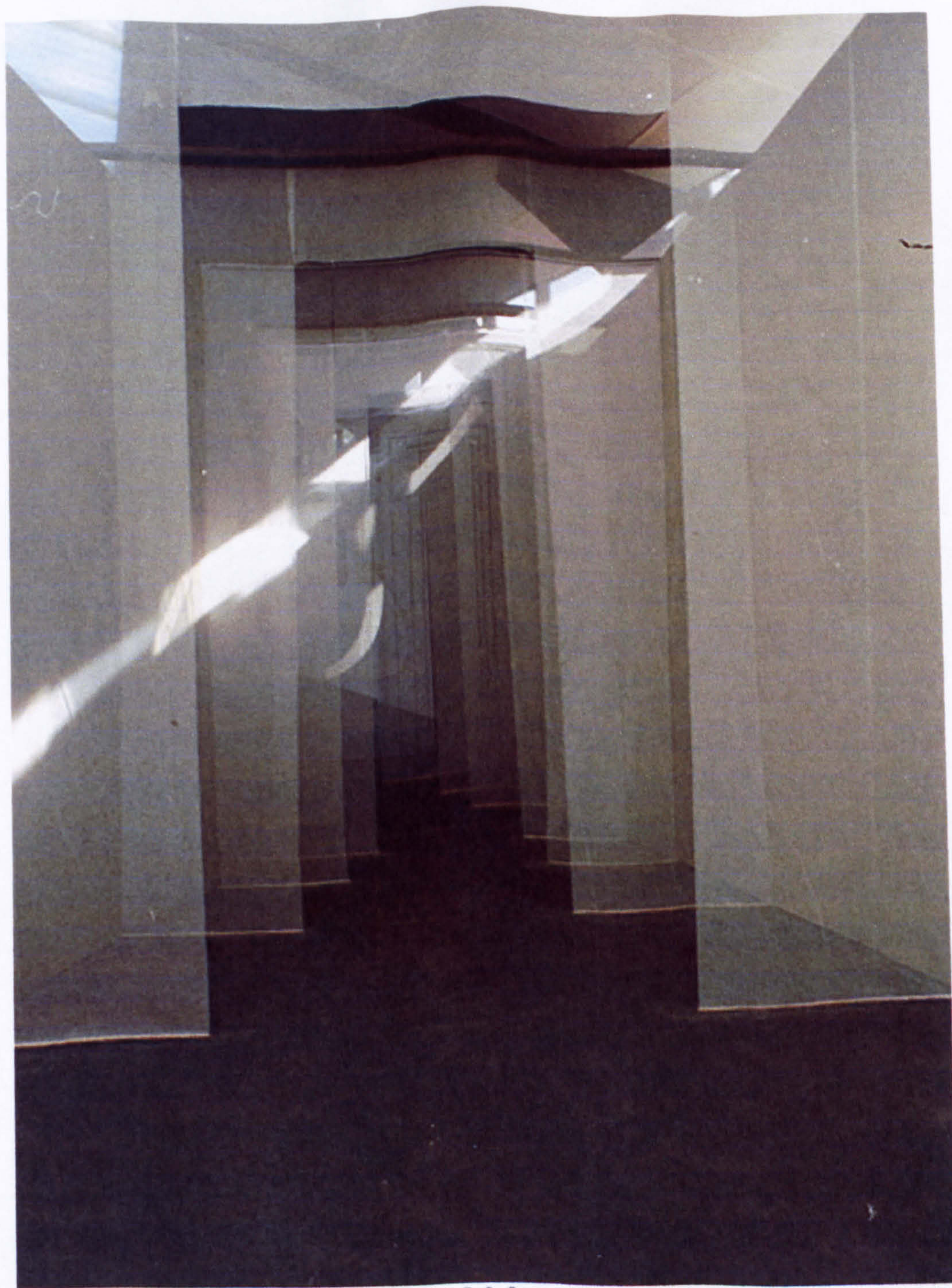


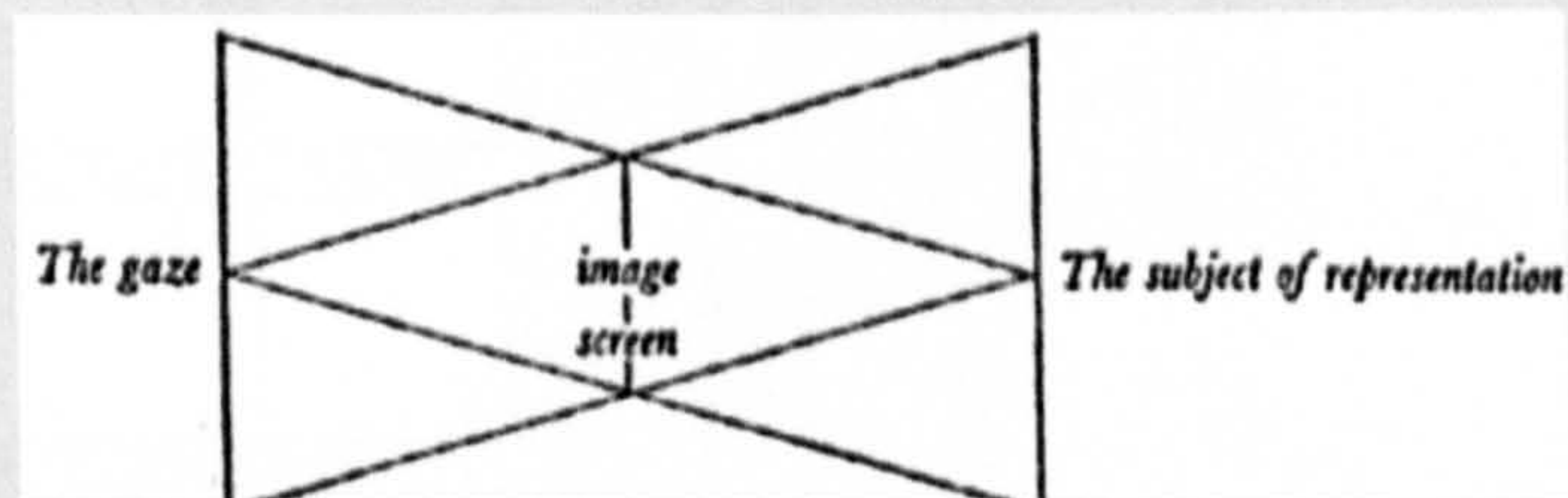
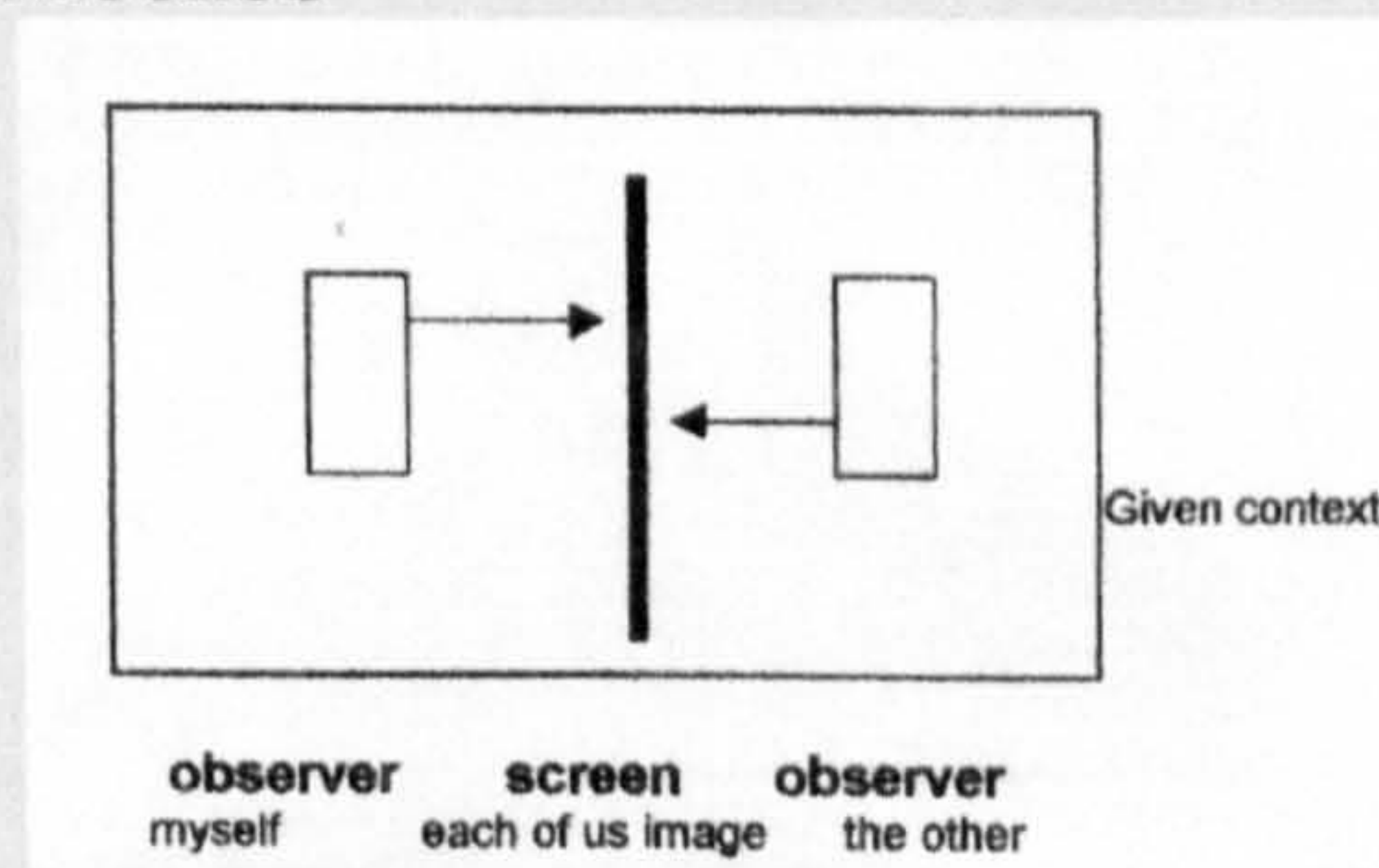
figure 38. *Stretched Mirror*, 5x3x3 mts, Centre for Sculpture,
Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 1997, detail of installation

My own understanding of the concept of the *Gaze* developed through this earlier work completed after my Masters Course at Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds, and was more recently investigated through the piece, previously referred to as *Mirroring*.

'24th of May00

12.30 to go out with my video camera
no specific plan apart from that of asking unknown people to take an image of myself; after having done a couple of attempts I can see that: I take a shot of the environment I am in; I focus on one particular person and then ask him/her to take a picture of myself.'

'MIRRORING THE PROCESS



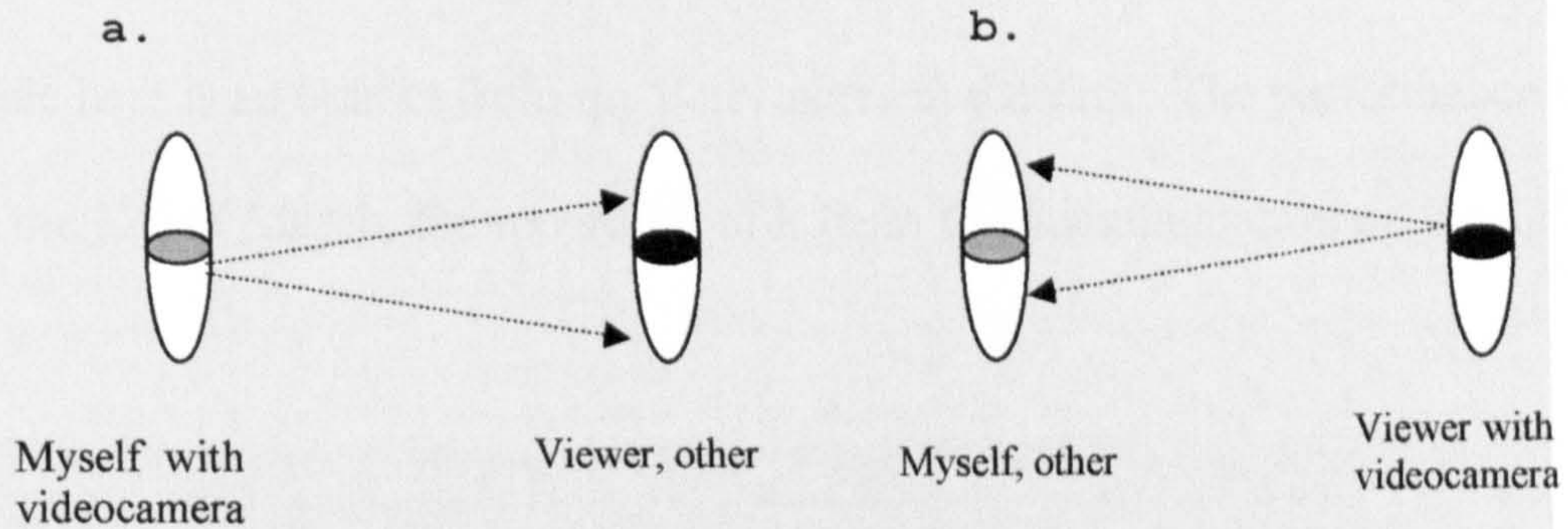
There are here two concepts involved in the process of making:

- one regards the action of meeting the other and communicating to them referring to the Lacan's concept of the gaze.
- The second is the selection process. I choose one image of myself and one image of the person I relate to. To collect images and select out of them the most interesting.

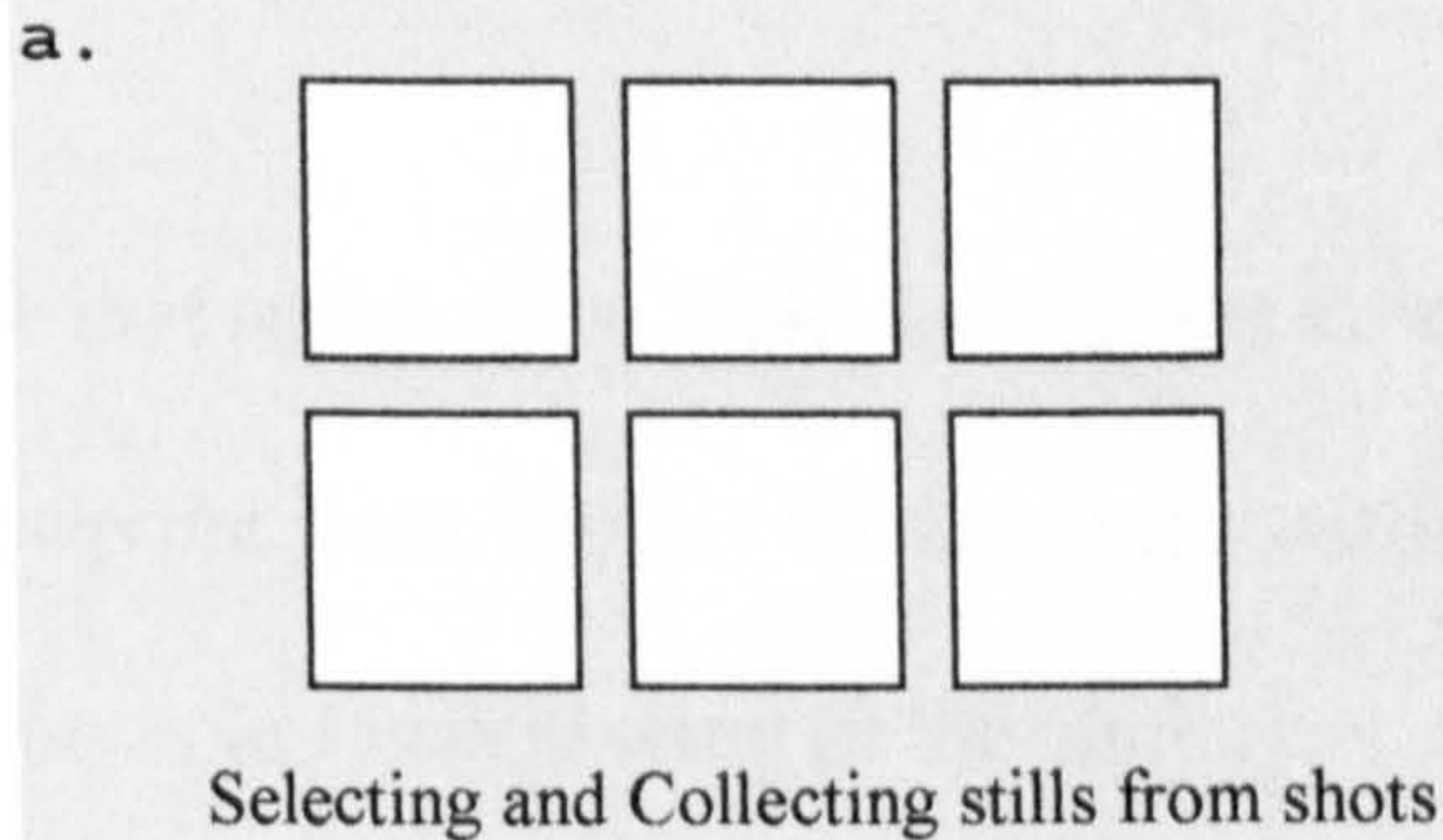
In these two processes what changes is the position of myself in relation to the other, who was before involved in the making as much as me, and then present with the produced material for me to be used.

The two concepts are applied to the two different chronological stages in the work. In these the relationship between the positions of artist and viewer change.

1 stage. An exchange of role between artist and viewer is involved in the happening of the creative act in present time in the shared context. Intentionality is what distinguishes that of the artist. In the first stage we act in order to communicate through the production of each other's images literally projecting each other's images onto the camera screen . We meet at the midpoint, the screen onto which both images are captured. The screen functions as both partition and filter for communication.



2nd stage. It is the artist who acts in present time on the documentation of a past action- in relation to the Other as memory. The viewer is not involved at this stage.'



199

A similar composition concept was applied to a different format in the production of the piece *Ancora Cerca* (performed at National Portrait Gallery, NPG, London 12-14 March 1999 and presented as an 8-monitor video installation at the Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo in Brescia, Italy, between the 6 and 24 April 2002).

¹⁹⁹ From my diary 24th May 2000.

For this piece I worked with the existing video security system of the gallery. After having done some research on the ideal location for the performance within the space, I looked at the monitors to which the video-cameras would send the captured video information and made notes. This enabled me to visualise the space from the viewpoint of the cameras – the space I would physically enter while performing. As an example here is an extract from my diary notes at the time. The performance took place on the 12th of March, the recording of it from the documentation on the 14th.

```
'...room 17-cam.24 -coming from18-sop between sculpture and  
entrance-watch camera  
room 19- cam25 - stop watch camera between glass case and  
sculpture  
room21-cam26 - standing behind sculpture watching camera  
room 22-cam 28- walking from 21 in the middle and out  
room 18- sitting on sofa..'
```

200

I think that as the piece took place, I was aware that I was working on a multiplicity of viewpoint from which I could see myself in the gallery as well as on a number of different role I was playing in the Gallery.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

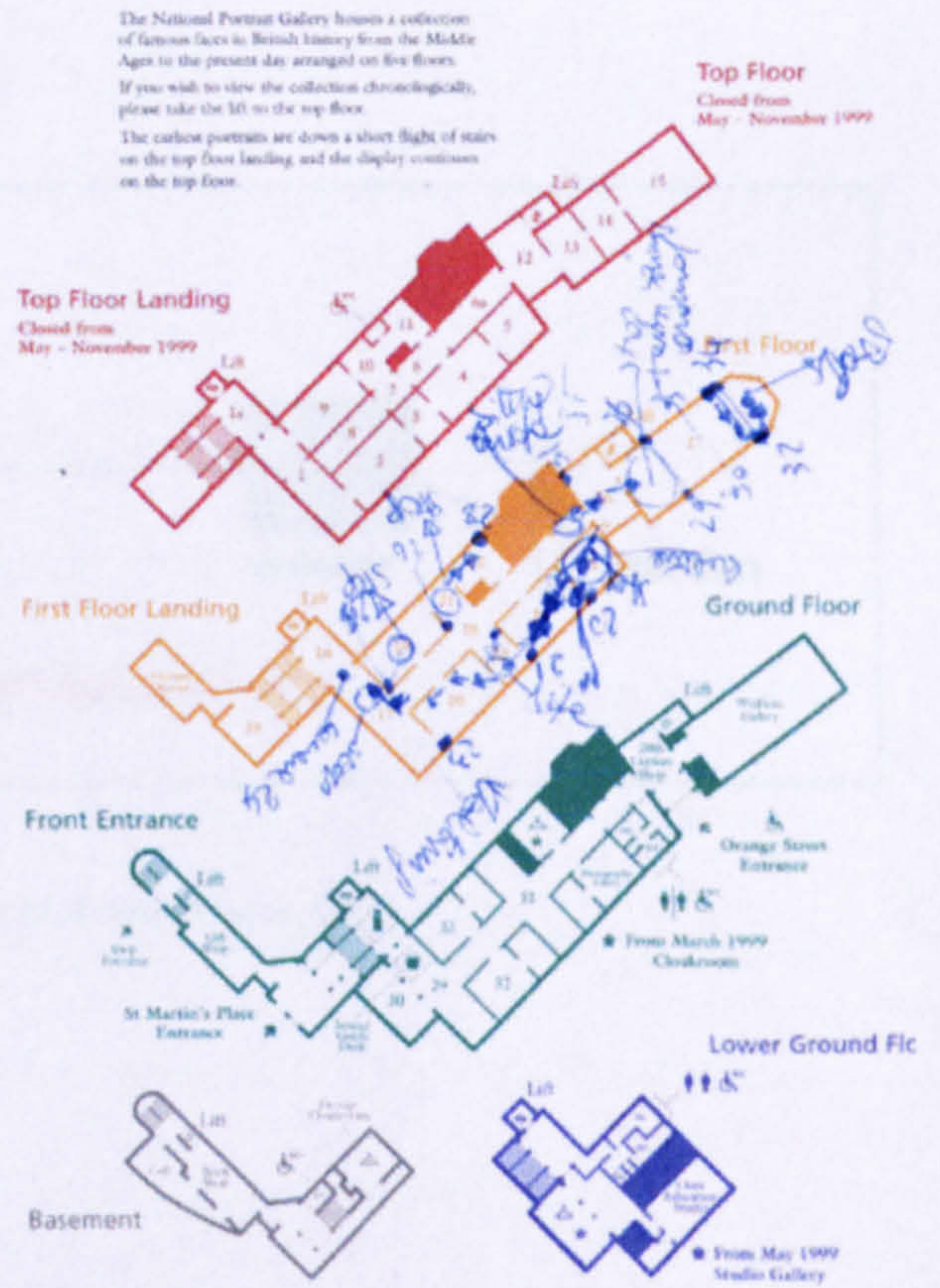
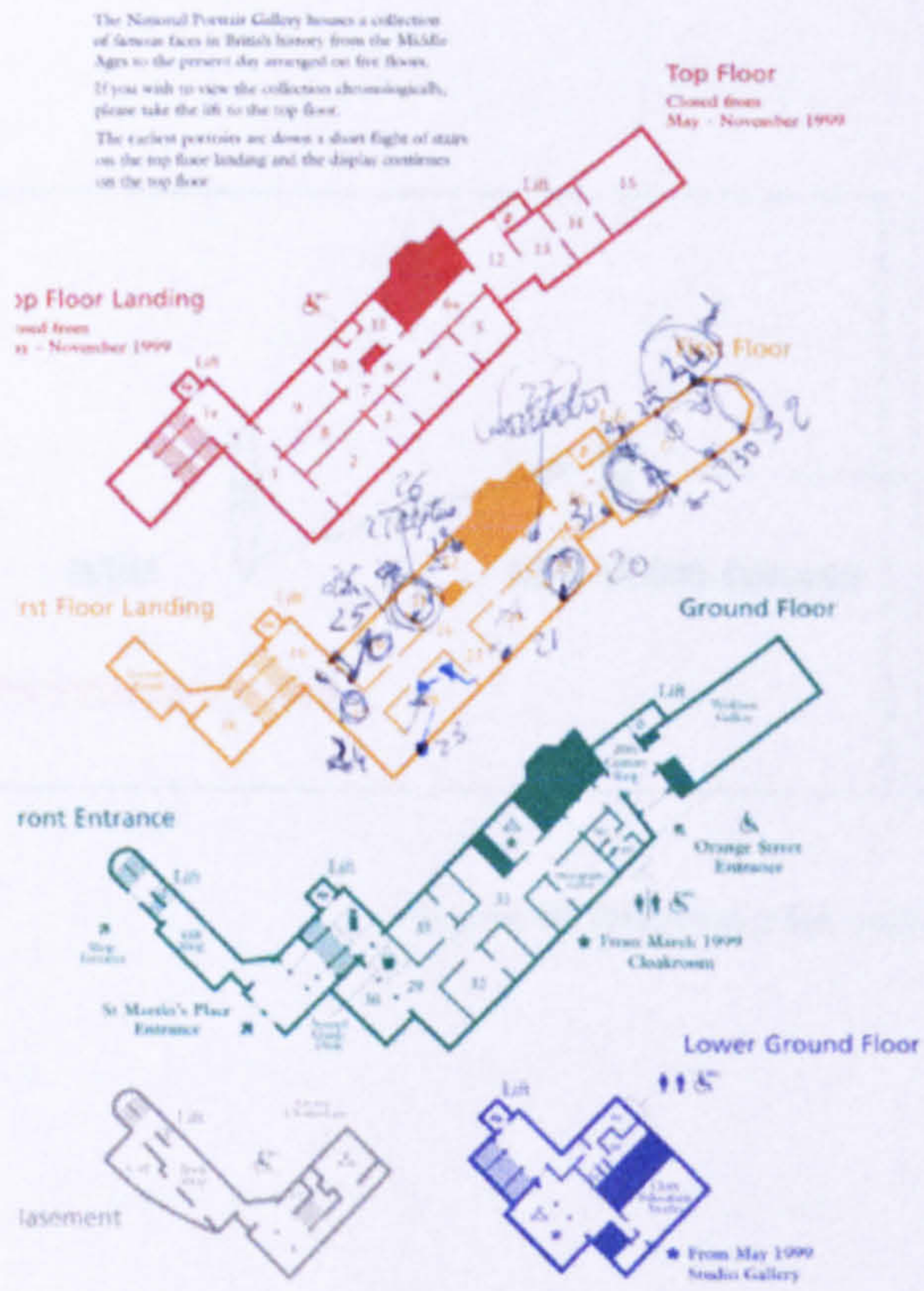


figure 39. Floor plans of the top floor of the NPG with notes for production, 1999



figure 40. Diagram *a* for analysis of *Ancora Cerca*, 2001

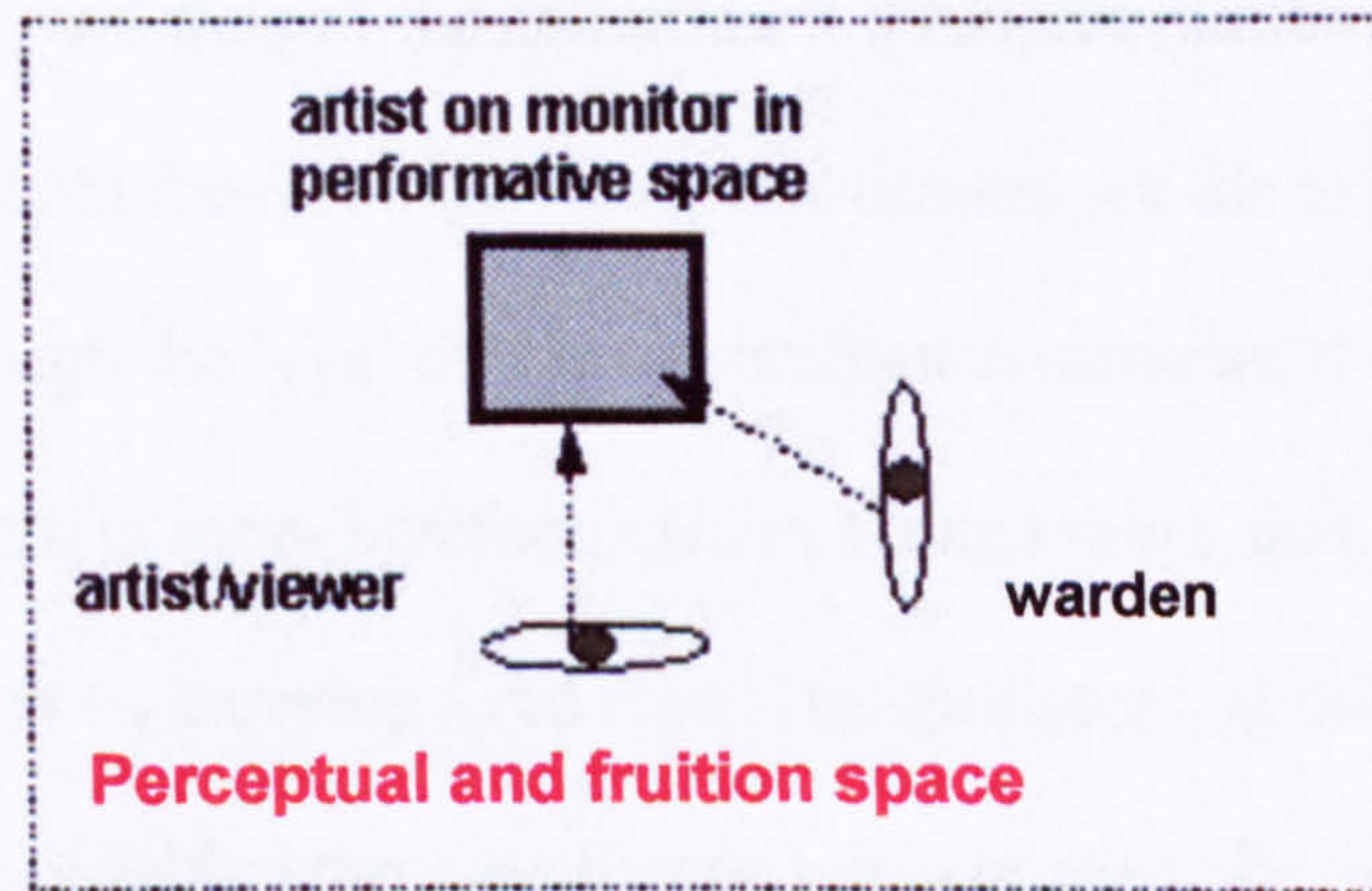


figure 41. Diagram *b*, for analysis of *Ancora Cerca*, 2001

To illustrate the project better I have analysed the event in the stages of relationship between the artist/ the institution/the audience, as described in the following diagrams which are plan views.

1. Diagram *a*. (fig. 40) 12 March – performance: I would stage an encounter with the warden watching the surveillance monitors in the NPG, by walking towards and watching the video-camera of each chosen room. As I address the camera in each room, I become a ‘picture’ in the gallery, yet the camera, fantasised as the *Gaze* of the Other is also, as it were, ‘pictured’ as the spectator sees me imaging what it is seeing and giving myself the things I lack and are looking for.

2. Diagram *b*. (fig. 41) 14 March – video recording: I went back two days after (as required by the gallery for security reasons) and played back the tapes that were stored. I was surprised to find that the system reduced the footage by half, so that not all frames were kept. As a result the quality of the recording was poor. However, I placed the video camera in front of the screen to record the half an hour of the performance: the recording of the action went through a number of filters.

3. Diagram *b*. In the resulting video, the viewers see the evidence of the performance through the ‘eye’ of these surveillance cameras, that have videoed me walking from room to room barefoot, clad in a beige dress, and evoking a romantic spirit of the gallery by carrying a red rose. The spectators, at this stage positioned as the camera when watching the surveillance video or see stills from it, are pictured by myself as I look at the camera. The spectators project what I might have seen from my vantage point in the gallery space. In this gallery dedicated to the construction of identity through picturing it, this performance makes the deep structures of that identity construction emerge, so we all become aware of how much both the artist and the spectator never fully or comfortably, inhabit the illusory space of identification.



figure 42. *Ancora Cerca*,
still from one of the 8 videoclips

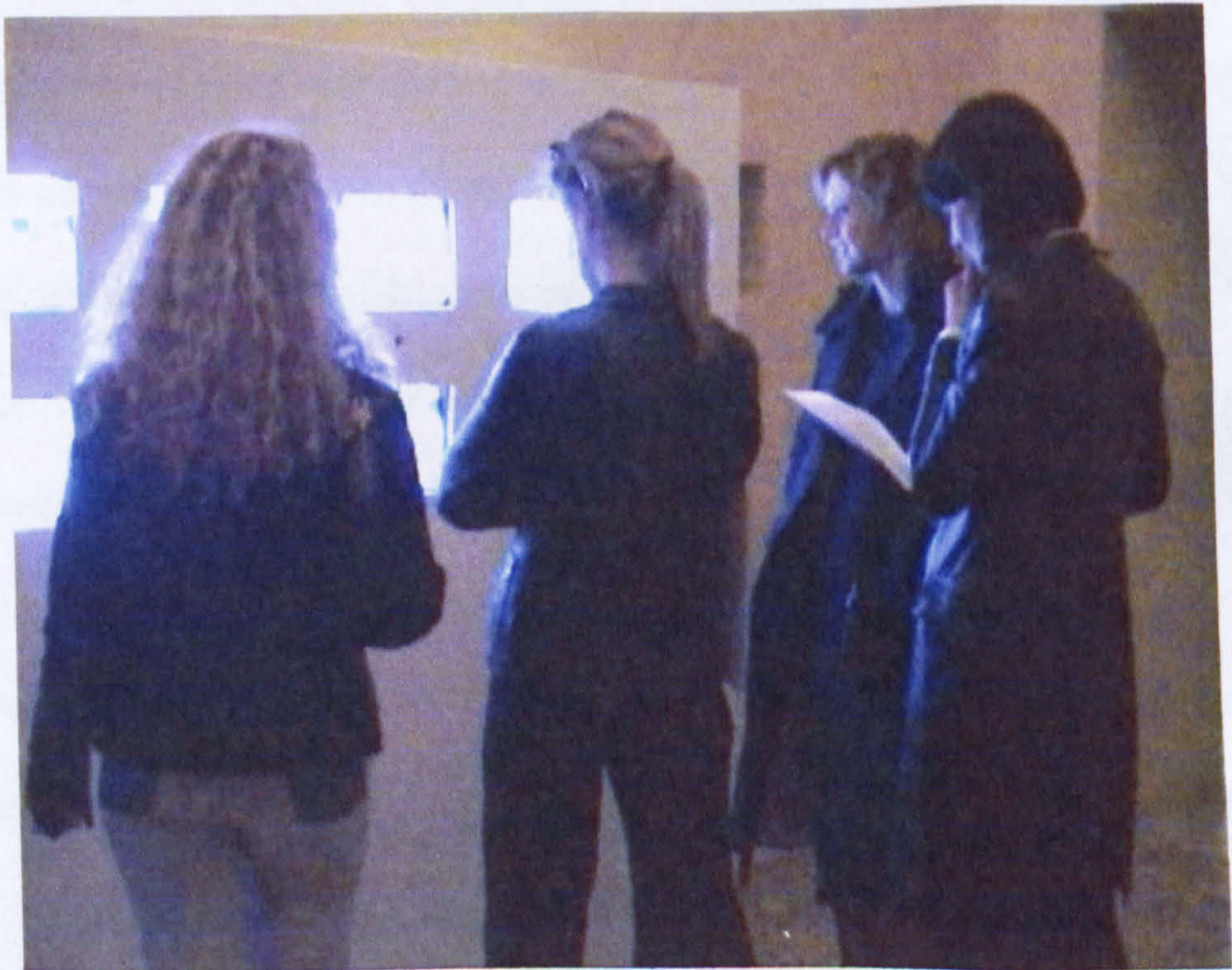


figure 43. *Ancora Cerca*, video installation and audience
Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia, Italy, 2002

In this project the process evolved beyond the initial intention at the end of the performance, which took place in one frame of time and context (that of the N.P.G.) with one audience, was then put into a different time and context and perceived by a different audience (the Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo in Brescia, Italy).

June 1999. 'I took the video from the security system's monitors in the control room on March the 14th. Every camera recorded the half hour of the performance reduced by the National Portrait Gallery system in half. I wanted to bring the real time back by slowing the motion in order to have the correspondence between real time of the action(then) and fruition time of the observes (now). This operation suggests that there is something in the middle, a partition, a screen which the Institution represents. The image that the eight security system cameras fixed of me, are projected onto walls at a human size scale in order to give to real space that screen image of myself. The observer looks for my image who is looking for her/him and dissolves. The multi-portrait of myself relates to the person who looks. The eight projections show the half-hour performance in which I walk barefoot carrying a red rose in the gallery.'

201

By looking back to this piece I can see that an interchange was taking place with the audience, and partially in a phenomenological sense. This approach can be found throughout my research, particularly developed through performative art practice. Here the idea of intersubjectivity as formulated by Merleau-Ponty, also the source for Lacan's conception of the *Gaze*, becomes the main reference. I would trace a brief development of this concept already mentioned earlier, through other commentators and in relation to my own artistic understanding of it and as a fundamental notion in Body Art dynamics. James Schmidt suggests²⁰² that for a description of the relation between self and other, Merleau-Ponty drew on Paul Valery's account of the 'exchange' of regards (before Lacan did). 'Once gazes interlock, there are no longer *quite* two persons and it's hard for either to remain alone. This exchange. . . effects...

²⁰¹ From my diary notes.

²⁰² James Schmidt, 'Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Between phenomenology and structuralism', *Theoretical Traditions in the Social Sciences*, MacMillan Publishers London, 1985, p. 91. Schmidt addresses the definition of the Other through Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and in relation to other philosophers and writers, pp. 59-99. In my own investigation the issue of other is not addressed, instead my aim is to understand the dynamics for interchange with what I targeted (my own image, the audience, the environment).

a transposition, a metathesis, a chiasm of two 'destinies', two points of view. You take my appearance, my image, and I take yours. You are not I, since you see me and I don't see myself. What is missing for me is this 'I' whom you can see. And what you miss is the "you" I see.'²⁰³

In Valery, the crossing of regards initiates a process of 'simultaneous, reciprocal limitation' which yields a 'decentering', not an 'annihilation'.²⁰⁴ Schmidt's makes a parallel with Sartre and states that he knew only 'a me-other rivalry' whereas in Valery's notion there is a 'co-functioning' of self and other. In Schmidt view, Valery confirmed Merleau-Ponty's misgivings about Sartre's description of the 'regard d'autrui'. Valery's use of the term *Chiasm*,²⁰⁵ reciprocal interpenetrations, and crossings was adopted by Merleau-Ponty to suggest an alternative to Sartre's panoramic vision.²⁰⁶

Schmidt explains that Merleau-Ponty had been groping towards an understanding of dialectical thought which would free itself from the standpoint of a 'spectator consciousness' by stating that there is dialectic only in that type of being in which a junction of subjects occur, which is the place of their exchange and of their reciprocal interpenetration. To remain faithful to this conception of the dialectic, he went on to argue in *The Visible and the Invisible*, that the dialectic was above all else 'the refusal of panoramic thinking'. This was conceived, according to Schmidt, by drawing on Valery, as he suggested in one of the working notes for *The Visible and the Invisible* that the dialectic must be grasped as a *Chiasm*, a 'reversal'.

²⁰³ Paul Valery, 'Analects', trans. S. Gilbert, *Collected Works*, vol. 14, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970, p.26.

²⁰⁴ Just as Sartre's panoramic vision had overlooked the interweaving of being and nothingness, so too it had been blind to the *Chiasm* in which self and other were tangled. Sartre viewed the regard, as a 'look that kills'.

²⁰⁵ Schmidt description of it is the following: 'a word which denoted X-shaped configurations of the sort frequently encountered in anatomy (for example the interweaving of optic nerves) and by extension referred to all those interweavings', op. cit. p. 90.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.91

Merleau-Ponty conceived tangible touchers and visible seers in this way transforming the problem of *the other*. The philosopher describes what occurs when one hand touches the other hand while this other hand is touching something else. This is particularly helpful in attempting to fathom the implications of the notion of the *Chiasm* for his philosophy. In Schmidt's view, as early as the *Phenomenology of Perception*, before his first recourse to Valery's 'chiasm of regards', Merleau-Ponty had discussed this example.²⁰⁷ He returned to it once again in the last two years of his life, after having made the *Chiasm* the central metaphor in his 'new ontology'.

My own position in respect of the problem of *the other* is close to Merleau-Ponty's in *The Visible and the Invisible*. *The other* represent a problem only to a philosophy which operates with a set of categories separating mind and body, consciousness and world, subject and object. This vocabulary was abandoned by Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*.²⁰⁸ In my own investigation, the issue of *other* is therefore not addressed, instead my aim is to understand the dynamics for interchange with what I targeted: my own image, the audience, the environment.

I believe the concept of *Chiasm* was embodied in the video *Blu* (2000), then presented as video live installation *BluX* (2001). The latter was presented at the Conference *Exchange 2000*, organised by University of West England in Bristol, as video live installation at the Watershed Media Centre, Bristol. The function of the chiasmatic composition was to incorporate the audience's presence and fruition. In some of my notes I wrote:

'190900 on the plane to Italy

²⁰⁷ Schmidt, op cit., p. 92.

²⁰⁸ The other is not a problem because 'it is not I who sees, not he who sees' - instead an 'anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh'.

Referring to the chiasmus composition of blu and blux, where there are four terms, I feel that what perceptually tends to happen, in case one of the terms were missing, is that the perceiver wants to fill the gap. As much as the fruition of the video blu demands that participation as the 4th term in the chiasmatic relation, in the performance bluX I was the forth term closing the composition and therefore leaving out the audience. Both of them are valid. I think that the concept of chiasmus overlaps with a mirror composition: it is a crossed mirroring composition. Thinking about the concept of chiasmus one can think visually at a parallelism referred to a plane, in this particular case, both the video perceived by a viewer and myself performing in front of it, the static flat composition becomes that intersecting mirroring composition. We can state that physical depth has been applied to it. Therefore my question is: how to act in the space?Derrida's concept on mirror- reflection RE-FLECTERE'
209

I illustrated the project in the paper published after the Conference:

The video *blu* shows the artist in an intimate action which was done in front of a camera without spectators. The action of caressing and then scratching the belly symbolises the coexistence of extreme opposite feelings in relation to love. The scrolling written text relates to the action on the video, while the sound text expresses an opposite meaning. This is to say that a *Chiasmatic* composition is used here. *Chiasmus*, a rhetorical figure whose name derives from the Greek letter CHI and visually expressed with the equivalent of the English letter X, might be defined as 'reverse parallelism' [...] Only three of the terms of the *Chiasmus* are included in the space of representation of the work, the actual video. The forth term is outside that space and is represented by the spectators looking at the video. Their involvement comes into play because of that gap of significance which they fill with their individual perception of, and response to, the work.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Diary notes published in Cologni, E., *In Between*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Lethaby Gallery, London 28 May-3 June 2002

²¹⁰ 'Interaction as a research data collecting system: the chiasmus', presentation and 'BluX' video performance, at conference: *Exchange 2000: facilitating research in Art, Design and Technology*, Watershed Media Centre, University of West England, Bristol- 2/3 Nov. 2000, published in *Exchange on line Journal* at http://www.media.uwe.ac.uk/exchange_online

Chiasmus composition of performance

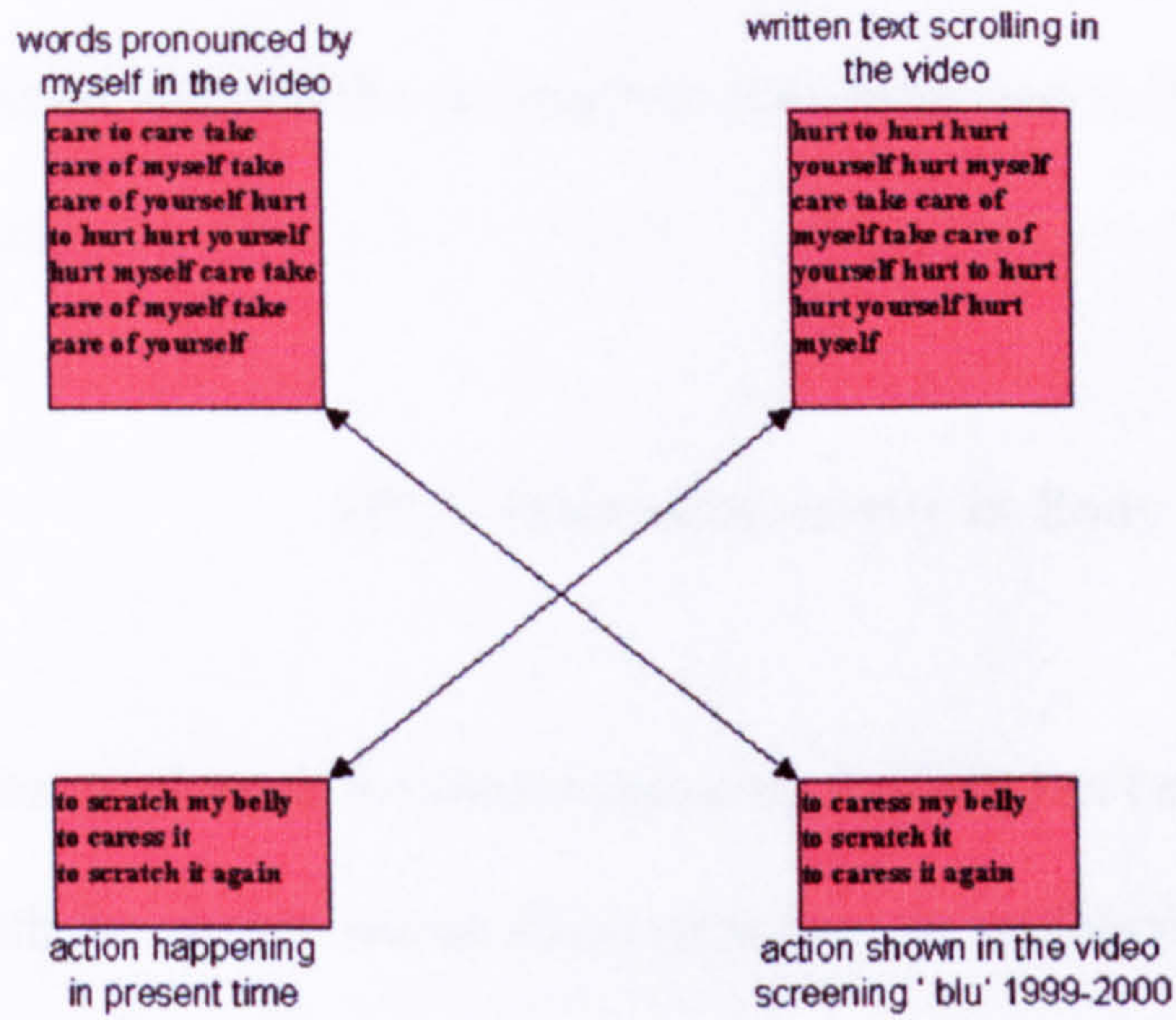


figure 44 a. Composition for performance *BluX*, 2000

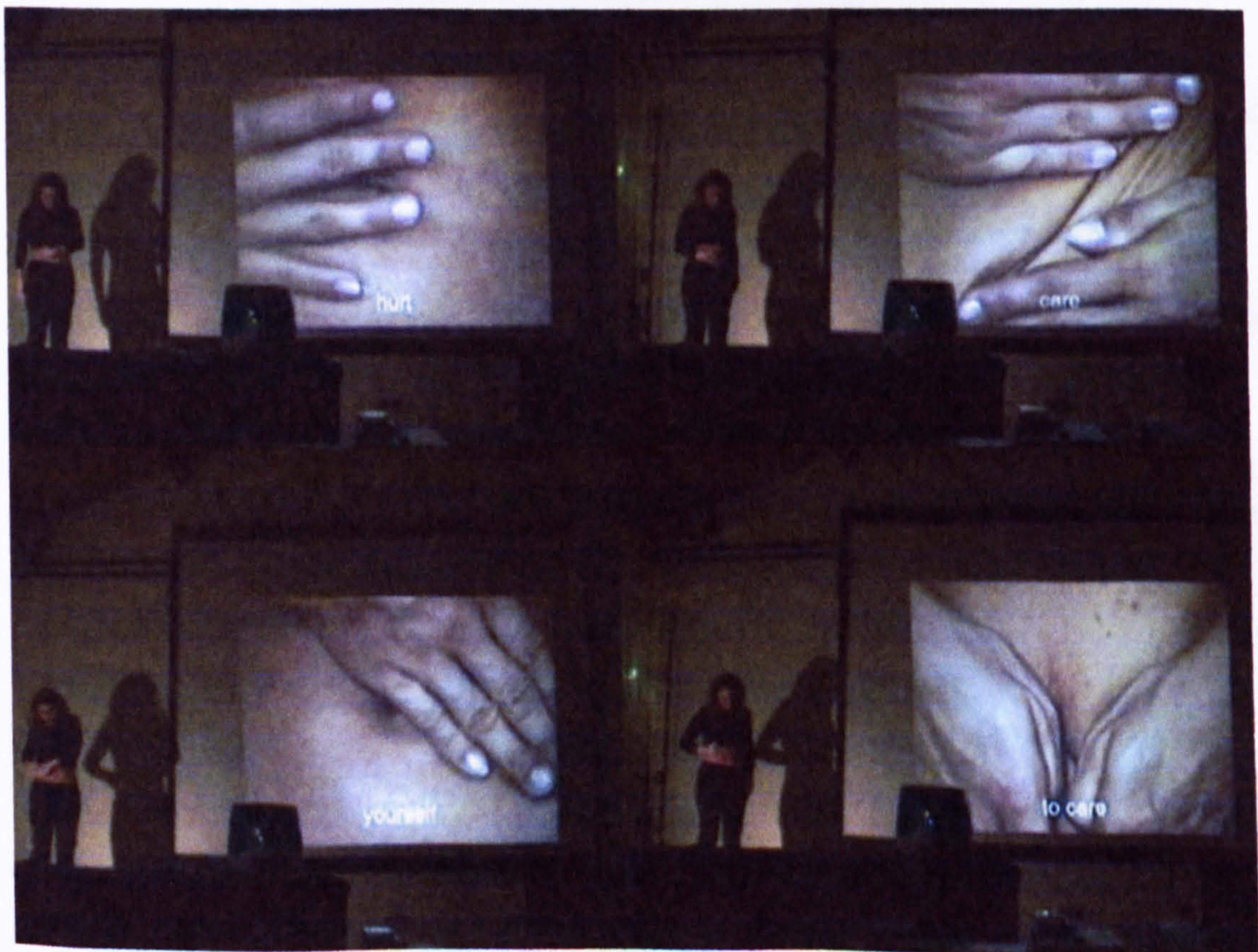


figure44 b. *BluX*, 7', stills from video documentation. Performed at Watershed Media Centre, Bristol, 2000, London Biennial, 2000, Camberwell College, 2000.

BluX is the video performance²¹¹, which takes place when it is myself that fills the gap. In relating to the sound text I complete the *Chiasmatic* composition myself. Here, the present dimensions of space and time in a public space relate to the representation on video of the same action that happened in the past and in an intimate place.

III. 4. Inter-subjectivity in Body Art

In my own practical work the inter-subjective element has been the basis for the exchange with the viewer whose active presence in the live pieces, as well as in the perception of the performative video and photographic 'documentation', complements their meaning and interpretation (as already illustrated through my artistic research). I believe performative actions have enabled me to experience the philosophical phenomenological ground offered by Merleau-Ponty, in relation to which the senses are investigated in the work. Particularly in the projects *Senses-Drawing Scents* and *Public Private Perceptions* the cross-modal association of the senses *synaesthetic phenomena* have been investigated.

In order to understand the use of the Body Art in my work I have found it necessary to review the theoretical positions of Amelia Jones and Lea Vergine.

According to Amelia Jones, Body Art places the body/self within the realm of the aesthetic as a political domain. It provides the possibility for radical engagements that can transform the way we think about meaning and subjectivity (as artist and

²¹¹ It was performed on 1 June 2000 at Camberwell College London, on 21 June 2000 as part of the London Biennial and at the screening session at the Conference Exchange 2000, Watershed Centre in Bristol, on 2 November 2000.

spectators). Body Art proposes the art 'object' as a site where reception and production come together: a site for inter-subjectivity. Jones explains that Body Art confirms what phenomenology and psychoanalysis have taught us: that the subject is constituted by the relationship with others and that the locus of identity is always elsewhere. Body Art, she states 'demonstrates that meaning is an exchange and points to the impossibility of any practice being "inherently" positive or negative in cultural value.'²¹²

The concept of interchange is discussed in terms of intersubjectivity in Amelia Jones' account on Body Art, which has also drawn upon Martin Jay's thought, by stressing the importance of Merleau-Ponty's concept of *intertwining* in the development of Body Art in challenging the Cartesian subject. I will draw parallels with an earlier account on Body Art written in the 70's by Lea Vergine: *Body Art* (1974). In the book Vergine sees the origin of the interchange with the audience in the effect of catharsis typical of Greek tragedies, mainly read through psychoanalysis.

Lea Vergine gives a reading of performance as ritual and spectacle, where the audience is mainly involved at a perceptual, psychological level, based on the concepts of projection and transference. She states:

... the relationship between the artist and the other is a question of being close to or distant from objects. And this leads to the self-satisfied cohabitation of a certain group with itself as well as to a situation of affectionate self-observation for the spectator. We observe the

²¹² Jones, A., op.cit., p. 14.

recuperation of the love object and we also observe the refurbishment of this image in the external world as a kind of compensation for the charges of affective energy that have remained deluded within us...²¹³

Vergine also defines the projection of the audience as : '[...] a kind of comfort (or even self-complacency) in the control of specular identification which is to say in one's motorial co-ordination in a mirror [...]. Narcissus projects himself outside of himself in order to be able to love what is inside of himself. The search for another self is the search for a partner, and vice-versa[...]'. In her view projection expels an internal menace that has been created by the pressure of an intolerable impulse to be transformed into an external menace that can be more easily handled. So doing, the artists shift their problem from the 'subject to the object', or from 'the inside to the outside'; Vergine suggests that in this way feelings that artists do not want to recognise as their own, are projected away from the ego and situated elsewhere outside in other things or other people.²¹⁴

She states that the extension of psychoanalytic awareness has opened the road to a better understanding of the notion and functioning of catharsis, referring to Aristotle's phenomenon of purification, which allows the self to establish a control that has been endangered by censured instinctual needs. She describes the important role of this phenomenon for the artist and audience:

We are also allowed an intensity of reaction that many individuals would be hard put to allow themselves without the protection of an aesthetic

²¹³ The references are from Vergine, L., *Il corpo come linguaggio (la "Body-art" e storie simili)*, trans. Inga Pin, L., Giampaolo Prearo Editore, Milano 1974, p.15

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33-34

situation. We know that in many cases this reluctance is due to the pressures of education that tend under certain cultural conditions to devalue the expression of intense emotion and to allow it to exist only if it is ordered within schemes and institutions. And art is precisely such a socially approved occasion for intense emotional reaction.²¹⁵

In her view, thus, the public must be involved in a collective experience that leads it to reconsider its quotidian existence and the rules of its ordinary behaviour, their role is no more that of passive contemplation. The relationship between public and artists becomes a relationship of complicity. The artists offer their hand to the spectator and the success of the operation depends upon how and how much the spectator is willing to accept it. The gesture of the artists who make the proposition acquires significance only if their actions are met by an act of recognition on the part of the spectator. The artists need to feel that others are receptive to them, that they are willing to play the game of accepting their provocation and they will give them back their 'projections'. The behaviour of the spectator is a gratification for the artist just as the behaviour of the artist is a gratification for the spectator.

Vergine's text was crucial in the seventies, in that she actively took part in creating a context for debate of performance and Body Art.

Vergine's very important argument of catharsis was influential on of much Body Art. However, in my own production I am very aware of the limitations of such a

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

direction. Whilst the concept of catharsis remains valid, this does not form a significant aspect of my work.²¹⁶

Amelia Jones, on the other hand, reads Body Art as dissolving the metaphysical idealism and the Cartesian subject embedded in the conception of modernism hegemonic in Europe and the United States in the postwar period.²¹⁷ Descartes' s dualistic conception of consciousness or cogito opposed to the brute object of the body dominated Enlightenment and, in her view, then modernist (nineteenth- and twentieth-century) ways of conceiving the subject.²¹⁸ In her view, art history and criticism have long taken their direction from this conception – with I, the eye/I of the artist, closely paralleled by the eye/I of the art critic or historian, who takes her or his authority from a close identification with the transcendent 'vision' of the original creator.

Jones suggests that body artists, often drawing on phenomenological models, began to enact their embodied subjectivities in relation to audiences with this intersubjective exchange constitutive of the work of art. 'Working in concert with the

²¹⁶ I acknowledge the importance of Vergine's in the general context and *language* of Body Art and performance. I review here some of the key artists contributing to this history. Hermann Nitsch explains the effect on the audience in the following way: 'This growing activity of the whole sensorial apparatus can be compared to psychoanalytic analysis. [...] The events which actually happen on the stage of this 'theatre of orgies and mysteries' are reflected in the soul of each spectator, favoring access in all its totality, of the lived existential mystique, this time, not individually but collectively'. Gina Pane as well as Nitsch provide two examples supporting the concept of *catharsis* outlined by Vergine. Pane explained her way of expressing herself using her body: 'The body and its support for a non linguistic communication [...]', furthermore in her view 'The Visual Communication remains of the "universal" type because it reintroduces the fundamental social relationships'. In *Sentimental Action* (1974) the psychoanalytic aspect of the subject matter is very strong as she describes the piece: 'Projection of an "intra" space in which what is lived by the sentiments between two women is intercalated by the magic mother/child relationship, which death symbolises. This intra space is stated by an exchange-mirror close circuit: Woman/Women identifying themselves in the process of primary emotive phenomenon: mother/child, a symbolic relationship and one which can discover different and emotional solution by introjection of one's own conflicts.'

²¹⁷ Although alternatives to the Cartesian philosophy can be found earlier on and it can be argued that, since the beginning of the XXth century, a number of attempts were expressed in the avant-garde art.

²¹⁸ In her view, predicated on vision (the 'I' of the subject was a disembodied 'eye' turning all bodies into objects), Cartesianism had a special force within artistic modernism, which was first dominated by French artists and writers embedded in the Cartesian tradition, then borrowed by the United States from France after World War II. Descartes's dualism soul-body is highlighted in *Discourse on Method*.

major shifts in philosophical thought and in the social realm, where the normative subject was being profoundly challenged by the various rights movements, body art dissolves the opposition informing the Cartesian conception of the self [...],²¹⁹

Cindy Nemser quotes Merleau-Ponty linking Body Art and phenomenology in the 1971 article *Subject-Object Body Art*:

Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body as we move an object. We transport it without instruments as if by magic, since it is ours and because through it we have direct access to space. For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions. Even our most secret affective movements, those most deeply tied to the humoral infrastructure, help to shape our perception of things.²²⁰

Jones states that Body Art, does not illustrate Merleau-Pontian conceptions of the embodiment of the subject and theories of the decentered self that we are now familiar with from post-structuralist theory; rather, it enacts or performs or instantiates the embodiment and intertwining of self and other.²²¹ ‘Body art is one of the many manifestations or articulations of this contingency or reciprocity of the subject that we now recognize as post-modern.’ In her view it is productive to explore Body Art through a

²¹⁹ Jones, A., op. cit., p. 38.

²²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, from *Primacy of Perception*;

²²¹ Jones, A., op. cit., p.38.

phenomenological and feminist framework, as the phenomena are interrelated in their compulsion to dissolve and/or interrogate the modernist subject.²²²

In 1959 the US sociologist Erving Goffman published a book entitled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which discusses the self as a performance in relation to others, a negotiation involving complex intersubjective cues and behaviours. The self, Goffman argues,

does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action. ...

A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location ... it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented.²²³

Goffman's book links together the theoretical exploration of the self and the performative bodies of Body Art (especially in its US manifestations). Jones states that in the 1960s, a number of artists in the United States read Goffman's book, as well as some of the work of Merleau-Ponty. Goffman's instrumentalized version of French existentialist phenomenology along with Merleau-Ponty's own writings, among other texts, provide a model for a younger generation artists, such as Vito Acconci, who came of age after the heroic era of abstract expressionism, and within the explosive social changes in the 1960s.²²⁴ The philosophical

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Garden City, NY, 1959, pp. 252-253.

²²⁴ Kate Linker discusses Acconci's interest in the work of Merleau-Ponty and Goffman as well as that of psychologist Kurt Lewin, in *Vito Acconci* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 30-46-47. Maurice Berger briefly mentions Robert Morris's interest in Merleau-Ponty in *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism and the 1960s*. (New York: Icon, 1989), n. 12, 65. It is Rosalind Krauss who elaborated the links between phenomenology and minimalism, in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1977), 239-40, and, especially, in *Richard Serra: A Translation*, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde', 260-74. This latter essay argues that abstract expressionism adopted the existentialist dimension of French phenomenology without its deeper implications in terms of perception and inter-subjectivity and that it was only with minimalism that these implications began to be explored fully. According to Amelia Jones, Krauss is one of the few US art historians, along with Michael Fried, who did not ignore the Merleau-Pontyan axis of 1960-5 practices, although Krauss had largely turned to

notion of the self as an embodied performance was expanded and developed through Body Art's radical opening up of the structures of artistic production and reception.

According to Jones the performative self, whose meaning and significance is not inherent or transcendent but derived 'from the whole scene of his action', dramatically overturns the Cartesian self of modernism, which construes the body not as enacting the self but 'as a brute object or hollow vessel given meaning only through the animating force of the consciousness that presumably can thus transcend it'. The lived body, Merleau-Ponty observed in his 1945 *Phenomenology of Perception*, is not discrete from the mind as vessel but is, in fact, the 'expressive space' by which we experience the world. Unlike other objects in the world, the body cannot be thought as separate from the self, nor does it signify or 'express the modalities of existence in the way that stripes indicate rank, or a house-number a house: the sign here does not only convey its significance, it is filled with it'.²²⁵

Jones suggests that Phenomenology interprets and produces the self as embodied, performative, and intersubjective – the critique of Cartesianism thus also involves a Hegelian dimension as the French Phenomenologists theorised a self that was both embodied but also articulated in relation to a self-other (master-slave) dialectic.²²⁶ It was Merleau-Ponty and Lacan, as already suggested, who in 1940's and 1950's began to theorise the splitting or dissolving of the Cartesian subject. Jones suggests that Merleau-Ponty's observations about the contingency and reciprocity of the self/other, and his emphatic critique of vision-oriented theories that polarise subject/object

Lacan as the predominant theoretical model in her work by the mid 1980s. As much as in Jones, the fascination with phenomenology seems to have been largely gender-based although Jones states that she interviewed several feminist Body Artists active during the same period (Schneemann, Wilke, and others) who said they were not directly interested in phenomenology, although they were aware of many of these issues.

²²⁵ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology of Perceptions*, trans. Colin Smith, New York, Humanities Press, 1962, p. 141, quoted by Jones, A., op. cit., p.39.

²²⁶ Jones refers to this conception of an intersubjective, embodied subject contingent on her or his others as expanded upon and radicalised by poststructuralism and feminism as well as, she argues by Body Art. Thus, the intellectual trajectory of phenomenology (especially from France) and a feminist poststructuralism, both of which articulate an

relations, seem to relate closely to Goffman's paradigm.

Jones suggests that Merleau-Ponty's anti-empiricism and his insistence on the fully embodied nature of inter-subjectivity enables him to conceptualise inter-subjectivity as imbricated rather than oppositional, as inter-subjective and embedded rather than simplistically staged in a discrete social environment.²²⁷ While Sartre sustains in his phenomenological work a more strictly Hegelian view of self/other relations as structured by conflict, Merleau-Ponty posits the self-other as reciprocal. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty insisted on embodiment by going beyond vision-oriented models of self and other to differentiate his work from Lacan's theories of self.²²⁸

Merleau-Ponty's theory of inter-subjectivity moves away from what Jones defines as 'the lingering idealism' of *Phenomenology of Perception* to theorise a *Chiasmic* intertwining of self and other. His *The Chiasm—The Intertwining*, published posthumously in 1964, is especially rich in relation to *Body Art*. In this text, Merleau-Ponty embeds vision in touch, touch in vision, and their chiasmic crossing is the flesh of the world/the body itself: differentiating modes of vision (colour and visible) is a tissue that is 'not a thing but a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things. The chiasmus is the doubled and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible,' and the flesh of the visible indicates the carnal being – at once subjective and objectified.²²⁹ Merleau-Ponty writes that there is a 'reciprocal insertion and intertwining' of the seeing body in the visible body: we are both subject and object simultaneously,

explicitly anti-Cartesian theory of the subject, underlies and informs my attempt to rethink *Body Art* and move it out of its consignment to essentialist oblivion.

²²⁷ Jones, A., op. cit., p.

²²⁸ Jones explains, at least as the latter have been popularised in contemporary cultural discourse in the United States (where the subject is staged through a disembodied-if psychically invested sense of vision that produces her/him as image).

²²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Chiasm—The Intertwining*, pp. 134, 135

and our 'flesh' merges with the flesh that is the world. There is no limit or boundary between the body and the world since the world is flesh.²³⁰

Amelia Jones states that the body/self is simultaneously both subject and object in the experience of the world, the two subjects involved (art maker, art interpreter) are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity.²³¹

Through the notion of flesh Merleau-Ponty theorises the interrelatedness of both mind and body defined by Jones as 'the embodiedness of the self'²³² and the reciprocity and contingency of the body/self on the other. According to Jones, this is what Lacan describes as the phenomenology of the transference by which the self is located in the other: 'What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. ... I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object'.²³³

Jones suggests that in Lacan's view it is in seeing a whole chain come into play at the level of the desire of the other that the subject's desire is constituted.

Jones argues that, while the body/self is inexorably sexual in Merleau-Ponty's formulation, and while he acknowledges (with a distant glance toward the master/ slave dialectic) the asymmetry of the reversibility of perception, like Lacan he theorises the sexual subject/object from an implicitly masculine point of view and continues her argument by drawing upon feminist writers such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Carolyn Dean.²³⁴

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

²³¹ Jones, A., op. cit., p.41.

²³² Jones, A., op. cit. p. 41.

²³³ Lacan, J., *Ecrits': A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan, Norton, New York, London, p. 86.

²³⁴ Jones in Chapter II of her book *Body Art Performing the subject*, traces an account of feminist Philosophers and writers who, drawing upon Lacan and Merleau-Ponty, contributed to the decentering of the masculine subject between 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the work of Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Carolyn Dean. Amelia Jones in the cited opus expands on the argument by illustrating that a number of feminist philosophers have reworked Merleau-Ponty's formulation through the lens of sexual difference, acknowledging the rendered configuration of

In illustrating both Vergine's and Jones's understandings of the audience involvement in Body Art, I realised that that two positions relate to the development of my own practical research, also in a chronological order. In my own work I was much more aware of the cathartic and psychoanalytic aspect of the work, the phenomenological reading of which allowed me to readdress my aims towards the relationship between the psychological and the physical, to investigate my own position within Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh of the world'.

IV. 4.1. Artist/audience interaction

In this section, I shall focus on how Body artists addressed the issue of interchange in their own practice particularly in relation to the audience in order to form the context for my own pieces adopting similar strategies.

According to Jones, around 1969 New York artist Vito Acconci used his body to provide an alternative to the poetic text; it was a way, he said, of shifting the focus from the words to himself as an image. So instead of writing a poem about *following* Acconci acted the *Following Piece* as part of *Street Works IV* (1969). I relate Acconci's *Following Piece* to my project *Mirroring*, in its relationship to the viewers. The piece consisted of Acconci following randomly chosen individuals in the street, abandoning them when they left the

the asymmetrical master/slave aspect of the subject/object relations in Western patriarchy. Judith Butler pinpoints Merleau-Ponty's tendency, in the earlier work, to theorise self/other relations in terms that implicate without theorizing gender asymmetry in *Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description*. Luce Irigaray plays against Merleau-Ponty's blindness to gender by inserting the 'maternal-feminine' into his language: the flesh is feminized as "a maternal, materialising flesh, reproduction . . . placental tissue." *The Invisible of the Flesh a reading of Merleau-Ponty*. Simone de Beauvoir, friend and colleague of Merleau-Ponty, lover of Sartre, was the first to expose the gendered specificity of the self/other relation in her 1949 opus *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir's book was the first to expand the general critique of the Cartesian subject of modernism and to interrogate it as having an exclusionary, masculinist dimension. Jones explains further that Beauvoir's book begins a radical particularisation of the phenomenological theory of a subject still (in the 1940s) largely assumed to be 'universal'. Here, the dialectic between the self and other outlined by Sartre (and more subtly transformed by Merleau-Ponty and Lacan) is reworked with an awareness of the mapping of power through gender in patriarchy. Sartre's existentialist argument, in *Being and Nothingness*, that the subject has the capacity to project himself into transcendence (the *pour-soi*) out of the fundamental immanence of the *en-soi*, is reread by Beauvoir as a privileged potentiality open only to male subjects in patriarchy.

street to enter a building. According to Jones, Acconci's strategic act of following is motivated, as he himself admits, by a desire to define himself through a relation with the other rather than by any need to explore the other for her or his own sake: 'If I pick someone to follow, then I can be tied into this other person. I can be dragged into another person. ... [In *Following Piece*] there was no viewer or, if anything, I was the viewer. I see myself as the audience of people walking in the street'. Here, Acconci has enabled his wish to incorporate the other, to become the viewer, not to explore her/him in her/his difference. It was invisible in that people were unaware that it was going on; Acconci made other pieces that were equally private. Jones suggests that, though introspective, they were also the work of an artist looking at himself as an image, seeing the artist as others might see him: Acconci saw himself as a marginal presence. In Jones's view the implications of others in his subsequent performances led Acconci to the notion of *power-fields* as described by the psychologist Kurt Lewin in the *Principle of Topological Psychology*, where Acconci found a description of how each individual radiated a personal power-field, which included all possible interaction with people and objects in a particular physical space. His work from 1971 dealt with this power-field between himself and others in specially constructed spaces. Acconci's subsequent works led to a further interpretation of the power-field, designing a space which suggested his personal presence. In *Command Performance* (1974), Acconci takes this withdrawal of the performance to an extreme and is absent entirely. The work consisted of an empty space, chair and monitor, with the soundtrack inviting the viewer to create his or her own performance.²³⁵ Jones's reading of Acconci's Body Art works is to enable a critical reading of masculinity and Cartesian subjectivity in general.²³⁶

²³⁵ Amelia Jones writes about Acconci's work in the chapter *The body in Action; Vito Acconci and the Coherent Male Artistic Subject* of the previously mentioned book. Vito Acconci's work from this period exemplifies the potential of Body Art projects 'both to interrogate the normative values inscribed in the trope of the artist genius epitomised by the modernist Jackson Pollock and to subvert formalist modernism's closed systems of 'disinterested' interpretation by insisting on the intersubjective' dimension of the experience and interpretation of works of art. Acconci's ambivalent, self-exposing Body Art works point to the dilemma faced by male artists in the post-1960 period in the United States and Europe. Jones, A., op. cit., p. 103.

²³⁶ She argues that 'Acconci's pathetic masculinity blatantly fails to cleanse itself of the "feminine" and the "homosexual"'.

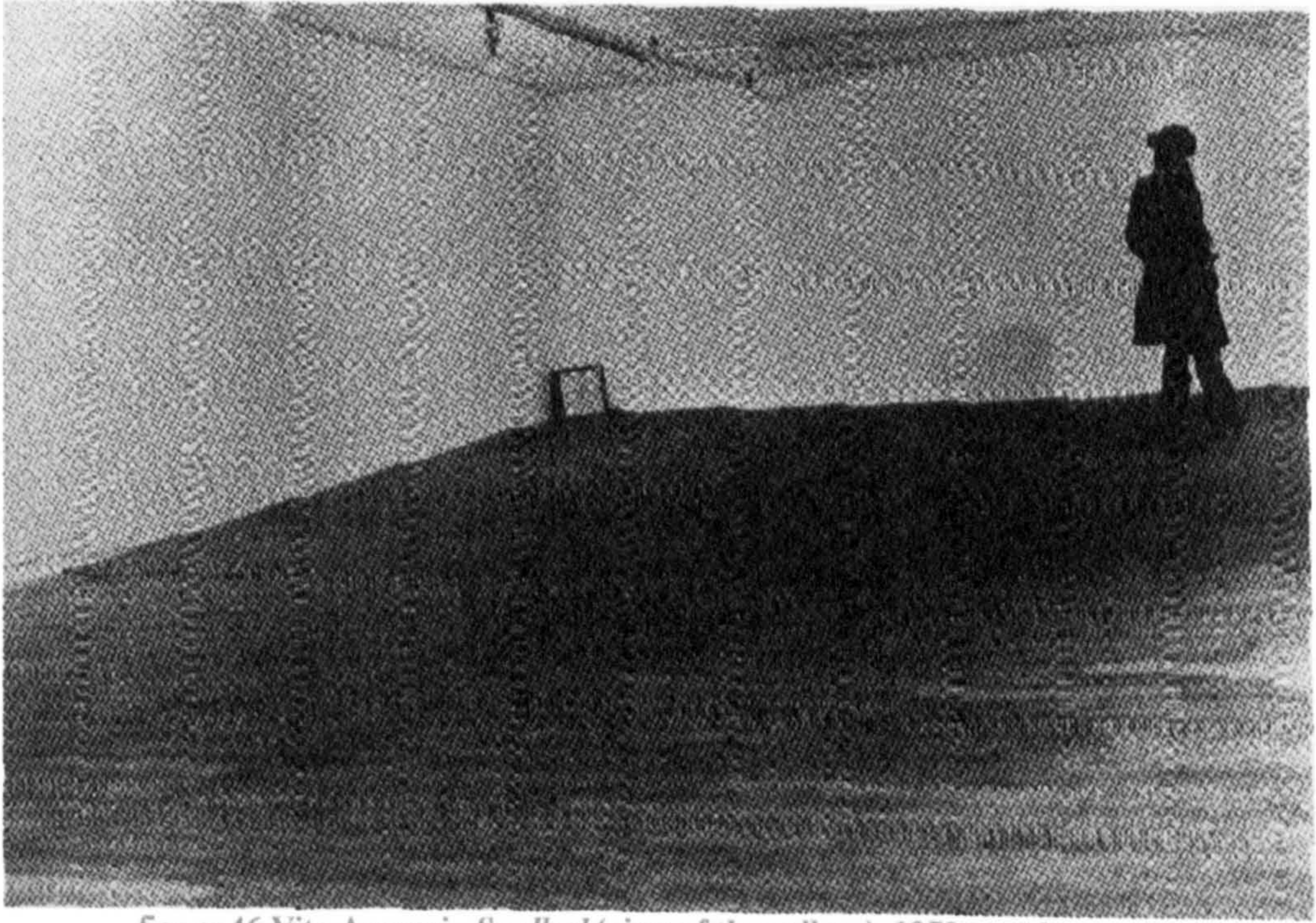


figure 46 Vito Acconci, *Seedbed* (view of the gallery), 1972; performance/
installation wood ramp, loudspeaker system at Sonnabend Gallery New York

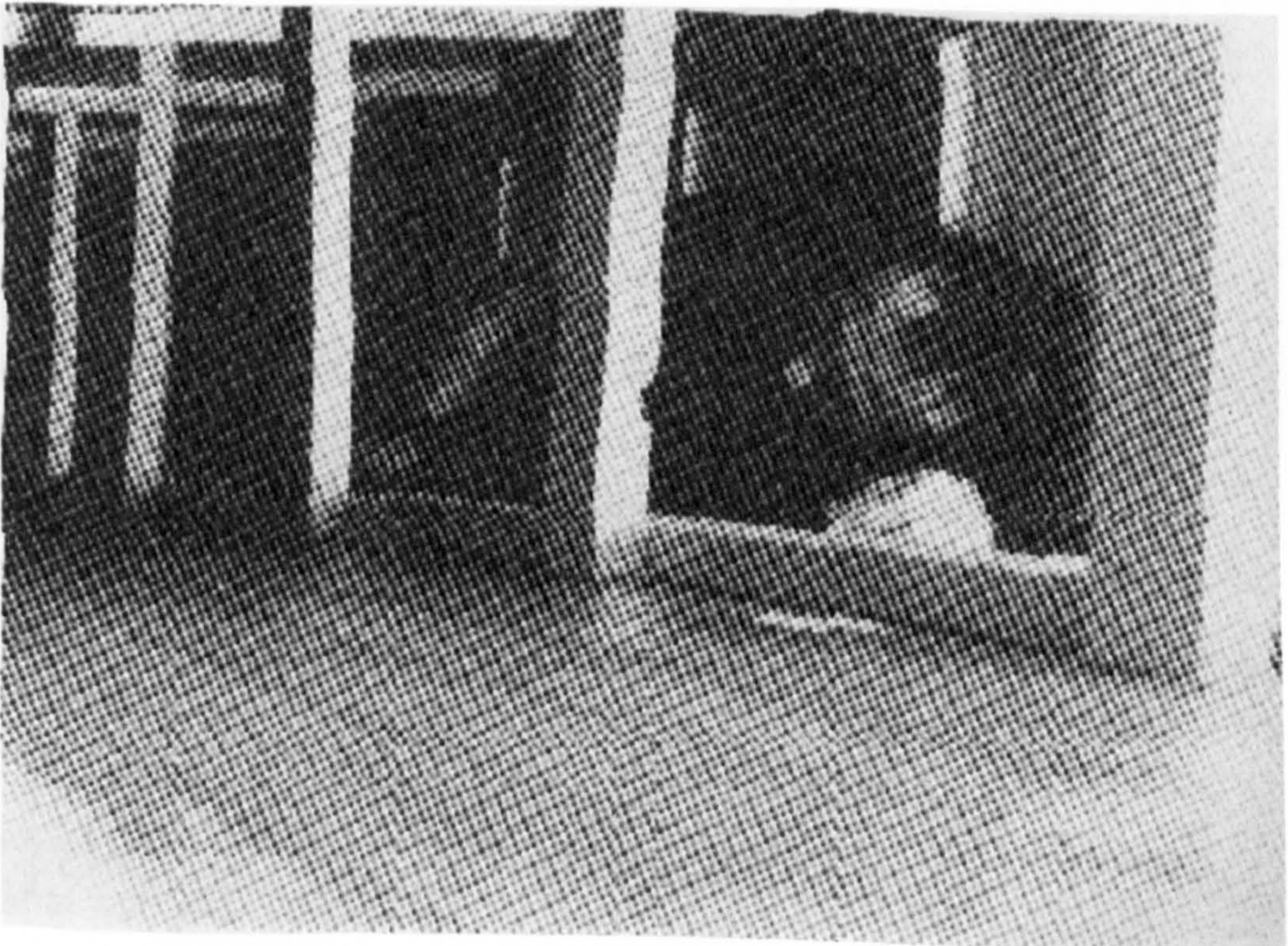


figure 45. Vito Acconci, *Seedbed* (view under the ramp)

In Jones view, in Acconci's 'Seedbed' (1972), he enacted in the 'most literal fashion the structures by which the institutions of art veil the modernist genius'; hidden under a ramp at New York's Sonnabend Gallery, he responded to the visitors' footsteps by masturbating, transmitting his verbal fantasies and moans of pleasure back to them via a sound projection system. In Jones's view, through Acconci's act, the visitor would have been inexorably involved in the inter-subjective articulation of 'artistic' meaning.²³⁷ She suggests that 'in all of his body art work, Acconci exaggeratedly performs the *Chiasmus* – the inter-subjective erotic intertwining – of the interpretive exchange'.

Through Body Art projects such as this, Acconci himself became one of the most important artist incorporating the re-embodiment of art production and art reception as a radical challenge to modernist formalism. According to Jones, staging art is a communicative exchange between desiring subjects – a phenomenological intertwining or psychoanalytic transference/counter transference involving an exchange of codes, behaviours, expressivities and embodied, erotically invested subjectivities.

What is most important in Jones position is her suggestion that 'body art projects explicitly stage the phenomenological model of intersubjectivity, in which the exchange of subjectivities (their intertwining) takes place through the engagement of bodies /subjects as well as, more specifically, the reversibility of expression and perception (as well as of subject and object) through which we constitute ourselves in the world'..²³⁸

²³⁷ This is an articulation, moreover, that Freud described in terms of transference (an intersubjective exchange of identities); transference, 'invariably resting] ultimately on an erotic basis', marks the struggle for meaning as necessarily an erotic exchange.

²³⁸ Jones, op. cit., p.107

As an art maker I do experience that by opening the embodied artist/subject to *the other* (following Jones argument), Body Art also opens the embodied other to the artist; each projects onto the other, each taking its place there as subject while simultaneously authorising the other as subject.

Like the ground opened up by Acconci, Bruce Nauman and Dan Graham, establish a framework for linking performance, the engagement of the spectator and in their case, the use of video, outside a concept of performance dominated by catharsis.

Since 1970, like the Minimalists Bruce Nauman became very interested in the relation of a work to its environment and with the involvement of the spectator. For example, he explored this in the installation *Corridors*. When I experienced the piece at the Hayward Gallery in the exhibition *Nauman Bruce* in September 1998, I found myself in situations of anxiety and surprise caused by the strong presence perceptual and phenomenological element. *Going around the corner piece* (1970) is a piece which I experienced myself in the same exhibition. As spectator I became aware of my own simple action of walking around the cubic structure, by watching my own image on the monitors placed at each corner.

Bouncing in the Corner, N2: upside down (1969) is a performance that does not deal with the concept of space and additionally, it incorporates the use of video. Talking about it Nauman states: ‘ [the performance]...at the Whitney Museum during the *Illusion* show in ’69. I had already made a video of it, bouncing in the corner for one hour. At the Whitney the performance was by three people, instead of just myself,

and after that I tried making pieces where other people could be involved in the performance situation [...].²³⁹

I am aware that, particularly in the use of video recording as an integral part of a performance work, Bruce Nauman provides a reference point for some of my own art practice, for example in *Ancora Cerca*, *BluX*, *Diagrammi*, *Morning Toilette*, *Public Private Perceptions*. In Nauman's *World Piece (Projected)* and *World Peace (Received)* (1996) spectator's become integral part of the work. I use these works as a reference for the complex experience for the active and passive engagement of the viewer and how this is changed by intervention of video. In *World Piece (Projected)*, as described in the Catalogue from the exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, the five video projections feature actors who communicate to each other and to the spectator. A fast-moving edit switches the image and voice from one screen to another. Spectators are encouraged to move around in this installation in which they can grasp only fragments of the text, although its results are very disorienting. In *World Peace (Received)*, on the other hand, the spectator is encouraged to take a seat amid five monitors in a rather more intimate space. The work evokes the relationship established between television and its viewers. The gestures and phrases are the same as before; only the montage is different, with an extremely fast rhythm leaving the viewer very little mental space. The two installations present two modes of reception and media communication.

²³⁹ Nauman Bruce, Catalogue from the exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, 16 July-6 September 1998,

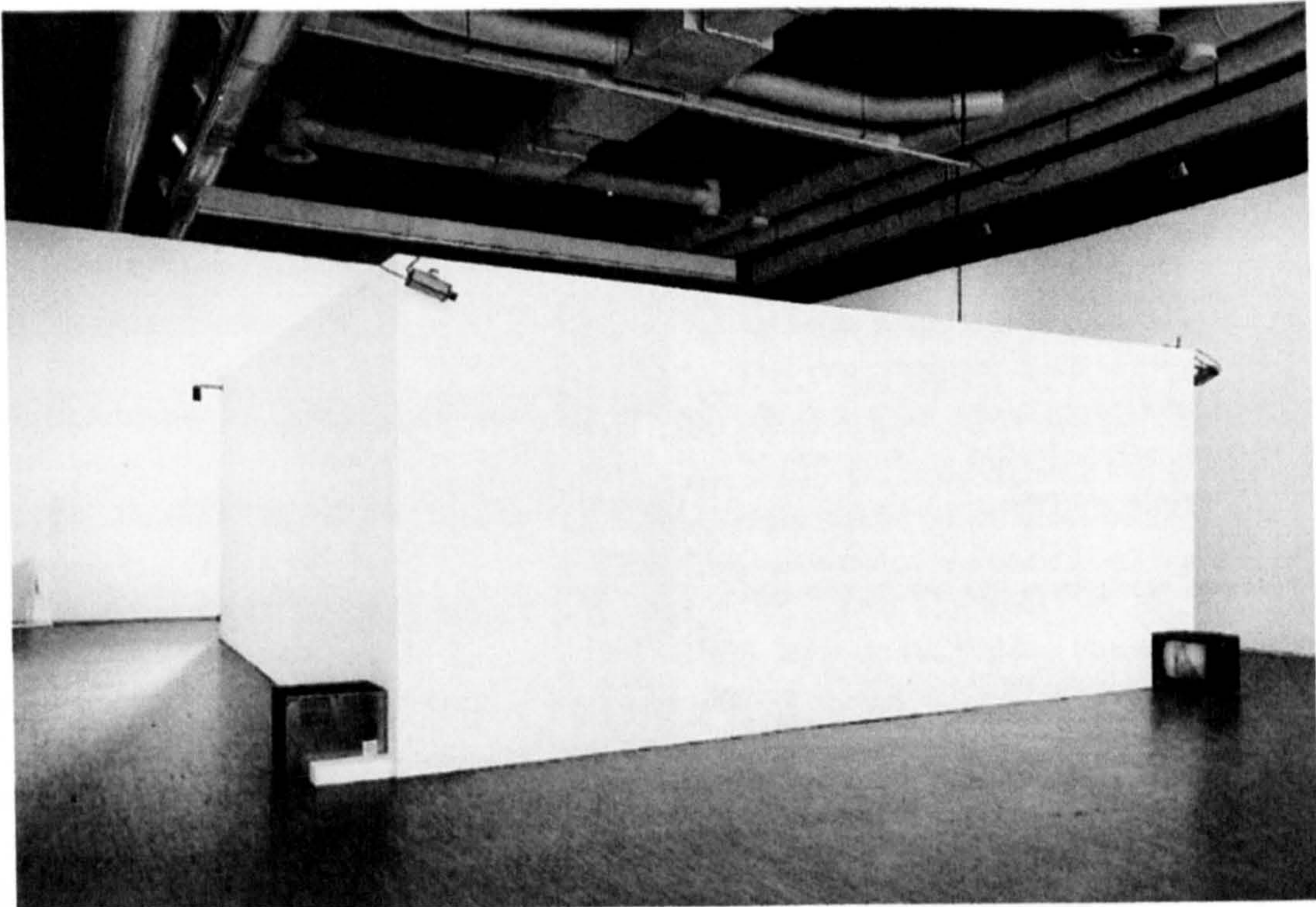


figure 47. Bruce Nauman, *Going around the corner piece* (1970)



figure 46. Dan Graham, *Performance Audience Mirror*, 1977, Amsterdam

The study of the active and passive conduct of the viewer became the basis of many of the New York artist Dan Graham's performances from the early seventies. Graham's highly psychological works also form an extremely important reference for my own production. It was through Graham's work and statements that I first became aware of the possible relationship between an art experience and a theoretical concept. In particular here a relationship with Lacan is referred to by the following Graham's statement (1997): 'the time-delay videos and the pavilions have parallels with Lacanian and phenomenological models of consciousness [...]' Performance pieces through to *Public Space/Two Audiences* deal with American psycho-social theories of micro-behavioural gestures and with the phenomenology of the individuals, either alone or in groups[...].²⁴⁰

Graham wished to combine the role of active performer and passive spectator in one and the same person. So he introduced mirrors and video equipment which would allow performers to be spectators of their actions. This self-scrutiny was intended to set up a heightened consciousness of every gesture. In some of his notes for the piece *Body Press* (1970-73) he describes the performers' behaviour and writes:

Two filmmakers stand (within a surrounding and completely mirrored cylinder), body trunk stationary, hands holding and pressing a camera's back end flush to, while slowly rotating it about, the surface cylinder of their individual bodies. One rotation circumscribes the body's contour, spiralling slightly upward with the next turn. With successive rotations, the body surface areas are completely covered by the back of the camera(s) until the cameraman's eye level is reached; then a reverse mapping downward begins until the original starting point is reached. The rotations are at

²⁴⁰ 'Dan Graham Architecture', Catalogue from the exhibition at Camden Arts Centre, 11-4/25-5 1997 and

corresponding speeds; when each camera is rotated to each body's rear, it is facing and filming the other as they are exchanged so the camera's "identity" "changes hands" and each performer is handling a new camera...²⁴¹

Graham's interest is the subjective mask of the observer, arguing that behind the glass the vision of the spectator is objective, so that the spectator's subjectivity is dissimulated; this is explored in *Two Consciousness Projection(s)* (1974), *Present Continuous Past* (1974), *Video Piece for Two Glass Office Buildings* (1976) amongst other pieces.²⁴²

In the piece *Two Consciousness Projection(s)* (1974) Graham created a situation which would increase that consciousness even further, since two people were asked to verbalise (in front of an audience) how they viewed one of the partners. A woman sat in front of a video screen which showed her face, while a man looked through the video camera trained on her face. As she examined her features and described what she saw, the man, at the same time, related how he read her face. In this way both the woman and the man were active in that they were creating the performance, but they were also passive spectators in that they were watching themselves performing. The specific results of the piece vary according to the context in which it is performed, with changing historical circumstances, locale, or use of different social classes of audience or actors. Graham's theory of audience-performer relationship was based on Bertolt Brecht's idea of imposing an uncomfortable and self-conscious state on the audience in an attempt to reduce the gap between the two. In subsequent work Graham explored this further by adding the elements of time and space in using video techniques and mirrors.

Architectural Association, London, 22-5/24-5, 1997, p. 18.

²⁴¹ Ibid., artist contribution.

²⁴² This is discussed by Andel, J., 'Miroir et autoréflexion' in *À travers le miroir de Bonnard à Buren*, Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 2000, p. 85-86 (my translation from French).

In *Present Continuous Past* (1974) the mirror acted as a reflection of the present time, while video feedback showed the performer/spectator their past action. Graham's text specifies: 'The image seen by the camera reflecting everything in the room) appears eight seconds later on the video monitor.[...] A person viewing the monitor sees both the image of himself eight seconds ago, and what was reflected in the mirror from the monitor eight seconds ago of himself, which is sixteen seconds in the past. An infinite regress of time continuums within time continuums is created[...].'²⁴³

The piece *Performer /Audience /Mirror*²⁴⁴ first performed in 1977 was based on the simple idea of mirroring the behaviour with language. I saw a video documentation of it at the Lisson Gallery in September 2001. The live description of the event has a very powerful quality. The precision of this description captured my attention because I was simultaneously experiencing what was described and could compare Graham's description to my own. Here is part of a written documentation of the pieces by Dan Graham. The text states:

A performer faces a seated audience. Behind the performer, covering the back wall (parallel to the frontal view of the seated audience), is a mirror reflecting the audience.

Stage 1 . The performer looks in the general direction of the audience. He begins a continuous description of his external movements and the attitudes he believes are signified by this behaviour for about five minutes. The audience hears the performer and sees his body.

²⁴³ Graham, D., *Two-Way Mirror Power Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, Ed Alberro, A. intr. Wall, J., MIT Press, 1999 Cambridge, Massachusetts, London England, p. 39 written in 1974.

²⁴⁴ first performed at de appel Amsterdam, Holland in June 1977, at PS1, New York in 1977 and Riverside Studios, London, England in March 1979. I saw a video documentation at Lisson Gallery in September 2001. I The text of performance was first published in Anton Herbert, ed., *Dan Graham: Theatre* (ghent: de appel, 1982)

Stage 2. The performer continues facing the audience. Looking directly at them, he continuously describes their external behavior for about five minutes. (See Observation 2.)

Stage 3. The performer faces the mirror (his back turned to the audience). For about five minutes he continuously describes his front body's gestures and the attitudes it may signify. He is free to move about, in order to better see aspects of his body's movements. When he sees and describes his body from the front, the audience, inversely, sees his back (and their front). The performer is facing the same direction as the audience, seeing the same mirror-view. The audience cannot see (the position of) the performer's eyes.

Stage 4. The performer remains turned, facing the mirror. For about five minutes he observes and continuously describes the audience who he can see mirror-reversed from Stage 2 (their right and left now being the same as his). He freely moves about relative to the mirror in order to view different aspects of the audience's behavior. His change of position produces a changing visual perspective which is correspondingly reflected in the description. The audience's view remains fixed; they are not (conventionally) free to move from their seats in relation to the mirror covering the front staging area.²⁴⁵

In some of his observations on the audience involved Graham writes:

Through the use of a mirror the audience is able to instantaneously perceive itself as a public body (as a unity), offsetting its definition by the performer.

This gives it a power within the performance equivalent to that of the

performer [...]. Cause and effect relations are further complicated when members of the audience (because they can see and be seen in the mirror by other members of the audience) attempt to influence (through eye contact, gestures, etc.) the behavior of other audience members, which thereby influences the performer's description (of the audience's behavior).²⁴⁶

My own understanding of this particular performance led me to conceive the piece *Diagrammi*, interactive performance, on 3 July 1999, 48th Venice Biennale.²⁴⁷

When I conceived the project I was interested in the shift of positions of artist and perceiver by interacting with the audience in order to get them involved in the creative process, and the concept of central-focus, perspectival space, left room for the concept of proximity: I put myself in a marginal position in relation to the space of the artistic event (also like Acconci) and the audience (fig. 49). The development of the composition and representation of the space in which the audience-artist relationship operates thus becomes symbolic for my understanding of that relationship.²⁴⁸ Also, in my own work the subjective approach adopted (I invited

²⁴⁵ Graham, D., *Two – Way Mirror Power, Selected Writings by Dan Graham in His art*, edited by Alberro., The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts, London England, 1999, p. 124-125.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

²⁴⁷ Notes on the event are published in *Oreste at the Venice Biennale*, 'Institutions in Great Britain: Artist as Researcher. Diagrams', Charta, Milan 2000, presented as part of exhibition 'Democracy', 13th April- 13th May 2000- Royal College of Art, London.

²⁴⁸ Text of Performance: PREFACE: communication between people depends on codes of the context in which they meet, communication is not possible if the code is not shared by everybody, communication is possible if the barriers are removed, by creating a virtual context is possible to remove social barriers

Audience: people I met during my lifetime.

INTENTIONS: 1. to remove our perception of each other based on assumptions that we made when met in a particular context, according to a particular role.

2. to create a new context in which to exchange messages and therefore communicate to people who I met in the past in a different context

2a. the use of words within social and cultural codes, has to show the poietic dimension and become instrumental in the operation of loss of social identity to let the personal identity emerge. It is here where Maria Grazia introduction becomes important.

THE OTHER INTRODUCTION by Maria Grazia Recanati, friend, opposite, mirror

"In the labyrinth of philosopher E.M. Cioran (Romania, 1911- Paris, 1995) aphorisms, by using *Lacrime e santi* (1937), *Sillogismi dell'amarezza* (1952), *L'inconveniente di essere nati* (1973), I chose phrases for us. Dialogues on the personage (the I represented in the performance, in precarious balance between discovered inwardness and truth of appearance), and on 'exercises of admiration', as Cioran would have called them. Themes are those linking the personage to Elena, through which their friendship was built. The personage believes in the power of words, but they contradict her when they are more intense.

The power of the Name is on her opinion, part of being. When the being comes to light, is named and exist. To name the being and to create it are one thing, but the created falls in the finite and death of the creature: the word is metaphor of this death. Cioran writes: 'at the time in which we had no name, we have probably heard everything'. The personage talks to Elena through an ideal interlocutor, who as much as Elena experienced life in another country and who found in being bilingual his strength. To open a piece of *The Ecclesiaste*, translated by Guido Ceronetti, it is about life and death and represent the Cioran's ideal interlocutor. Chosen to contradict, Emil Cioran breaks distrust towards paradox created by lexical mechanisms, opening up the *poietic* dimension of the word. The style adopted by the interlocutor, who loved to define herself secretary of sensations, is that of seismographic recording of inwardness, the only possible fairy tail with a fragmented and visionary I. Also the personage lives of energetic impulses transmitting codes through herself. She sees herself as a point on a journey in a big spiral, observing towards up and down in every segment, because the continuity has always the same shape, without

3. to exchange role within the new context by inducing the audience to participate in the creation of the narrative of the new context. 'A person's identity consists of a sense of belonging to a social community, on the one hand, and its self-awareness as a unique individual, on the other. One's personal identity is its difference from others'. Erik Erikson

PERFORMANCE PHASES

Phase a. I introduce myself with different social identities that the audience unconsciously relate to, while projecting the diagram: Figlia daughter figlia daughter sorella sister nipote nephew cugina cousin nipote nephew zia aunt cognata sister in law convivente flatmate amica friend amante lover amica friend alumna pupil studente student studente professoressa teacher vice preside vice-head socia member president promoter manager membro del pubblico public dipendente employee ricercatore researcher

The first phase will show a situation in which we recognise ourselves as part of a certain social context and by doing so we will focus our attention on our social identity (me) detached from the (I). The relation is initially between myself and the audience b. To invite the audience to create a composition which breaks the system audience-performer and adjust the chairs with no order. Now the dynamic in the relation is in the new situation one-to-one.

c. MariaGrazia and Simon stand up and step out

Maria Grazia and Simon read:

Qohélet, I, 8-11, in Guido Ceronetti version (and my translation).

In tutte le parole è fatica Un uomo non basta a dirle Mai sazia gli occhi il vedere Mai è troppo agli orecchi l'udire Il Sarà fu già Il Si Farà fu fatto Non si dà sotto il sole La novità Si parla di qualcosa - Guarda! Qui del nuovo... - Non è che del Già Fu Nei mondi prima che fossimo c'era Nessuno rinomina i primi Non c'è più il nome di chi sarà Niente ricorda chi è stato Niente ricorda chi verrà.

In all words is hard work A man is not enough to tell them Never enough the sight to the eyes Never enough the hearing to the ears The will be was already The will do was done One doesn't give under the sun The new One speaks about something - Look! Here the new...- It is just what has been already In the worlds before we were there was Nobody names again the first ones The will be's name is not here anymore. Nothing remembers who has been Nothing remembers who will come.

d. To create an artistic context: my role as artist, theirs as audience. I stand up and step out my self.

First dialogue to be red by Maria Grazia and myself:

MG. Perché dovresti frugare nella mia memoria? A che serve ricordarti di me? Arriverai un giorno a misurare la tua caduta e la presenza della mia angoscia nella tua?

E. Ogni amicizia è un dramma impercettibile, una serie di sottili ferite.

MG. Qualsiasi parola mi fa male. Eppure, quanto mi sarebbe grato sentire i fiori chiacchierare della morte!

E. Hai sognato di incendiare l'universo, e non sei neanche riuscita a comunicare la tua fiamma alle parole, ad accenderne una sola!

MG. Fallire la propria vita significa accedere alla poesia — senza il supporto del talento.

Per tutta la vita ho vissuto con il sentimento di essere stata allontanata dal mio vero luogo. Se l'espressione "esilio metafisico" non avesse alcun senso, la mia sola esistenza gliene darebbe uno.

Same dialogue red by Simon and myself:

S. Why should You look into my memory? What do you remember me for? A day will come when you will measure your failure and the presence of my anguish in yours?

E. Every friendship is an imperceptible drama, a series of subtle injuries.

S. Any word hurts me. Even so, how grateful I will be in listening the flowers talk about death!

E. You dreamt to set on fire the universe, and you couldn't even inflame the words, not even one!

S. To fail ones own life means have access to poetry- without talent as support. For all my life I have lived with the feeling of having been taken apart from my real place. If expression "metaphysical exile" wouldn't make sense at all, than my own existence would be the meaning.

contact with the Beings.

e. A situation in which the audience will create the narrative. During this phase the partition between me-performer and audience dissolves. We will be all responsible for the action in the created new context.

I will pronounce the word: yellow directed to Maria Grazia, she will answer by saying another word to another person. In the mean time I say blue to Simon who will answer in the same way. A game starts made of spontaneous words, the rhythm grows: all people are involved and communicate to each other. In the communicative act of

people I had met in various contexts throughout my living experience and used a text for the dialogue that was based on a friend's personal response to a given input), give further meaning to the concept of the work. In this sense my piece was different from Graham's approach, which was more broadly socio-psychological and less subjective.

Visual models, often used in research to clarify or synthesise a particular theory, or define a method, are particularly useful in my own artistic practice. The diagram used in the performance (fig. 48) comes from a drawing that I made in 1996. At that time I was making a choice from images coming from memory and contexts in which I had lived. The diagram is very simple to read: myself in the centre relating to a specific context, in and outside of Italy (my own native country). This relation is not fixed and refers to a continuous repositioning of myself within the contexts. This dynamic generates an always new relation within the communication schema. In the notes prepared for the event I wrote:

The perception of a work of art is the first step to communication.

sending and receiving signs to which feedback are expected, we will have changed our behaviour, hopefully understood a little bit more who we are in relation to others.

f. We both artist and audience recognise ourselves in a new context with a new identity.

We read overlapping voices (myself, Simon, MariaGrazia) :

Vi siete mai guardati allo specchio quando tra voi e la morte non si frappone più niente?

Have you ever looked at yourself in the mirror when between you and death there isn't anything left?

Avete interrogato i vostri occhi?

Have ever asked a question to your eyes?

Avete capito, in quel momento, che non potevate morire?

Have you understood, at that time that you could die?

Le pupille dilatate dal terrore vinto sono più impassibili delle piramidi.

Pupils expanded by beaten terror are more impassible than pyramids.

Una certezza nasce dalla loro immobilità, una certezza strana e tonificante nel suo lapidario mistero: tu non puoi morire.

A certainty was born from their immobility, a strange and refreshing certainty in its lapidary mystery: you cannot die.

E' il silenzio degli occhi, è il nostro sguardo che incontra se stesso, calma egizia del sogno davanti al terrore della morte.

It is the eye's silence, it is our *Gaze* that meets itself, Egyptian calm of the dream in front of terror for death.

Quando questo terrore vi coglie, guardatevi allo specchio, interrogate i vostri occhi, e capirete perché non potete morire, perché non morirete mai.

When this fear catches you, look at yourselves in the mirror, interrogate your eyes, and you will understand the reason why you cannot die.

I nostri occhi sanno tutto.

Our eyes know everything.

Imbevuti del nulla ci assicurano che niente ci può più accadere.

Imbided of nothing they assure us that nothing can happen to us anymore.

The virtual dimension also mirrors the surreal character of the new context created.

I (personal identity) io (identità personale)
 Me (social identity) ___ within context nel contesto___ me (identità sociale)
 other's I io degli altri
 other's Me me degli altri

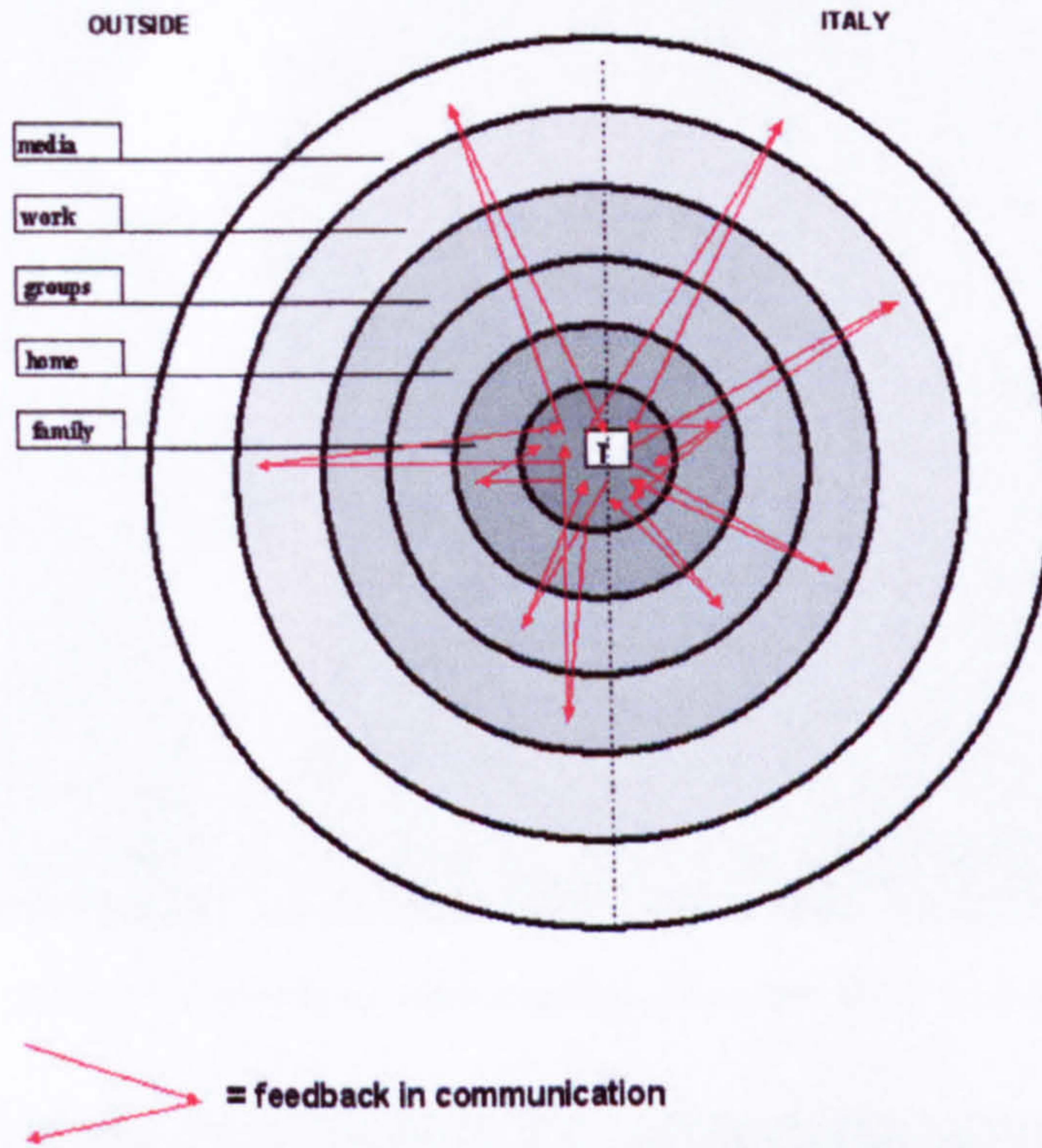


figure 48. Diagram of the context for the interaction in the piece, 1999

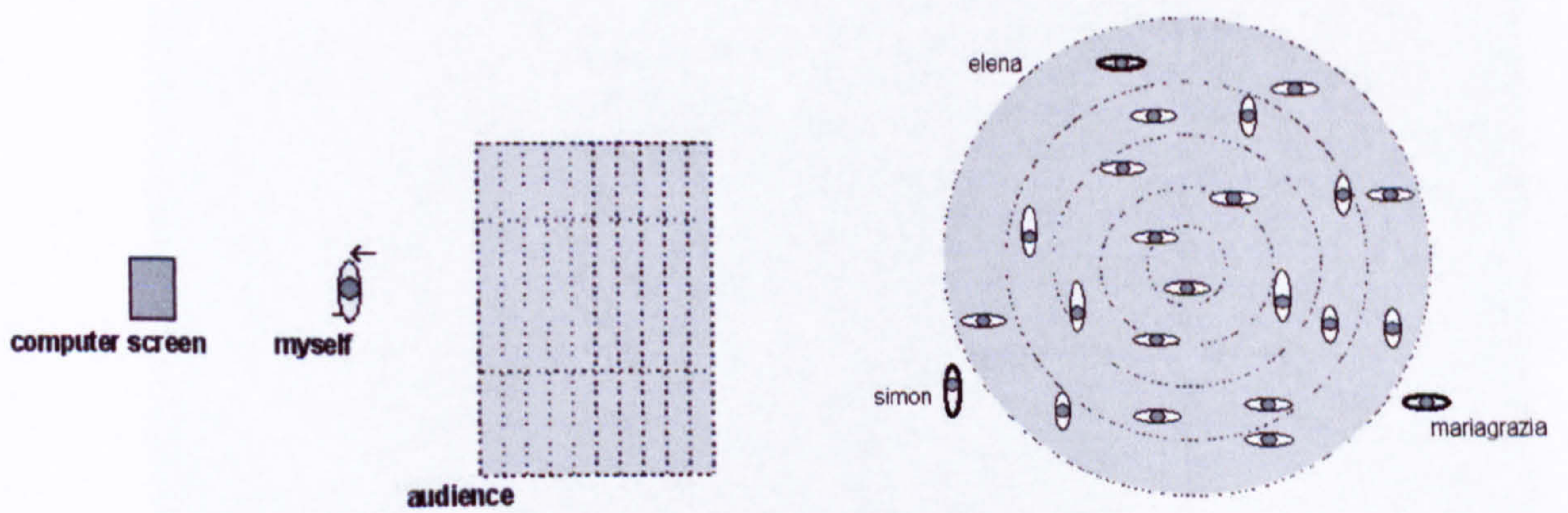


figure 49-50. Diagrams of the composition artist-audience in the space designed in preparation of the event *Diagrammi* (1999)



figure 51. *Diagrammi*, video documentation, still of the dialogue stage, 1999



figure 52. *Diagrammi*, video documentation, still of audience interaction stage, 1999

All forms or media of communication extend the power of our senses.

[...] Communication is a process. When we communicate, we exchange messages. Communication is about the giving and receiving of signs to which we attach meanings, within a given conventional context.

Meanings change according to context and time. By communicating we are involved in a kind of behaviour that may well be a way of trying to change the behaviour of others. The context always effects the act of communication. We present different personalities to other people, according to the situation we are in we stage a performance through a persona. The idea of staging is that we do put on a show. The persona is the character that we adopt to play the part. A performance is the act of presenting the self. Feedback regulates our contact with others. It is our reaction to other people's communication, and their reaction to ours.

Perception is about noticing signs that tell us about ourselves and another person, and then making sense of them. The way we make sense of them is itself based on our previous knowledge and experience. There are barriers in communication which act as filters of messages in the formulation and interpretation of the message: in the process of perception, the most common kind of filtering happens because we make inaccurate assumptions. Semantic barriers are to do with problems in conveying, receiving and agreeing about meaning (language).

Psychological barriers are to do with assumptions and prejudices which cause the message to be filtered.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Cologni, E., *Interaction in art making as data collecting system. Chiasmus, Mirror, Interaction: Mirroring, BluX, Diagrammi*, http://www.media.uwe.ac.uk/exchange_online/

The script of the performance was prepared with Maria Grazia Recanati (as her response to a friend), based on E.M. Cioran (Romanian, 1911- Paris, 1995) aphorisms, the dialogues were read by herself, Simon Tweed and myself. After the introduction when the arrangement of the space was as illustrated in diagram (fig. 49). By getting people to move the chairs in the arrangement as shown in diagram (fig. 50). In order to break a fixed dynamic artist-audience and the exchanging of words (feedback) following the dialogues, the audience was involved in the action. My intention was that people would have forgotten about their social identity in order to let the personal one come out through the action of communicating in the new created artistic context. The audience's feedback was a series of words : giallo, luce, blu, tranquillity, atmosfera, luna, giappone, rosso, verde, arancione, giardino, erba, fiori, pomodoro, rosso, bianco, padiglione, cinema, luce, acqua, mare, liguria, bianco, cielo, bimbo, amore, anguilla, pesce, cane, nero, cane, gioco, bambino, padre, io, anguilla, pesce, acqua.

The performance contains many of the concepts that have broadened throughout my research: issues of mirroring, audience involvement, the adoption of a multidirectional concept of space, the split self. However, I have a concern with the piece which has mainly to do with my own performance, and the fact that there is an element of acting in it, which, as I subsequently understood, it is not part of my performative vocabulary. Also, the piece marks a point in my research development: the deconstruction of a single point perspective spatial composition leaving room for a multi-focal one. This also means that, as performer, I now allow and stimulate interference and interaction to be part of the pieces, whereas here, as I can see from the recording, although I asked for it, I was still afraid of that interference.

III.5. The interchange with the audience and the environment

through an investigation of the senses.

My own artistic contribution to the debate previously illustrated is based on a holistic approach to senses, mainly based on my understanding of Merleau-Ponty. Such an approach enabled me to question the primacy of vision over the other senses and to test my own perception of the world through other senses or to create situations where the spectators would become aware of their own. As much as Merleau-Ponty investigated the relationship of vision-touch, in my own work the same parallel is engaged. Synaesthesia between smell and vision is also addressed in one of my pieces. As a result a new element emerged from the presentation of the pieces: memory. These elements will be discussed in relation to the work made.

III.5.1. Synaesthetic relations

An aspect of the vision-touch relation can be represented by the phenomenon of Synaesthesia.²⁵⁰ Richard E. Cytowic, explains that Synaesthesia is an involuntary physical experience, the joining (cross modal association) in which the real information of one sense is accompanied by a perception in another sense. In addition to being involuntary, this additional perception is regarded by the synesthete as real, often outside the body, instead of imagined. Synaesthesia has been known to medicine for almost three hundred years, interest peaked between 1830 and 1930, but psychology and neurology were somewhat premature sciences.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Although many interpretations have been attributed to the term, in the Oxford dictionary it is defined as follows: Syn-aes-the-sia n. Physiol. Sensation produced at a point other than or remote from the point of stimulation, as of a colour from hearing a certain sound (fr. Gr, syn = together + aisthesis = to perceive).

Johnathan Harrison in *Synaesthesia, the Strangest Thing* illustrates the importance of studies of synaesthetic relationship colour-smell/taste – conducted by June Downey of the University of Wyoming. She states that cases of coloured taste have been less well described in the literature, though attributes this not to the frequency with which this variant occurs, but to the failure of those who experience it to notice that tastes (or smells) evoke colours. Downey suggests that this is because objects that smell and/or taste are usually bound to ‘an object that naturally has a colour which masks the synaesthetic colour. This may or may not be true, but it is our experience that those with, say, coloured smell are very aware of the colour of the odiferous object, as well as the colour percept elicited by the smell’.²⁵²

Harrison also suggests that 'smell function has, for the last couple of decades, been of interest to a number of researchers who investigate Parkinson's disease, which features olfactory loss amongst its sequelae'.²⁵³ The test conducted by a synaesthete patient showed a consistent result of shape perception in relation to smells.

Downey attempts to clarify two distinct types of Synaesthesia, which he named *sensational* and *imaginal*. ‘Would the synaesthete automatically ‘see’ the colour on being stimulated with the appropriate odour on each occasion that the odour was

²⁵¹ Richard E. Cytowic in *Phenomenology and Neuropsychology*, 1995, <http://psyche.cs.monash.edu.au/v2/psyche-2-10-cytowic.html>

²⁵² Jonathan Harrison in *Synaesthesia, the Strangest Thing*, Oxford University Press, 2001, illustrates the different positions regarding the nature of this condition, including: Chris Frith, Cytowic, Zeki, Smith Churchland. Downey's participant, S, reports having experienced coloured gustation for as long as he can remember. In contrast to our experience with coloured hearing synaesthetes, S was able to locate his synaesthesiae, in this case in the mouth. Intriguingly, S also reported that, whilst some colours were agreeable tastes (such as pink and lavender), others, such as reds and browns, were found to be disagreeable. S never experienced blue tastes. After eliciting these subjective accounts of his synaesthesia, Downey set about answering the following questions:

1. Does S possess a normal sensitivity to taste?
2. Are the colour tones of his tastes uniformly determined by any particular factor in the gustatory complex?
3. Is the induced colour sensational or imaginal.

Downey set out to address these questions by administering these tastes and then recording S's responses. Psychophysical experimentation revealed that S seemed particularly sensitive to small concentrations of saccharin (sweet), salt (sodium chloride), sour (sulphuric acid!), and bitter (quinine). However, S was quite poor at distinguishing some tastes; for example, he was seemingly unable to tell quinine from cayenne pepper and took 3 minutes to identify the taste of peppermint. The answer to question 2 appears to be no.

²⁵³ Harrison, J., op.cit., p. 170.

presented?'²⁵⁴ If the answer were to be yes then the perception could be described as *sensational*. However, if it is necessary for the synaesthete to conjour up the colour in an particular fashion, then the perception might best be described as *imaginal*.

Harrison suggests an alternative definition of terms but he also proposes two terms. For the synaesthesia that are believed to be automatic, constant and irrepressible, the term *correspondence* can be used describing the relationship between the primary sensation and the synaesthetic percept. In contrast, when referring to synaesthesia that are learnt (and therefore not automatic, constant, and irrepressible) the term *association* can be used. In my works relating to this phenomenon I tend to refer to the latter in that the associations are stimulated also in non-synaesthetic individuals.

Some recent research into Synaesthesia has examined which brain areas are activated when blind people read braille. This research is based on the knowledge that sensorimotor strip is the brain region that detects touch, so this would seem to be an obvious and expected neural substrate for braille reading. At a functional level according to this research people become very inventive about finding alternative strategies for dealing with the loss of sensory information.²⁵⁵ Harrison states that braille reading is a relatively new human skill, just a couple of hundred years old. In terms of the history of our species, visual reading is also relatively new, being no more than a few thousand years old. Given this, it is unlikely that the human brain is specialised for reading. There simply hasn't been enough time for this to occur. Our ability to read is therefore likely to be subserved by a number of pre-existing cognitive skills, such as our ability to see and our language capacity, abilities we know are housed in occipital and temporal lobe structures. Much of our

²⁵⁴ Harrison, J., p. 34

understanding of brain function has been revealed to us through nature's exceptions and, as a consequence, neuroscience has been much occupied with the various deficits exhibited by patients with physical damage to either the brain or the sense regions that convey information to the brain. The advent of functional neuroimaging has meant that, for the first time, we can look to see how nature deals with these exceptions.

One of the first studies to be conducted in this area (Sadato 1996) compared the blood flow maps of people in normal conditions with those of braille readers who had been blinded early in life. All subjects were scanned while engaged in a tactile discrimination task and a tactile task that required no discrimination. As predicted the latter task yielded no unexpected activation in either group. However, a marked dissociation was seen in the discrimination task such that blood flow to primary visual areas increased in the braille reader's group but decreased in normal subjects. This remarkable study has shown that brain regions ordinarily subserving vision are recruited when the unsighted are engaged in making tactile discriminations.²⁵⁶

In relation to my work, the distinction Harrison makes between environmental and genetic is particularly appropriate to my 'test' in the piece *Public Private Perceptions*. According to Bulat Galejev's theory the phenomenon of Synaesthesia derives from social and cultural phenomenon, he describes it as being co-imagination or co-feeling' and that by its psychological nature it is an intersensory association. He claims that the ability to connect in consciousness the visual and audible phenomena is inherent to everyone. This is one of the reason why I wanted to test the synaesthetic connection in my own experience through the piece *Public Private Perceptions*.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 249.

In relation to this phenomenon, together with other elements, I developed the project *Senses*, and begun discussions in May 2000 with the Five Senses Section of the Fondazione Science Museum Leonardo Da Vinci in Milan, for an exhibition at their Museum. The plans for work consist of five interactive pieces based on the cross-modal associations of the senses in order to investigate modes of expression other than, or in relation to vision. One of the pieces *Drawing Scents* has recently been presented to the public, the others remain work in progress.

The initial design for the whole *Senses* project was presented at the *CADE* Conference of Digital Creativity in Glasgow in April 2001,²⁵⁷ where I also tested an interactive method to gain data on the audience response to it in the video piece *Through Senses* (discussed earlier).

The design for the projects refers to the presence of a *container*, designed to stimulate the cognitive process, and a *content*, which functions as stimuli to which the audience respond. The chosen stimuli are video clips, generated noise, reconstructed scents drawn from my own subjective experience, to which the responses (taking different forms) become part of the work itself.

Synaesthesia as interpreted within this project is understood as a specific way of perceiving based on a concept of duality, connections, rebounds, non-linear dynamics, which are concepts also present in my way of working through interaction. Interactive dynamics have a maieutic quality in that they involve

²⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 240, 241.

²⁵⁷ The presentation was published in 'Through Senses' p. 86-88 in Show, R. and McKay, J., *Digital Creativity: Crossing the Border*, The School of Art Press ISBN 0 901904 82 1, 2001 Glasgow

participants by stimulating curiosity and desire to know, together with the ludic aspect of the process, such that it will generate physical awareness of themselves in relation to work in the space.

The complete *Senses* project though some work are in progress, represent the end point of my practical research within the PhD. The works were conceived as follows.

1. *Life Archive*, where a *Chiasmatic* composition is implied to relate sound to visual stimuli. Adopting a mirror composition in the space I try to relate my own vision of the world represented by the video and audio information to the seeing and hearing of the audience. Furthermore, the content of information refers to places I know through my life experience, but they can be familiar to many so that they have space to fill in with their own life experience.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Installation: One couple out of the 20 video clips are projected symmetrically one in front of the other onto walls. In all situation a web of infrareds will be the keyboard for playing sound.

Perceivers behaviour: Perceivers enter in the room wearing headsets connected to sound. Video clips are projected and they have to find/associate the sound file to the paying video. This is played and change according to the infrareds. This is connected to an archive of twenty video files 1,30 minute long each. Perceiver is left free to imagine the situation that the sound refers to.

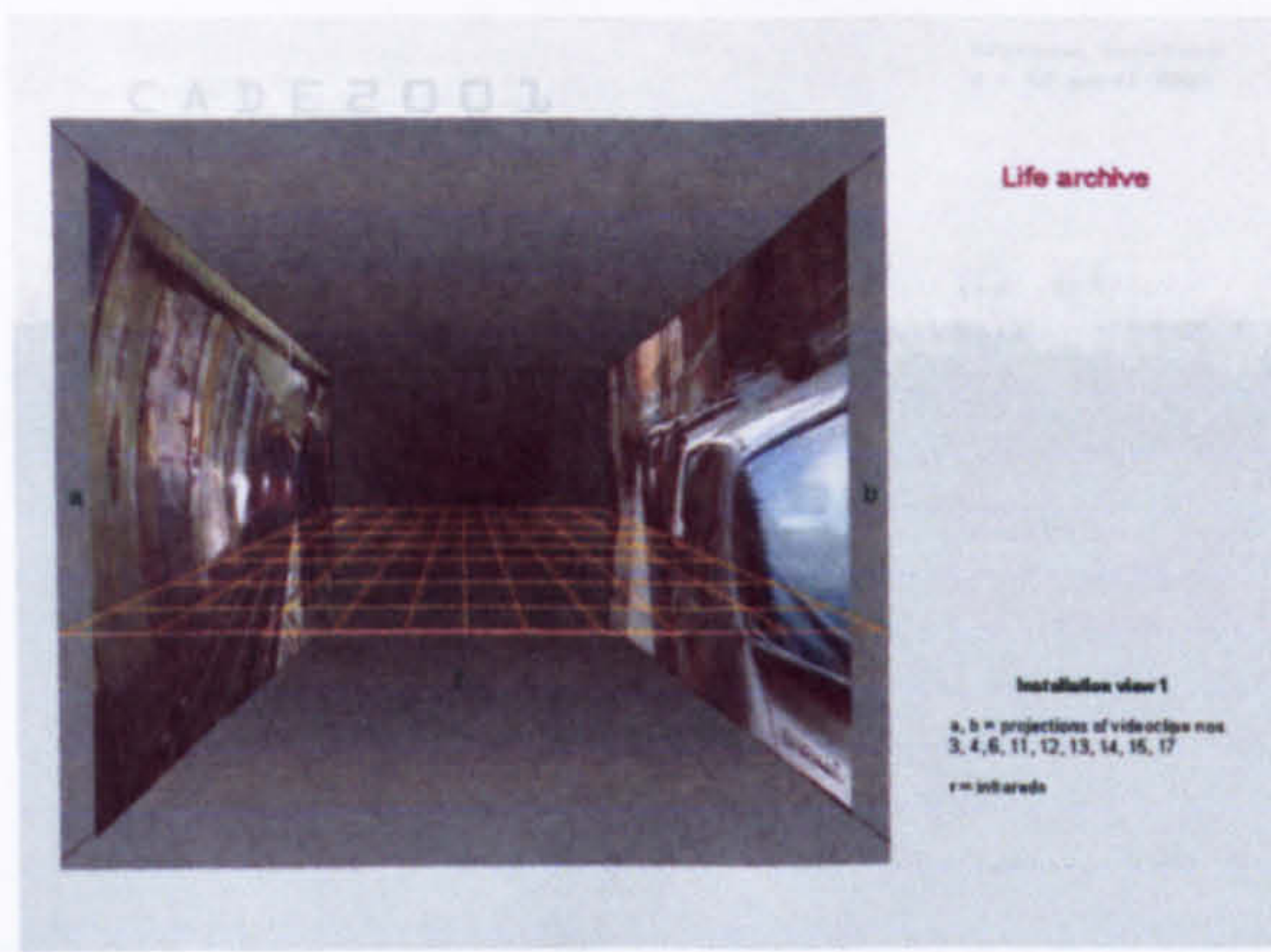


figure 53 *Life archive*, design



figure 54. *Take my breath away*, design

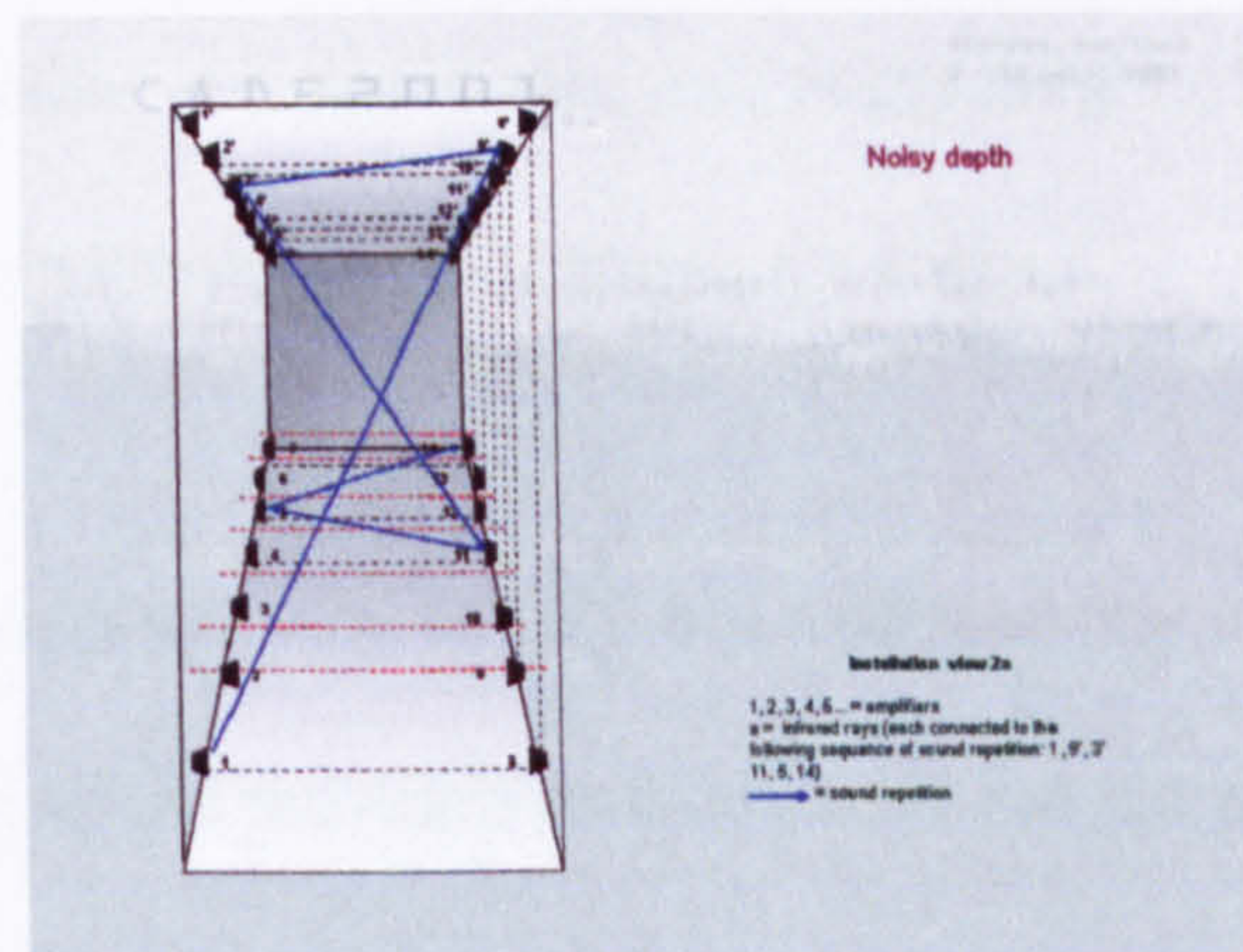


figure 55. *Noisy depth*, design



figure 56. *Don't touch*, design

2. *Take my breath away*. The work aims to generate a need for synchronicity with the rhythm of the waves. In this the interaction is, I would say involuntary because it is not activated consciously, but depends on the emotional state of the perceiver recorded through the rhythm of the breathing.²⁵⁹

3. *Noisy Depth*. Would we be able to draw the space in a darkened place, had we only propagation of sound in the space as information? What does the spatiality of sound do to our mapping of the space? These are the questions I asked myself, while experimenting with the audience to find out how sensitive we can be to sound in perceiving space without the aid of vision. Blind people sense the presence of an obstacle because they hear their own voice rebounding back as indicative of the distance from it. I have thought about a long and narrow corridor, along the walls a series of sound amplifiers are positioned at regular distances. Infrareds rays are placed one after the other at a similar distance at the height of the perceiver's legs, to be interrupted as the perceiver walks through the room.

4. *Don't Touch!* The work is very simple, but expresses my own position in this work: I am present with the provided material, but I am not physically there. I touch the screen which divides myself from the viewer. I cannot be touched, I disappear.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Installation: In the darkened room three videos lasting 45" each are projected symmetrically onto the floor in front of the perceiver and in the next walls from floor to half height.

As much as the composition in the installation projection, also the shots were taken from above and each of the sides. Behaviour of perceiver: perceivers entering in the room will locate the sensor which will record the alterations of the breathing. Three frequencies (high, medium, low) are connected to the three videos, which will be played according to the alteration of the breathing of the perceivers. They will then activate their own rhythm in the video composition.

²⁶⁰ Perceiver behaviour: As soon as the perceiver touches the screen the video changes, which means that my hand moves in a different way. In this, visual perception is still involved even though the sense involved mainly is that of touch. Installation: a touch screen onto which one of the two videos showing my hands move, in one vertically, in the other horizontally, is playing. When the perceiver touches the screen this action will stop the video playing while activating the other.

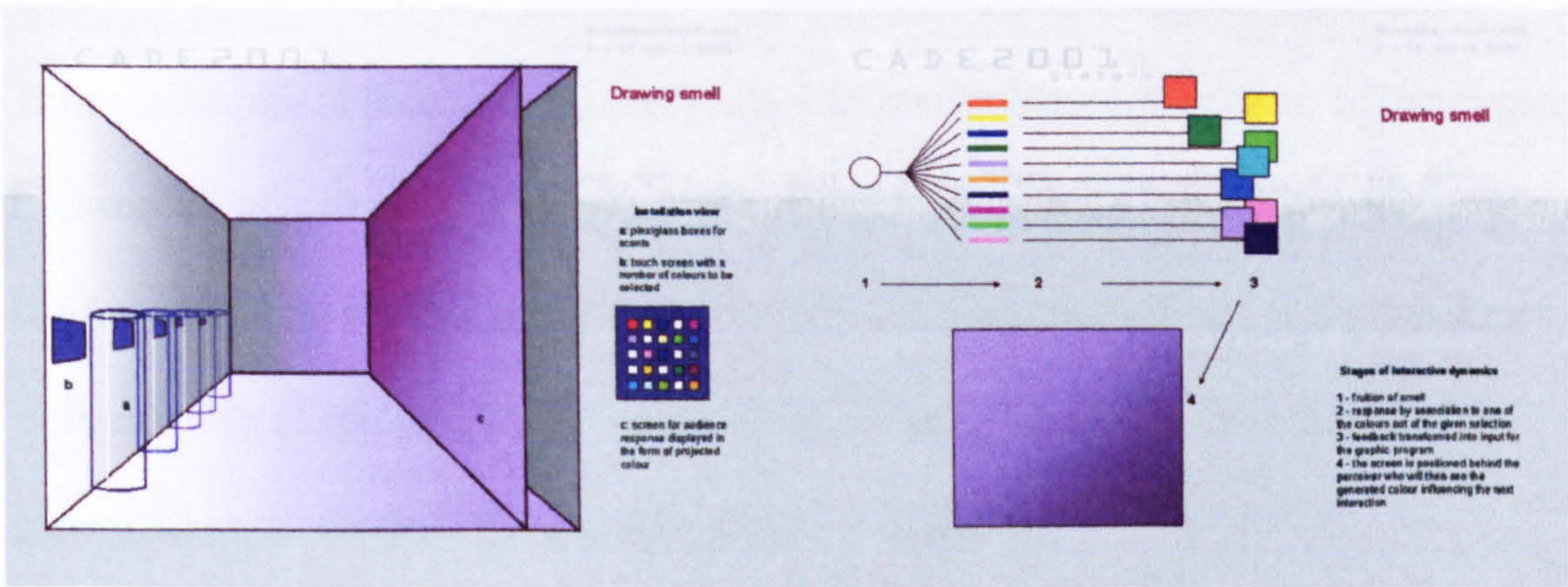


figure 57 a *Drawing Scent*, designs of installation view and interactive dynamics

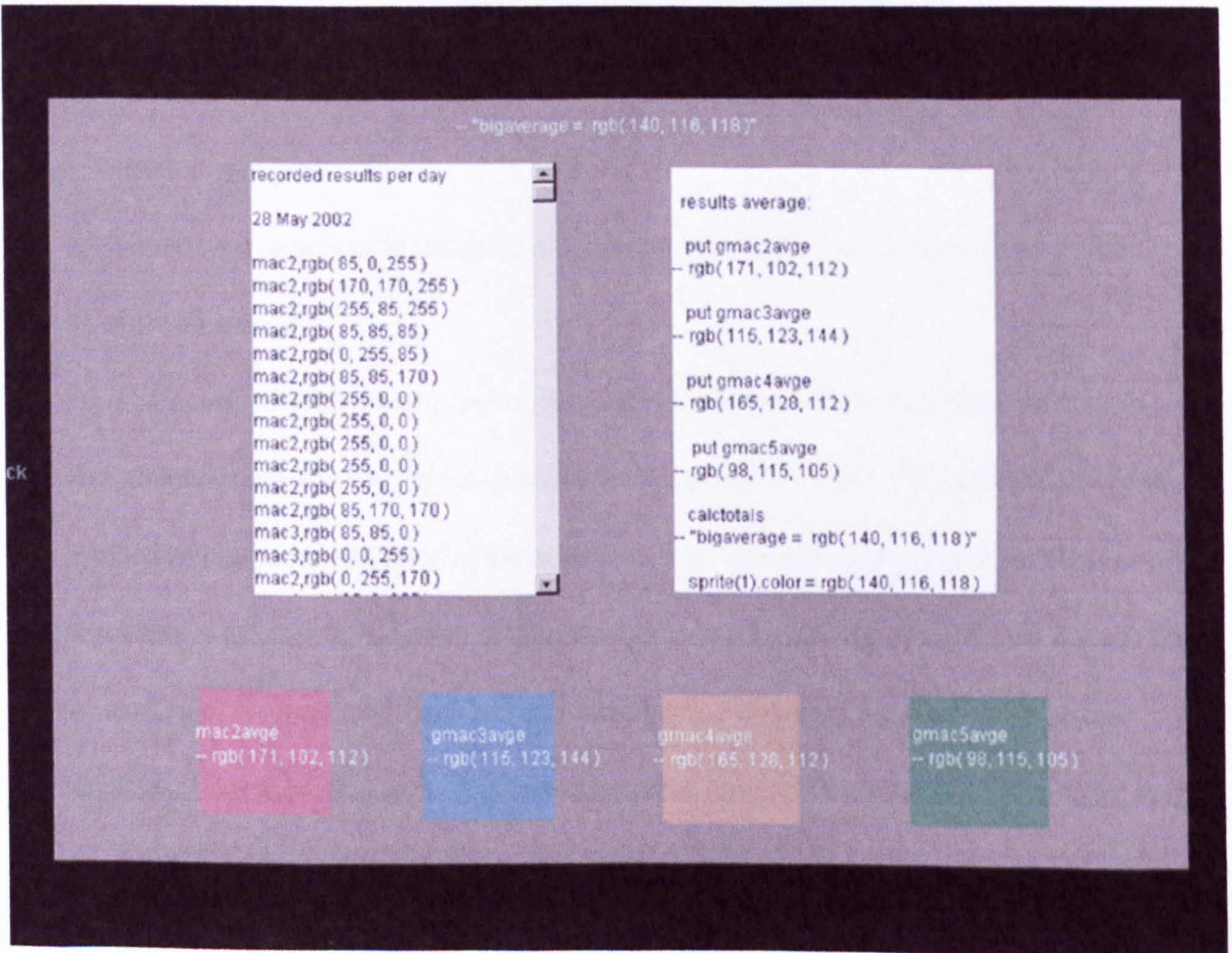


figure 57b. *Drawing Scent*'s results as analysed in included CD-ROM, screenshot

5. *Drawing Smell* (title changed to *Drawing Scents*), was presented to the public in the exhibition *In between* held in the Lethaby Gallery between 28 May and 1 June 2002.

Through the piece I investigate the association between scents and colours, to interrogate the concepts of memory, presence and absence. It was designed in the following way: a number of sources of smell are placed along the wall. Next to each one is a touch screen with a number of colours. On the wall in front of it a screen shows the update of the generated outcome depending on the audience feedback.

The work functions in four stages in relation to the perceiver's behaviour:

1. fruition (perception through smelling)
2. perceiver's feedback through association with colour among a given selection
3. the perceiver's choice is connected to a series of parameters to implement a graphic program
4. Those parameters take shape on the digital screen behind the perceiver in the form of a colour
5. The colour fills the space and will influence the next perceiver reaction

The audience response was then averaged after the exhibition, the RGB information of the selected colours over the period of the exhibition was: 140, 116, 118.²⁶¹ The installation will be presented to audiences in other countries where I will record the different reactions to the same olfactory stimuli, which will be translated into a different colour. In this sense the reaction is not explained, but its illustration becomes part of the work itself in the form of a printed single colour photographic piece of the resulting colour.

²⁶¹ here some of the results out of the four adopted macs produced in real time and then collected: gmac2avge -- rgb(171, 102, 112), mac3avge rgb(115, 123, 144), gmac4avge -- rgb(165, 128, 112), gmac5avge -- rgb(98, 115, 105)
part of the text files produced: mac2,rgb(255, 0, 0) mac3,rgb(255, 0, 170) mac4,rgb(85, 0, 255) mac5,rgb(0, 0, 170)
mac2,rgb(255, 170, 85) mac3,rgb(255, 85, 170) mac4,rgb(170, 85, 0) mac5,rgb(0, 85, 0) mac2,rgb(255, 170, 170)
mac3,rgb(170, 255, 255) mac4,rgb(255, 255, 0) mac2,rgb(255, 255, 170) mac3,rgb(85, 0, 170) mac4,rgb(0, 85, 0)
mac5,rgb(85, 255, 170) mac2,rgb(170, 255, 170) mac3,rgb(0, 85, 255) mac4,rgb(255, 85, 0) mac5,rgb(170, 85, 85)
mac3,rgb(170, 255, 255) mac4,rgb(255, 170, 85) mac5,rgb(170, 170, 255) mac2,rgb(85, 0, 255) mac3,rgb(170, 170, 255)
mac4,rgb(255, 170, 85) mac3,rgb(255, 255, 85) mac4,rgb(170, 85, 255) mac5,rgb(85, 85, 0) mac3,rgb(85, 255, 0)
mac2,rgb(255, 255, 170) mac5,rgb(0, 85, 0) mac3,rgb(170, 255, 85) mac4,rgb(255

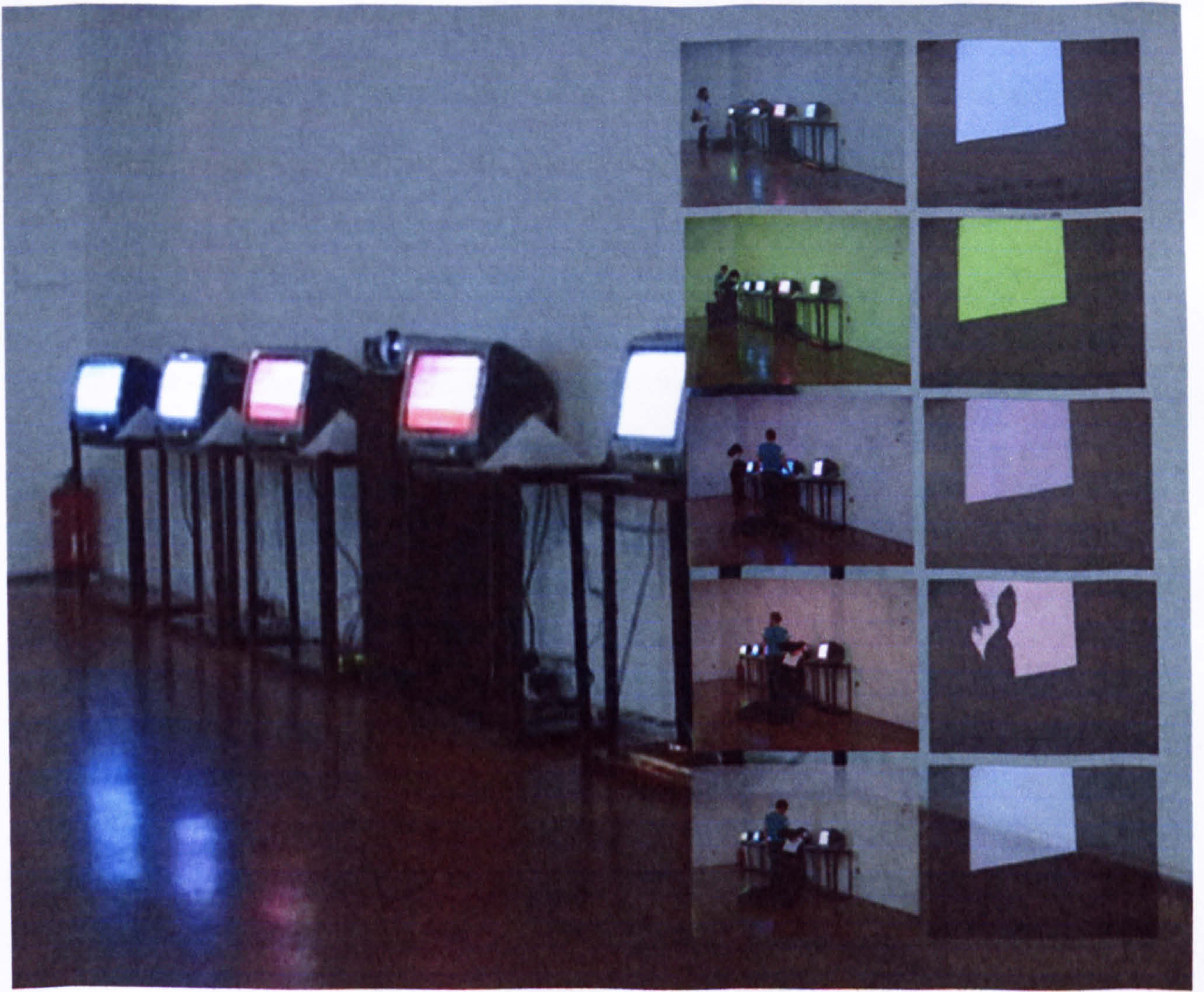


figure 58. *Drawing Scents*, installation view and perceivers' behaviour, Lethaby Gallery, London 2002

II. 5.2. Touch and vision

In order better to understand the synaesthetic direction taken in my most recent works, and to link one aspect, touch and vision, I found it necessary to review some of the philosophical concepts underlying this debate.

‘From Descartes to Berkeley to Diderot, vision is conceived in terms of analogies to the sense of touch [...] Diderot, in his work *Letters on the Blind* (1749), asserts the possibility of a tactile geometry and that touch as well as sight carries with it capacity for apprehending universally valid truths [...]’²⁶² : states Jonathan Crary in his book *Techniques of the Observer On vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. He also writes that even in Diderot, a so-called materialist, the senses are conceived more as adjuncts of a rational mind and less as physiological organs. Each sense operates according to an immutable semantic logic that transcends its mere physical mode of functioning. Thus, the significance of the image is discussed in Diderot’s *Letters on the Blind*: a blindfolded man in an outdoor space steps forward, tentatively holding a stick in each hand, extended to feel the objects and area before him. He continues by stating that ‘[...] paradoxically this is not an image of a man literally blind; rather it is an abstract diagram of a fully-sighted observer, in which vision operates like the sense of touch. Just as the eyes are not finally what see, however, so the carnal organs of touch are also disengaged from contact with an exterior world’.²⁶³

²⁶² Crary, J., *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990, p. 59.

²⁶³ this is part of an historical account on vision conducted by Crary in order to contextualise an in-depth description of the instruments for representation in relationship to the evolution of the position of the observer, *ibid.*, p. 60.



figure 59. Illustration from 1724 edition of Descartes *La Dioptrique*

Jacques Lacan writes on Diderot's script in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*²⁶⁴, to show how the Cartesian spatial construction is not a necessary reference for visual construction. That kind of geometrical space of vision is, in his view, perfectly imaginable by a blind man. In Lacan's view, geometrical perspective's aim is to map the space, not sight. A blind man can conceive the space that he knows being real to be perceived at a distance and with a simultaneous act. His point is to apprehend via temporal action instantaneously. Lacan writes also that in Cartesian *Dioptrics*, the action of the eyes is represented by the action of the two sticks. The geometrical dimension of vision does not represent what the actual field of vision offers to us, which is the relation of subjectification.

In Cray's view, Bishop Berkeley's theory of perception was based on the essential dissimilarity of the senses of vision and touch, but he writes that this insistence on the heterogeneity of the senses is remote from nineteenth-century notions of the autonomy of vision and the separation of the senses. Berkeley was not alone in the eighteenth century in his concern with achieving a fundamental harmonisation of the senses, in which a key model for visual perception is the sense of touch.

The Molyneux problem, which preoccupied the thought of the eighteenth century, poses the case of a perceiver who is ignorant of one of the languages of the senses: sight. The best known formulation of the problem is Locke's:

Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a cube and a sphere of the same metal, and nightly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and the

²⁶⁴ Lacan, J., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Translated by Sheridan, J.A., Penguin Books,

other, which is the cube, which the sphere. Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on a table, and the blind man be made to see: quaere, whether by his sight before he touched them, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe, which the cube?²⁶⁵

Discussing the matter, Martin Kemp writes that Molyneux answered that he could not, on the basis of Locke's assertion. The man would have to learn which visual sensations would correspond to the tactile ones of sphericity and squareness.²⁶⁶

Crary writes that Diderot's position in his script is not so much a depreciation of the sense of vision as it is a refutation of its exclusivity. Diderot details Saunderson's devices for calculation and demonstration, rectangular wooden boards with built-in grids marked out by raised pins. By connecting the pins with silk threads Saunderson's fingers could trace out and read an infinity of figures and their relations, all calculable by their location on the demarcated grid. Here the Cartesian table appears in another form, but its underlying status is the same. The certainty of knowledge did not depend solely on the eye but on a more general relation of a unified human sensorium to a delimited space of order on which positions could be known and compared. In a sighted person the senses are dissimilar, but through what Diderot calls 'reciprocal assistance' they provide knowledge about the world.²⁶⁷

Martin Jay suggests that

The empiricist solution – that each sense was utterly distinct – and the intellectualist alternative – that a transcendental knowledge of space exists prior to sense experience – were both inadequate, because they

1977, p. 86

²⁶⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, ix, 8.

²⁶⁶ Kemp, M, *The Science of Art, Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, Yale University Press 1990, p. 235.

failed to register the primary layer of intersensory experience in the body anterior to the differentiation of the senses on the level of reflected thought. Instead, Merleau-Ponty claimed, the unification was like the merging of binocular into monocular vision, produced by a kind of bodily intentionality before mind distinguished itself from matter.²⁶⁸

In both cases the world was construed as a spectacle to be observed from afar by a disembodied mind. It was necessary instead to delve into the experience of perception prior to the constitution of the body as object and the cogito as rational subject.

Although his own philosophical tools were inevitably reflective, Merleau-Ponty sought to explore the pre-reflexive phenomenal field he called 'being in the world'.²⁶⁹

Kemp refers to the Cartesian image previously discussed and writes:

Descartes had compared our perception of the inverted retinal image with a blind man feeling objects with a pair of crossed sticks, an analogy illustrated by Le Cat in 1740 (fig. 60). The actual orientation was irrelevant, since our understanding depends upon how the mind interprets the 'information'. And if we have to learn to make this interpretation, as Locke believed, the erstwhile blind man would not immediately be able to interpret what the 'crossed sticks' of the optical processes in his eyes meant with respect to his previous sensations of touch.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Crary, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

²⁶⁸ Jay, M., p. 310.

²⁶⁹ Jay, M., p. 308.

²⁷⁰ Kemp, *op. cit.*, p. 235

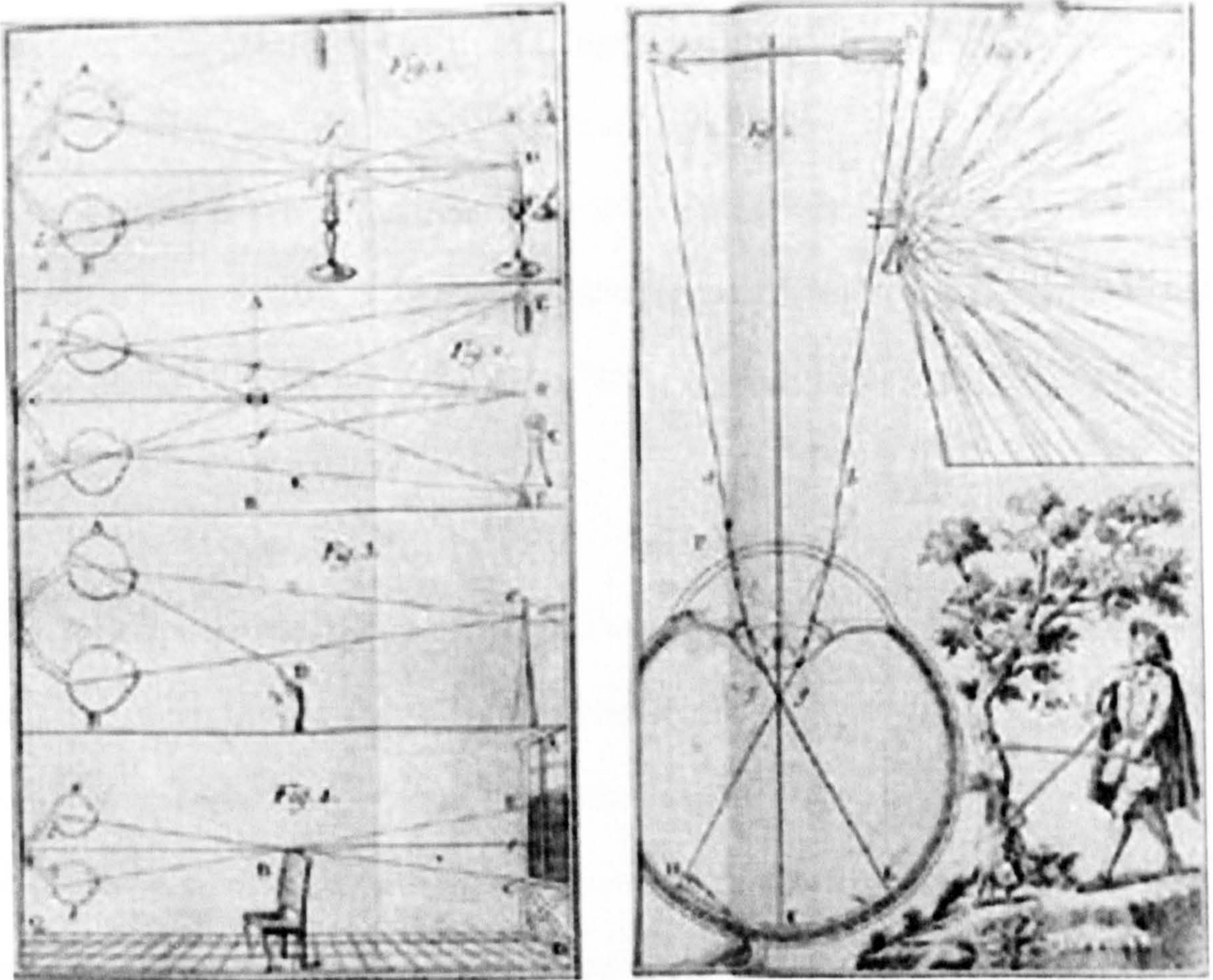


figure 60. Studies of the eye and binocular vision, including the crossed sticks analogy, from Nicolas le Cat's *A Physical Essay on the Senses*, London, 1750. In Kemp, M. op. cit., p. 235.

In Crary's view, regardless of how the problem was ultimately answered, whether the claim was nativist or empiricist, the discussion of the senses constituted a common surface of order for the eighteenth century. But for those whose answers to Molyneux were, in one way or another, negative: a blind man suddenly restored with sight would not immediately recognise the objects before him and these included Locke, Berkeley, Diderot, Condillac, and others. They share little with the physiologists and psychologists of the nineteenth century who were also, with greater scientific authority, to answer the question negatively. By insisting that knowledge, and specifically knowledge of space and depth, is built up out of an orderly accumulation and cross-referencing of perceptions on a plane independent of the viewer, eighteenth-century thought could know nothing of the ideas of pure visibility to arise in the nineteenth century.²⁷¹

Martin Kemp refers to Bishop Berkeley as a great radical philosopher of perception in Britain at this time, who argued that a blind man who was suddenly able to see would not know by his eyes alone what was high or low, erect or inverted. 'For the objects he had hitherto used to apply the terms up and down, high or low, were such as only affected or were in some way perceived by his touch; but the proper objects of vision make new sets of ideas, perfectly distinct from the former. Nothing could be more removed from Berkeley's theory of how distance is perceived than the science of the stereoscope.'²⁷² The stereoscope as Crary shows in his text, became a crucial indication of the re-mapping and subsumption of the tactile within the optical.

Jay writes that Merleau-Ponty challenged the Cartesian account of vision, critically examining *La Dioptrique*. 'Descartes was right in abandoning the medieval notion of "intentional species" flying through the air from object to eye, and with it, the

²⁷¹ Crary, J., pp. 58,59.

resemblance theory of vision. For if such entities existed, the different perspectival profiles of perception would be impossible. But Descartes still remained too beholden to the realist paradigm, which turned vision into a view on the world, rather than in it.²⁷³

But Merleau-Ponty, as already suggested, and also in Jay's view, reinterpreted Descartes claim that it is not the eyes, but the soul that really sees as the spiritual category in his own terms and opposed it to something else:

It is the soul which sees and not the brain; it is by means of the perceived world and its proper structures that one can explain the spatial values assigned to a point of the visual field in each particular case. [...] The universe of consciousness revealed by the cogito and in the unity of which even perception itself seemed to be necessarily enclosed, was only a universe of thought in the restricted sense: it accounts for the thought of seeing, but the fact of vision and the ensemble of existential knowledges remain outside of it.²⁷⁴

As mentioned before, Merleau-Ponty by means of explaining the ontology of the *Chiasm* embraces a discussion of touch in relation to vision particularly in the notes published with the title *The Visible and the Invisible*. Opposing his view to that of Sartre,²⁷⁵ Merleau-Ponty granted that 'the two hands are never simultaneously in the relationship of touched and touching to each other', but he refused to concede that this meant that the touched hand is simply an object in the world like any other thing: 'In passing from one role to the other, I can identify the hand touched as the same one which will in a moment be touching'.

²⁷² Kemp, M., p. 235.

²⁷³ Jay, op cit., p.304.

²⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Primacy of Perception*, pp. 192-193. Quoted by Jay, op, cit. p.305.

²⁷⁵ The disagreement with Sartre over the status of the touched hand reflects their more basic divergence regarding the nature of the 'pre-reflective cogito' - that 'non-positional' self-consciousness which, for both, grounded all reflective acts.

Merleau-Ponty states:

In this bundle of bones and muscles which my right hand presents to my left, I can anticipate for an instant the integument or incarnation of that other right hand, alive and mobile, which I thrust towards things in order to explore them. The body catches itself from the outside engaged in a cognitive process; it tries to touch itself while being touched, and initiates 'a kind of reflection' which is sufficient to distinguish it from objects.²⁷⁶

He continues by writing that this equivocation between touching and being touched is one of the 'structural characteristics of the body itself; the body is both subject and object, capable of both seeing and suffering'.²⁷⁷

James Schmidt states that throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty had argued 'for a different understanding of the pre-reflective cogito [this] must be understood as an incarnate consciousness, as a body-subject. Hence, there can be no question of the body being simply an object among other objects in the world. Without downplaying the extent of Merleau-Ponty's dissent from Being and Merleau-Ponty's later examinations of the touched hand thus proceed without recourse to the tacit cogito'.²⁷⁸

Schmidt suggests that at this point all of the terms associated with the philosophy of the cogito are now suspect. In a long working note from May 1960 he stressed a point which had been noted only in passing in his earlier discussion: the touching hand is 'never exactly the touched'; it always eludes us. 'Something other than the body is needed for the junction to be made; it takes place in the untouchable.

²⁷⁶ Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.93

Schmidt gains nothing by foisting another name onto this untouchable and saying that the touching and the touched ‘coincide “in the mind” or at the level of “consciousness”. These words only transform ‘a true negative’ into ‘a positive that is elsewhere (a transcendent)’.²⁷⁹ The place where the toucher and the touched meet is not simply de facto untouchable. It, like the ‘invisible of vision’ or the ‘unconsciousness of consciousness’, is the ‘other side or the reverse of sensible Being’.²⁸⁰

Merleau-Ponty stresses that the touching hand always escapes the hand that tries to touch it. But Schmidt explains that the non-coincidence of the touching and the touched is not a ‘failure’, but rather, the sort of joining of obverse and reverse, which is typical of the *Chiasm*. The analysis of the touched hand must take as its starting-point the fundamental lesson the *Chiasm* teaches: ‘there is not identity, nor non-identity.. . there is inside and outside turning around one another’.²⁸¹

Merleau-Ponty by clarifying that, although my hands are never able to coincide with one another, they nevertheless are able – because of ‘a very peculiar relation from one to the other across corporeal space’ – to join together as one ‘sole organ of experience’ and explore the world. In the same way, the monocular views of my individual eyes are tied together into ‘one sole cyclopean vision’. In Merleau-Ponty’s words:

My two hands touch the same things because they are the hands of one same body. And yet each of them has its own tactile experience. If nonetheless they have to do with one sole tangible, it is because there exists a very peculiar relation from one to the other, across the corporeal space-like that holding

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.95.

²⁷⁸ Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp 92-93.

²⁷⁹ Merleau Ponty, M., *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.254.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*

between my two eyes-making of my hands one sole organ of experience, as it makes of my two eyes the channels of one sole Cyclopean vision.²⁸²

Vision should be understood as the 'turning back' of one part of the visible upon the rest. In Merleau-Ponty's view the *Chiasm* is our primordial relation with the world:

The seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision.[...] What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the visible and the tangible, is-if not yet the incorporeal-at least an intercorporeal being, a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see sit present.²⁸³

Merleau-Ponty's thought, therefore, was based on the connection of senses: 'The senses translate each other without any need of an interpreter, and are mutually comprehensible without the intervention of any idea.'²⁸⁴ Martin Jay suggests that if the phenomenal field linking, but not fully uniting, lived body and natural environment was to Merleau-Ponty, based on the communication of the senses, so too the human *Lebenswelt* entailed reciprocity rather than conflict. Indeed, the very bodily experience of being at once viewer and viewed, toucher and object of the touch, was an ontological prerequisite for that internalization of otherness underlying human intersubjectivity.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p.264.

²⁸² Ibid., p.139.

²⁸³ Ibid., p.143.

²⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 235.

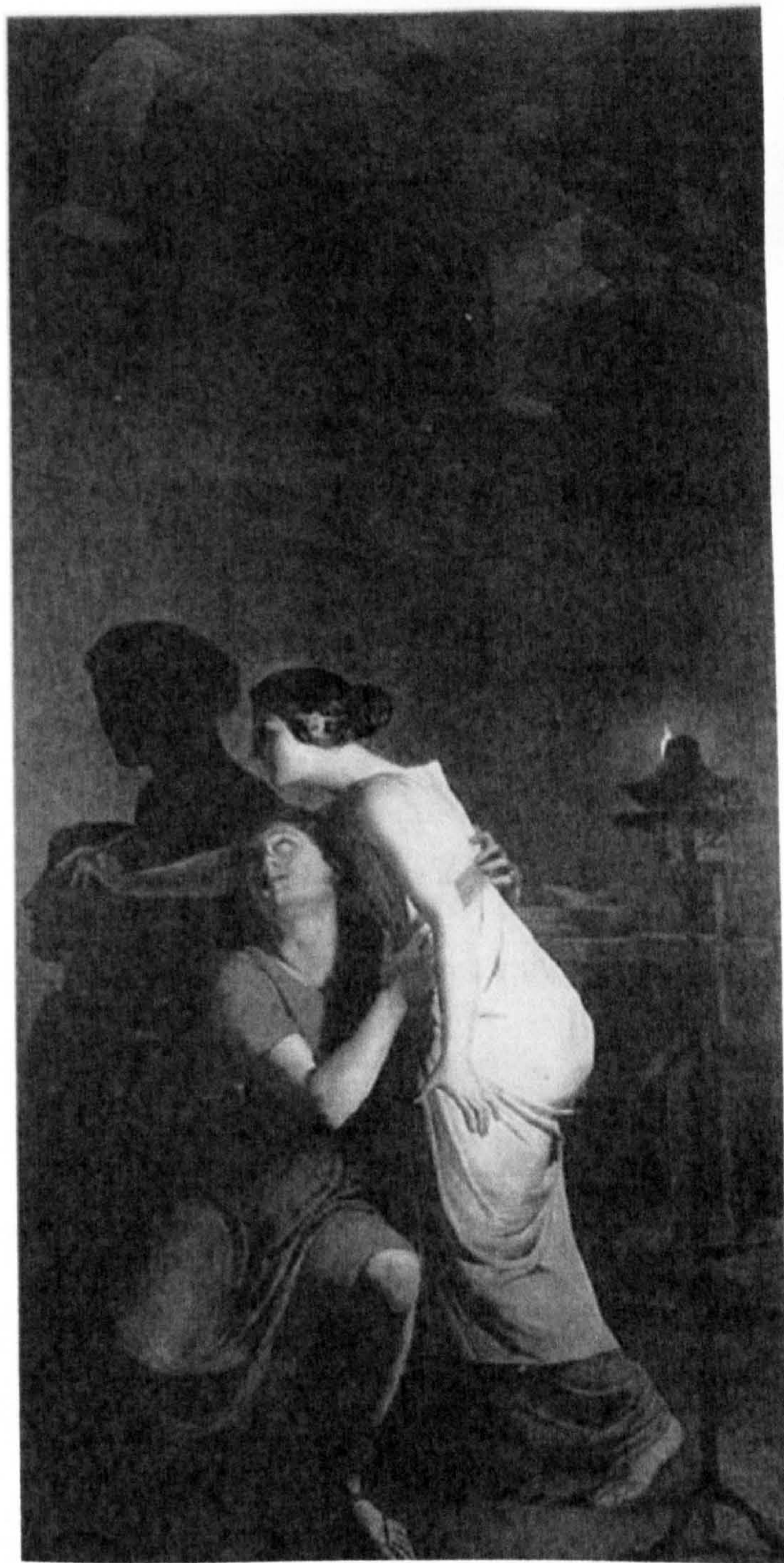


figure 61. Joseph-Benoit Suvée, *Budates or the Origin of Drawing*, Bruges, Groeningemuseum from Derrida J., *Op.cit.*

In my own art practice the understanding of the intertwining between vision and touch was the basis for the piece I made: *Public Private Perceptions*. For its realisation I acted blind-folded. By doing so I was both making the statement that I would present myself in a vulnerable position (being the object of other people's *Gaze* although active by performing) and I was physically testing scientific readings on Synaesthesia. I also interpret this as a response to the anti-ocularcentric discourse, as a result of which I begun to understand the relationship between memory and non-vision. This relationship was investigated by Derrida in discussing the the origin of drawing. In the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Louvre in Paris in 1990, *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autoportrait et autres ruines* (*Memoirs of the Blind, The Self-Portrait and other Ruins*), Jacques Derrida writes on the origin of drawing in relation to memory and vision, to then find in Merleau-Ponty's concept of *non-visible in the visible*, a possible link. Derrida writes that, by attributing the origin of drawing to memory rather than to perception, Charles Baudelaire is, in turn, making a show of memory. He is writing himself into an iconographic tradition that goes back to at least Charles Le Brun.

In this tradition, the origin of drawing and the origin of painting give rise to multiple representations that substitute memory for perception. First, because they are representations, next, because they are drawn most often from an exemplary narrative (that of Butades, the young Corinthian lover who bears the name of her father, a potter from Sicyon), and finally, because the narrative relates the origin of graphic representation to the absence or invisibility of the model.²⁸⁵

Derrida explains that Butades does not see her lover because their gazes cannot meet (for example in J. B. Suvée's *Butades or the Origin of Drawing* in fig. 61): it is as if

seeing were forbidden in order to draw, as if one drew only on the condition of not seeing. Finally, he explains, it is as if the drawing were a declaration of love destined for or suited to the invisibility of the other. In Derrida's view, whether Butades follows the traits of a shadow or a silhouette, or whether she draws on the surface of a wall or on a veil, a skiagraphia or shadow writing in each case inaugurates an 'art of blindness'. Derrida explains that Butades was a young Corinthian lady who had to face the separation from her loved one for some time. Noticing the shadow on the wall of her man generated by the light of the lamp, inspired by love, she wanted to stop this image by tracing the contours of the shadow.

Derrida then poses the question of the 'invisible that lost memory': amnesia. This to prevent any implication of visibility, 'invisibility that inhabits the visible'.

Invisibility that looks for the visible to the point that it is confused with it, to assure the ghost of its impossibility as the most appropriate source.

The visible is in these terms invisible, not as visibility, phenomenology or essence of the visible, but as body of the visible itself. Thus, as emanation of the visible, it produces blindness. To be other than visible, Derrida explains that absolute invisibility does not have to take place somewhere else nor has it to constitute another visible, which has already appeared or disappeared some monumental spectacle of ruins called reconstruction, coming from memory. This non-visible does not describe a phenomenon which is present somewhere else, latent, imaginary, unconscious, hidden or past; it is a phenomenon whose non appearance is something else.

²⁸⁵ Derrida, J., *Memoirs of the Blind, The Self-Portrait and other Ruins*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1990, pp. 51-52.

In a similar way in my work, a constant concern with memorising and recording through video, scripts and photographs was implied. On the one hand this enabled me to compare the documentation regarding a particular event to my own memory of it filtered by time, and experiences. on the other hand at a conceptual level the very notion of non vision within visibility suggests a comparison with memory, imagination, a-perception: the boundary between imagination and lived experience. In order to give a sense of what is the context for the above here are some of Merleau-Ponty's notes published after his death with the title *The Visible and The Invisible*:

January, 1960. Principle: not to consider the invisible as an other visible 'possible' or a 'possible' visible for an other. . . . The invisible is there without being an object, it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask. And the 'visibles' themselves, in the last analysis, they too are only centered on a nucleus of absence. Raise the question: the invisible life, the invisible community, the invisible other, the invisible culture. Elaborate a phenomenology of 'the other world', as the limit of a phenomenology of the imaginary and the 'hidden'.²⁸⁶

[May 1960]. When I say that every visible is invisible, that perception is imperception, that consciousness has a 'punctum caecum' that to see is always to see more than one sees-this must not be understood in the sense of a contradiction it must not be imagined that I add to the visible ... a nonvisible... One has to understand that it is visibility itself that involves a nonvisibility.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1968, pp. 229.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 247.

What [consciousness] does not see it does not see for reasons of principle; it is because it is consciousness that it does not see. What it does not see is what in it prepares the vision of the rest (as the retina is blind at the point where the fibers that will permit the vision spread out into it).²⁸⁸

The process of recording, using video, photography, text, can be seen as a need to define (without solution) the boundary between imagination and lived experience although, as Merleau-Ponty, suggests it does not exist.

'I have had a very happy childhood...
...a wooden white wardrobe with golden relief decorations as large as the wall in front of my bed and that of my little sister Paola. Our beds were low, too low if compared to the wardrobe; mine was on the side of the window and the balcony. At night in bed, when trying to fall asleep, I could see the wardrobe coming towards me, falling down on me. I am trying to remember the images that I used to see and that I now remember with the idea that the wardrobe was falling down onto myself. I am not sure if these images appeared in a state of semi-consciousness, as a dream or if they were a visual distortion due to the shadows in the dark that I consciously visualised. The wardrobe was shaped like an image seen through a wide-angle lens and was falling down. I remember that I used to fear this visions and then I got used to it. I think I never talked about it before, thus this image of the wardrobe, absolutely real, of my childhood forms, together with other images my visual archive, from which I still draw upon.'

289

Some of the implications of the non-vision with touch relation, also aiming to generate synaesthetic relation, were tested through the piece *Public Private Perceptions*. This was performed on 21 October 2001 at the Toynbee Theatre in London²⁹⁰ and the version *02* was performed on 16 March 2002, and remained as a video installation for the following two weeks at the Neon Gallery in Bologna.

²⁸⁸Ibid., p. 248.

²⁸⁹From my diary, 17 May 2001.

²⁹⁰The documentation of it was presented at the *Performance As Research In Practice Symposium*, University of Bristol 10-11 November 2001 as part of the Paper: 'Private action becoming public. A practical investigation on the performer's reactions to the environment.'

The production was driven by my instinctive interest in knowing more of symbology and limits of the sense of sight. I started working on the ideas around which *Public Private Perceptions* was conceived in April 2001, as can be gathered from my notes:

'April and May have been very productive months. New environments, new conditions, new people ... new me. The investigation for my research had already become conceptually more clear and focused: by looking back at my previous work I can see the genuine intuition which influences the most recent work becoming conscious intention.

'...going to the bedroom from the dining room' in April 2001 and '...going to the rear garden from the side entrance' (action and video installation project) in May 2001 represent my own way to apprehend a part of the domestic space around me through touch. The soundtrack of it is silent, the visual appearance of the space narrow. I wanted to record the tactile sensation of these places, in the first one with the aim of remembering, in the second one of meeting. This is a subjective experience of the readings on senses and cognitive processes; I have been working on environments to be perceived by the viewer, to stimulate his or her reactions. In a way these two actions represent a way of stepping into the role of the viewer again to then look at the documentation of it, and myself in it, as the work [...]'

291

The overall context investigated in the work is the relationship body-environment: how this influences my perception of myself in delivering a piece. The nature of the context, as well as the conditions, generate a different tension and therefore experience of the piece in myself the performer and of course the audience (as a consequence of the Tate event in March 2001 previously illustrated).

²⁹¹ From my diary, May 2001.

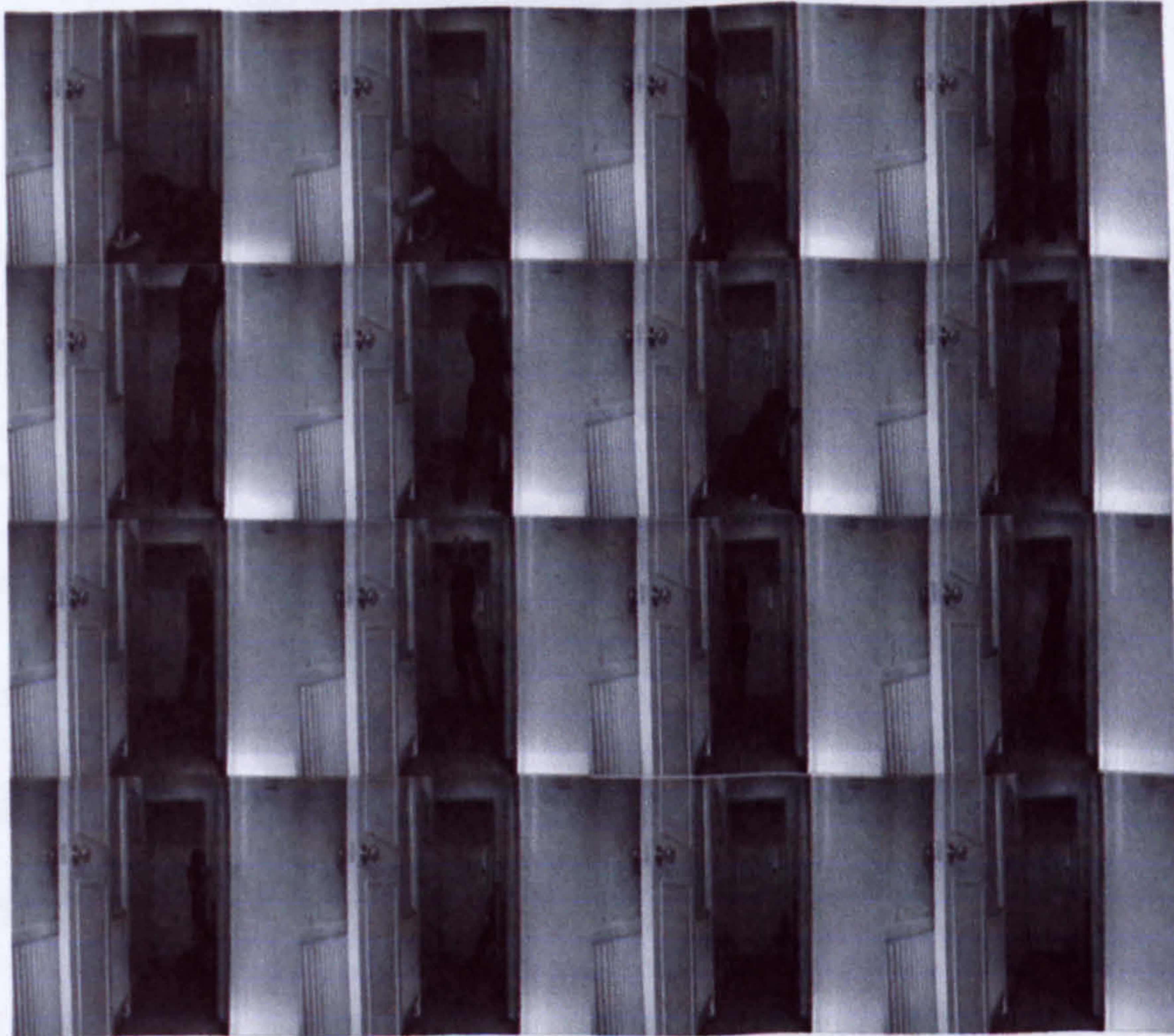


figure 62. *going from the dining room to the bedroom...*,
April 2001, stills from video documentation



figure 63. *going from the side entrance to the rear door...*
May 2001, stills from video documentation

I believe that the awareness of the bodily experience (here through touch) of the environment enables me to reposition my self within a particular place. The apprehension is subject to the changing conditions of the context; from the juxtaposition of present and past action the space/time in between seems to arise as a possible answer. By exploring the environment through touch with my eyes blindfolded, I gathered information about a particular space up until then perceived with all the senses. I related a colour sensation to a tactile one. This was repeated in two different situations: at home with no audience before the event, and in the theatre. By performing in front of the public, while the video of the domestic action is projected, I presented myself simultaneously in two environments playing different roles. Not only the physical space was different, but the work stressed my difference in relation to it. The colours are named in Italian in the private dimension and in English in the public one. The surfaces present certain characteristics that I tried to visualise with my eyes blindfolded, and by naming colours I drew a sort of map, neurological as well as one that indicates urban places.

In the Bologna version *02* the piece was composed of two video-clips, the first recorded in The London Underground, a public place with an audience, and the second a live recording of the action taking place in an isolated (private) context the ground floor of the gallery, without an audience. Public and private here are not indoor-outdoor, but *outofthecountry-withinthecountry*. The audience simultaneously in two projections perceived the two 'dimensions' of the enactment – a relationship between two representations of myself in different dimensions of time and space. My presence is through video representation, but the audience was able to feel the tension generated by the live event. The recording of the live event remained in the gallery for presentation during the following two weeks.



figure 64 *Public Private Perceptions*, Toynbee Studios, October 2001

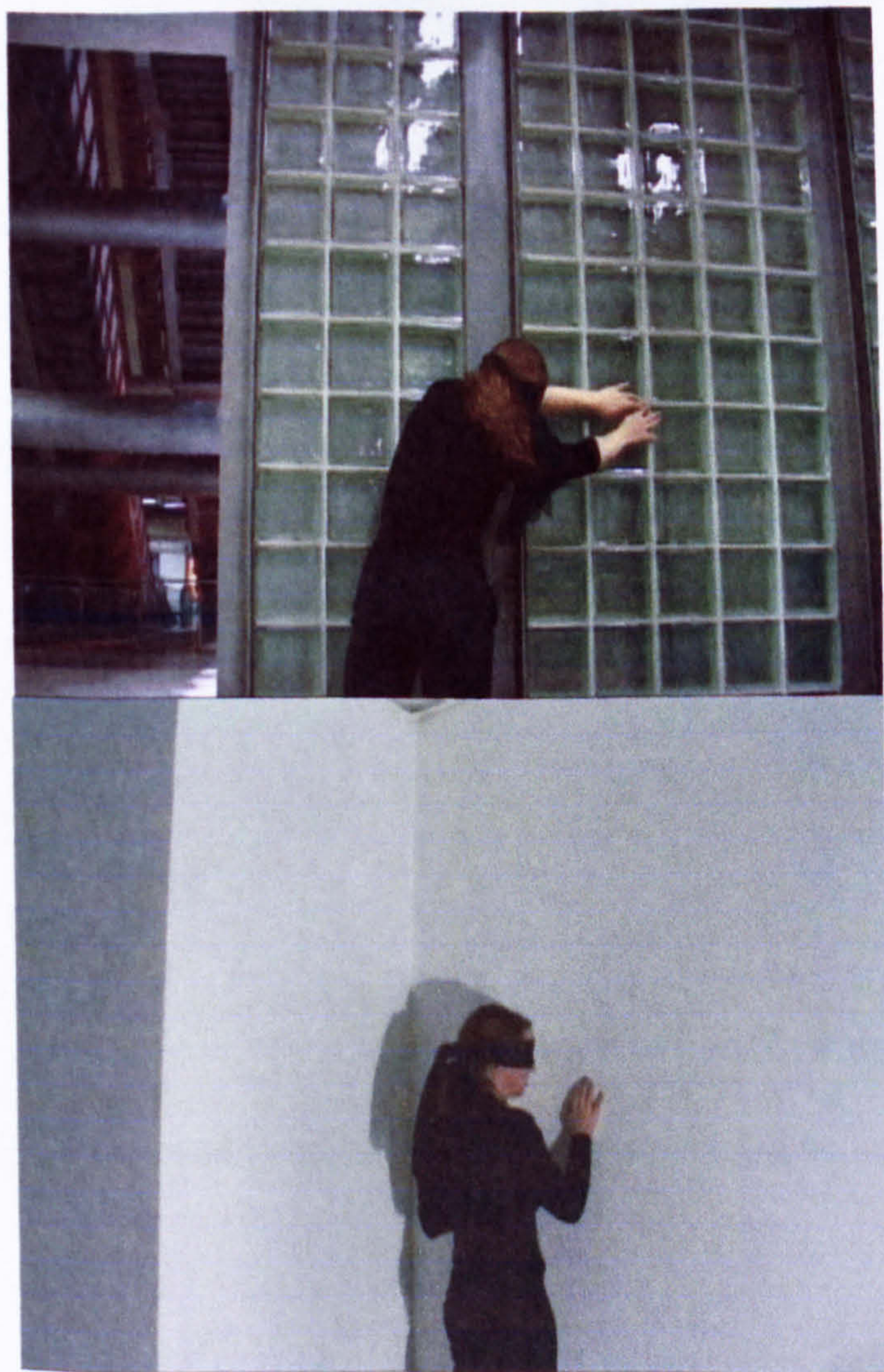


figure 65. stills from recorded action in Westminster Underground Station London and live action as perceived by the audience at Neon Gallery Bologna Italy

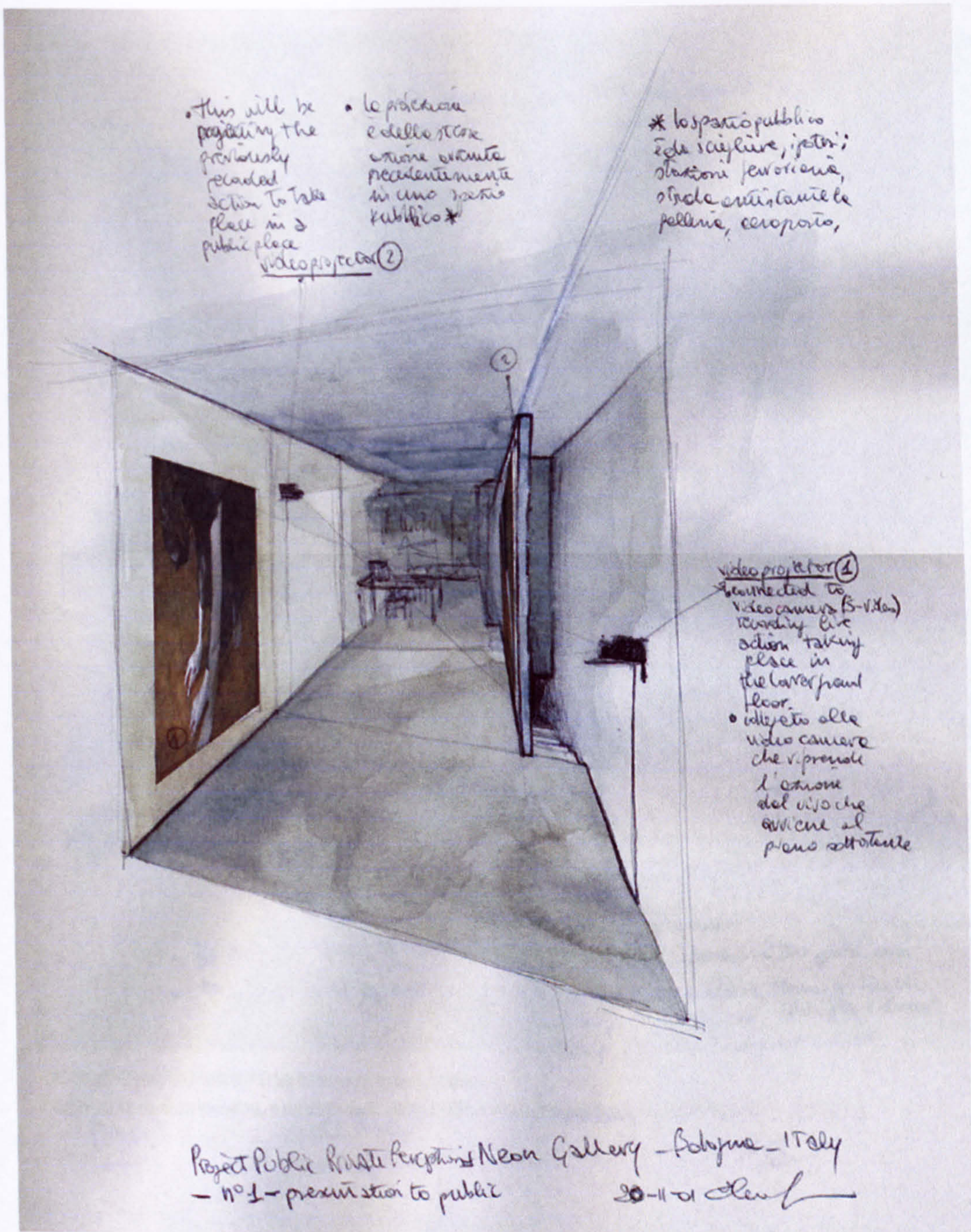
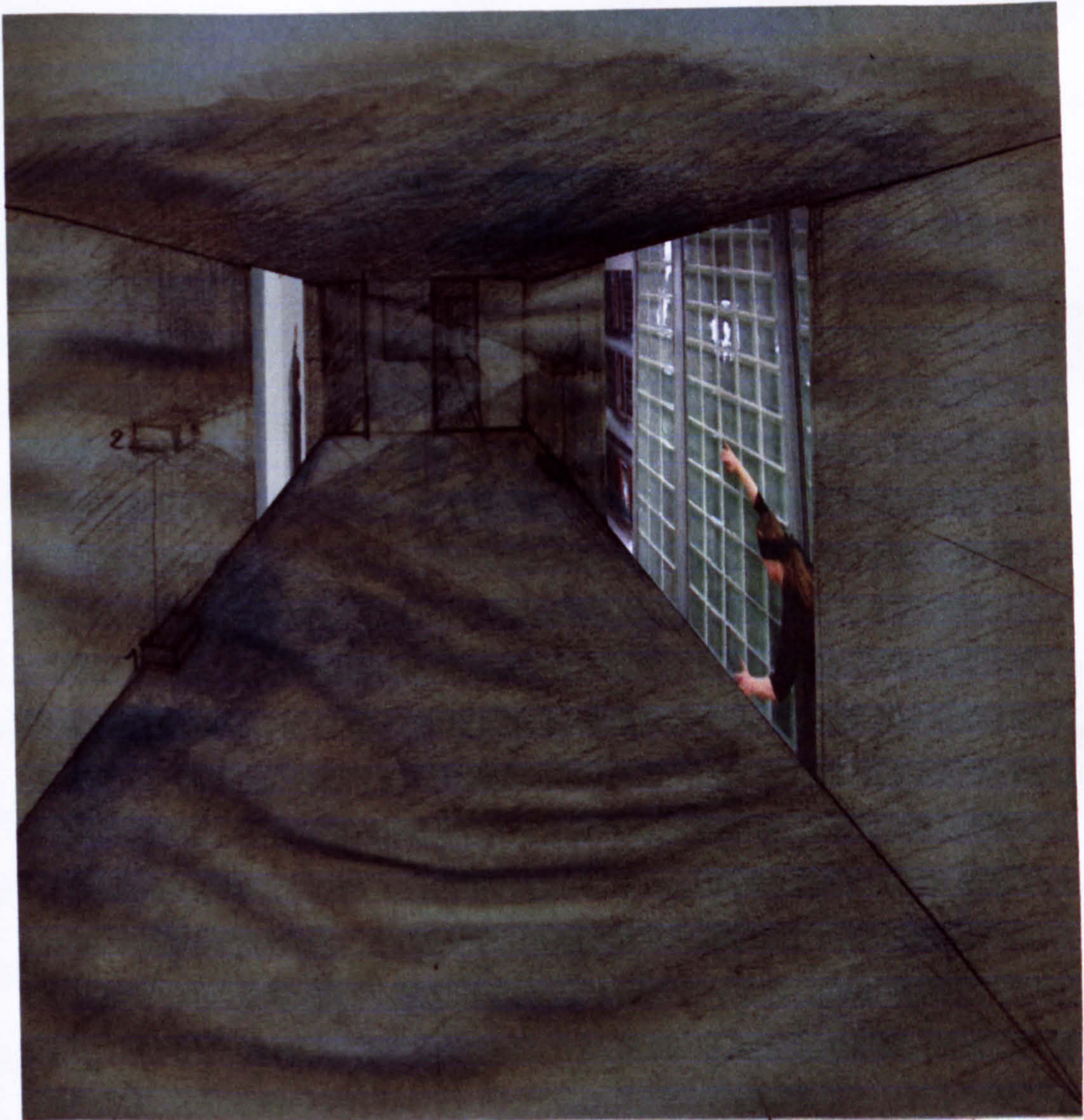


figure 66. Design for installation in the Neon Gallery of Public Private Perception 02, 2001.



PUBLIC PRIVATE PERCEPTIONS 02 neon gallery Bologna

digitally enhanced drawing, with stills from dvd used for the installation 16-30 march 2002

ambientazione installazione P.P.P. Neon
A. G. L. 23-01-2002

figure 67. *Public Private Perceptions 02 Neon Gallery Bologna*. Digitally enhanced drawing, with stills from DVD used for installation 16-30 March 2002

The video 'documentation' of the actions, which now constitutes the piece, was presented in the exhibition *In Between* at the Lethaby Galley from 28th of May to 1st of June 2002.

CONCLUSION

There is no single conclusion to this research. The practical work has developed and progressed in respect of a greater understanding of the relationship between artist as maker and audience; artist as maker and self-audience and audience as participant. The practice has also developed through an investigation of the dialogue of the scopic regime, the domination of the scopic in art practice and, more importantly the relationship between my *non-scopic* works and a developing theory of the anti-ocularcentric.

Though non linear, this conceptual progress within aesthetic practice, from opticality and its contradictions in the earlier works to the exploration of synaesthesia in the later works, is evident. I cannot demonstrate any simple one-to-one relationship between the theoretical discourse and the practice because, although interlaced with theory, practice also opens up interpretations within its own territory and language. However, there are clear parallels between some concepts in the theory with my own practice and the practice of others – for example the relationship of Lacan to the work of Dan Graham and to my own or, Merleau-Ponty's notion of *Chiasm* in Acconci's and again in my own work.

I believe my original contribution to be both in the content of the artworks and the methodology adopted, rather than at theoretical level. Whilst I acknowledge that my

art practice owes a debt to the work of other artists and is connected to a range of art concepts evident in recent history, I believe some of the practical work does make original contribution and establishes some new ground – particularly recent performative works using video and the exploration of synaesthesia in the context of memory.

By adopting a variety of strategies in the creation of my work, I have challenged the static artist-audience relationship implicit in the one-way perception of representations based on central-focus perspective. My hypothesis, which encompassed a two-way artist-audience interaction, was first tested in the body of work I produced in 1999. The theoretical argument of *chiasmatic intertwining* I subsequently developed, allowed me to place my practice within the anti-ocularcentric discourse and confirmed the direction undertaken in the practice. The validity of my initial hypothesis was further confirmed by the participation of the audience in aspects of the art making process of the recent video-live installations.

Despite subjective and sometimes unpredictable directions in my practice, I believe that the work has been methodical in the interplay between a tracking diary, video documentation, analytical diagrams and attempted theoretical connections being made throughout.

Some of the issues opened up have not been resolved. In particular there is a range of work that might be undertaken in exploring the creative potential of synaesthesia and linking this to scientific experiment on brain structure and psychological formation. This is beyond the scope of the current research.

Although the work developed and shifted from a psychoanalytic to a phenomenological ground, through an engagement with perception, questions of memory and imagination have arisen, particularly in the more recent pieces. This may suggest that while questioning the primacy of vision, through an engagement with the other senses, a form of visual response is generated as a break between sight and consciousness. In this respect I now believe I could relate my position to Sartre's, who directly challenged the ocularcentric traditions that equate the *I* and the *eye*.

Sartre dealt with the issue of images and the imagination²⁹² by posing a radical difference between sense perception and the imagination. He criticised the belief that images were only likenesses of external objects reflected in consciousness. In my work I have increasingly come to distinguish images from perception, visual or otherwise, and instead identify them with the intentionality of action. In my future work, following Sartre in this respect may offer a possibility to 'escape' the *Gaze* of others through an awareness and understanding of the 'invisibility' of non-perceptual, non-visual images. Together with the continued exploration of synaesthesia and the concept of performativity this represents another and future project.

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²⁹²For example in *Imagination: A Psychological Critique* (1936) and *The Psychology of Imagination* (1940).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

figure 1. layer a. Diachronic Research Development.....p 8a

figure 1. layer b. Patterns of investigation evolution.....p 8a

figure 2. Practice-Theory relationship, 2002.....p. 11

figure 2b. Diagram of creative process in artistic practice research, 1999.....p. 11

figure 3. <i>Blugiallo</i> , video 4', still, 1999.....	p. 13
figure 4. Diagram on interaction and method for incorporation of research data (02-2001), developed from previous version (01-2000).....	p. 13
figure 5. <i>Through Senses</i> , stages of interactive dynamics, exhibited at CADE Conference, Glasgow School of Art, 2001.....	p. 14
figure 6. Diagram of gathering of feedback from audience in a defined context, 1999.....	p. 16
figure 7. <i>Mirroring</i> , stages involved in the production process.....	p. 24
figure 8. Layout of 3 pages for publication, 2000.....	p. 24
figure 9. From <i>public-private</i> series, 2001.....	p. 27
figure 10. <i>Live archive (transition)</i> , digital video 4 minutes, stills, 2001.....	p. 27
figure 11. <i>Las Meninas</i> by Diego Velázquez.....	p. 45
figure 12. Stages of artist and spectator production of spatial context in relation to their activity.....	p. 45
figure 13. From Kemp, M., ' <i>The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat</i> ', Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, p.107.....	p. 48
figure 14. From Kemp, M., ' <i>The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat</i> ' Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, p.107.....	p. 48
figure 15. Florence Henry, <i>Self portrait</i> 1928.....	p. 66
figure 16. Claude Cahun, <i>Autoportrait (Self-Portrait)</i> , 1928.....	p. 69
figure 17. Cindy Sherman, <i>Untitled Film Still # 2</i> , 1977.....	p. 69
figure 18. Cindy Sherman, <i>Untitled Film Still #81</i> , 1978.....	p. 72
figure 19. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, illustration in <i>Avex non avenues</i> , 1929-30 (detail).....	p. 74
figure 20. Bruce Nauman, <i>Self-Portrait as a fountain and Finger touch with mirrors</i> , 1967.....	p. 76

figure 21. Bruce Nauman, <i>Art Make-up n° 1, 2, 3, 4</i> , 1967-68.....	p. 76
figure 22. <i>Myme</i> series, detail, 1999.....	p. 79
figure 23. 2001.....	p. 79
figure 24. Diagrams for analyses of the space of action in my own creative process, a, 2001.....	p. 82
figure 25. Diagrams for analyses of the space of action in my own creative process, b, 2001.....	p. 82
figure 26. <i>Madrid</i> , digital video 1'30", still, 2000.....	p. 84
figure 27. Diagram for analyses of <i>Morning Toilette</i> , 2002.....	p. 86;
figure 28. one of the charts of analyses for <i>Morning Toilette</i> videoclips, Nov. 2000, #1 recorded on 7 th June 2002 Stills from the two simultaneous projections...	p. 86
figure 29a. DVD installation, 2001, cover; figure 29 b. installation in space, viewing audience, 2001.....	p. 89
figure 31. <i>Morning Toilette</i> , video live installation, Tate Modern, London, 2001.	p. 90
figure 30. <i>Morning Toilette</i> , DVD installation, Lethaby Gallery, London, 2002...	p. 90
figure 32a. Stills from the two simultaneous projections	p. 91
figure 32b. Table given to the audience after the performance at Tate Modern for data collection.....	p. 91
figure 33. <i>Public Private Perceptions</i> , Toynbee Studios, London 2001.....	p. 94
figure 34. Tables on anamorphosis from Kemp, M., <i>The Science of Art Optical Themes from Brunelleschi to Seurat</i> , Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1990, p.235.....	p. 108
figure 35. Hans Holbein, <i>The Ambassadors</i> , 1533.....	p. 109
figure 35 b. <i>Seeing Through</i> , 1997, detail of anamorphic dotted image on surface and design for it.	p. 109

figure 36a. Lacan, J., <i>The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis</i> , Penguin, London, 1994, p. 91.....	p.126
figure 36b. Lacan, J., <i>The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis</i> , Penguin, London, 1994, p. 106.....	p.126
figure 37. Designs for <i>3D Mirror</i> and <i>Stretched Mirror</i> , 1997.....	p. 133
figure 38. <i>Stretched Mirror</i> , 5x3x3 ms, Centre for Sculpture, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 1997 (detail).....	p. 134
figure 39. Floor plans of the top floor of the NPG with notes for production, 1999.....	p. 138
figure 40. Diagram <i>a</i> for analyses of <i>Ancora cerca</i> , 2001.....	p. 139
figure 41. Diagram <i>b</i> for analyses of <i>Ancora cerca</i> , 2001.....	p. 139
figure 42. <i>Ancora cerca</i> , still from one of the 8 videoclips, 2002.....	p. 141
figure 43. <i>Ancora cerca</i> , video installation and audience, Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia, Italy, 2002.....	p. 141
figure 44. a. Composition for performance <i>bluX</i> , 2000; b. <i>bluX</i> , 7', stills from video documentation, Watershed Media Centre, Bristol, London Biennial and Camberwell College, 2000.....	p. 146
figure 46. Vito Acconci, <i>Seedbed</i> , performance/installation wooden ramp and loudspeaker system, Sonnabend Gallery New York, 1972 (view of gallery).....	p. 159
figure 45. Vito Acconci, <i>Seedbed</i> (view under the ramp).....	p. 159
figure 46. Dan Graham, <i>Performance Audience Mirror</i> , Amsterdam, 1977.....	p. 163
figure 47. Bruce Nauman, <i>Going around the corner piece</i> , 1970.....	p. 163
figure 48. Diagram of the context for the interaction in the piece, 1999.....	p. 171
figure 39. Composition artist-audience in the space designed for <i>Diagrammi</i> , 1999.....	p. 171

figure 50. Composition in the space at the dialogue stage of <i>Diagrammi</i> , 1999.....	p. 171
figure 51. <i>Diagrammi</i> , video documentation, still of the dialogue stage, 1999...	p. 172
figure 52. <i>Diagrammi</i> , video documentation, still of audience interaction stage, 1999.....	p. 172
figure 53. <i>Life archive</i> , design.....	p. 181
figure 54. <i>Take my breath away</i> , design.....	p. 181
figure 55. <i>Noisy depth</i> , design.....	p. 181
figure 56. <i>Don't touch</i> , design.....	p. 181
figure 57a. <i>Drawing Scent</i> ; a. designs of installation view and interactive dynamics;	
figure 57b. results as analysed in included CD-rom, screenshot.....	p. 183
figure 58. <i>Drawing Scents</i> , installation view and perceivers' behaviour, Lethaby Gallery, London, 2002.....	p. 185
figure 59. Illustration from the 1724 edition of Descartes <i>La Dioptrique</i>	p. 187
figure 60. Studies of the eye and binocular vision, including the crossed sticks analogy, from Nicolas le Cat's <i>A Physical Essay on the Senses</i> , London, 1750. From Kemp, M., <i>op. cit.</i> , p. 235.....	p. 191
figure 61. Joseph-Benoit Suvée, <i>Budates or the Origin of Drawing</i> . From Derrida, J., <i>Memoirs of the Blind</i> , University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1990, p.50.....	p. 197
figure 62. <i>going from the dining room to the bedroom...</i> , stills from video documentation, April 2001.....	p. 203
figure 63. <i>going from the side entrance to the rear door...</i> , stills from video documentation, May 2001.....	p. 203
figure 64. <i>Public Private Perceptions</i> , Toynbee Studios, London, October 2001.....	p. 206

figure 65. Stills from recorded action in Westminster Underground Station London
and live action as perceived by the audience at Neon Gallery Bologna
Italy.....p. 206

figure 66. Design for installation in the Neon Gallery of *Public Private Perception*
02, 2001.....p. 207

figure 67. *Public Private Perceptions 02*, digitally enhanced drawing, with stills from
DVD used for installation, Neon Gallery Bologna, 16-30 March 2002.....p. 208

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A CD-rom of practical research documentation and analyses is included. The
interactive presentation is designed for pc users.

THESIS CONTAINS

VIDEO CD DVD TAPE CASSETTE

Elena Cologni
'The Artist's Performative Practice Within
The anti-Ocularcentric Discourse'
PhD, 2004

Documentation and Analyses of Artist's Practice