

CHAPTER 1

Reflections on the Mirrored Room: From Work to Word

IN THE MIRRORED ROOM

Some of my most memorable recollections of growing up in Buffalo are of visits to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and it is to this place that I now return, accompanied, to think through the theoretical issues involved in the study of literature and the visual arts. Only two people are allowed in the *Mirrored Room* at a time, so this chapter should read as if we two coauthors were walking through the structure—and the issues—in tandem. The native Buffalonian (that's Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal) voices an *I* when she speaks for herself in the first part of this chapter: there is a deliberate shift to a *we* when both of us are implicated or authoring, as in the second part, or when our readers are included (even spoken for), or, finally, when that old-fashioned but convenient editorial *we* gets dusted off, "as we will see." In the chapters that follow, the *we* proves useful, too, even though an *I* might be more precise: we fundamentally agree with each other in our expositions of the material, and so we have elected to smooth over the jarring effect that would be produced by dual referents for the first-person pronoun. In the epilogue, however, we each reclaim our individual *I* as we enter into explicit dialogue in two voices.

I have chosen one of the most popular works on exhibition in the contemporary collection of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Lucas Samaras's *Mirrored Room* (1966) (Fig. 1), as central metaphor for these reflections in this section, and the choice is far from arbitrary. I have gone through the *Mirrored Room* countless times, and have emerged with ever-evolving perceptions of the work, of the art world, and, in recent years, of my critical practice as a scholar of literature written in Spanish. Now that my own studies have placed me in closer proximity to the field of visual arts, I find myself indebted to early encounters with the *Mirrored*

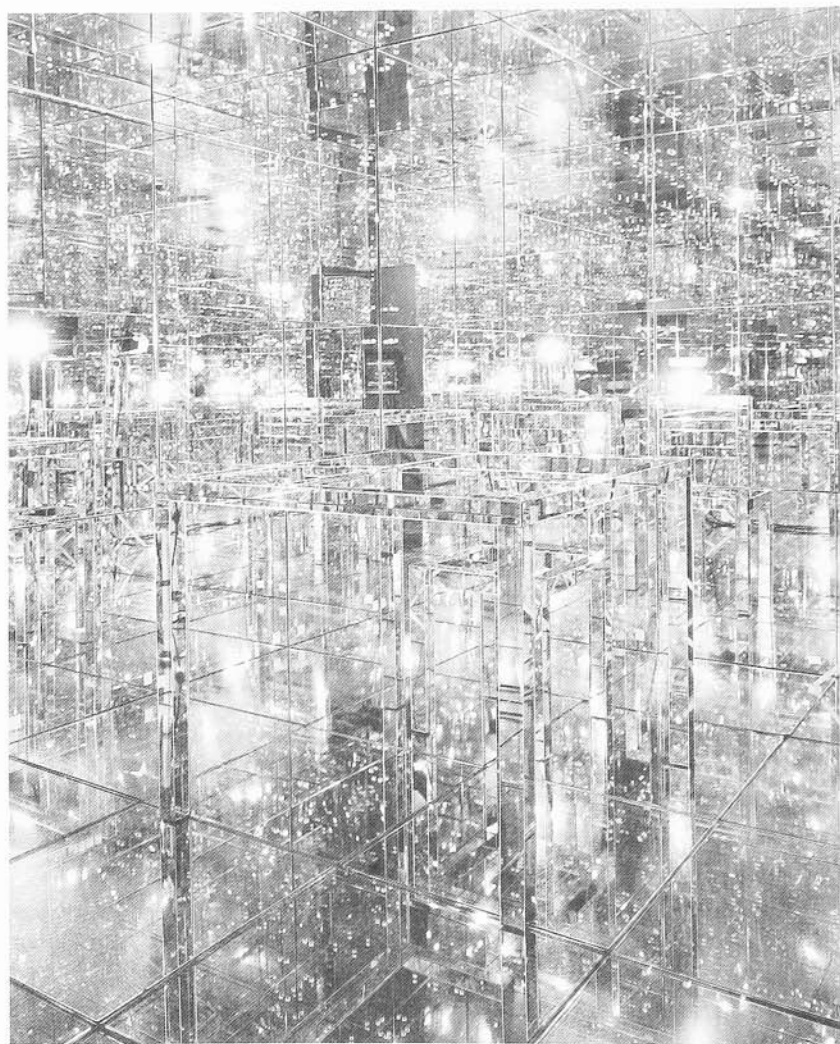


Figure 1.

Lucas Samaras, *Mirrored Room* (1966). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, 1966.

Room for the rich host of interpretive possibilities it can provide when the printed word is held up to the metaphoric mirror of visual representation.

Lucas Samaras's *Mirrored Room* is built up around notions of the reflected work and the reflected self. After all, what is a sculpture consisting of mirrors that make up the inside, the outside, the

ceiling, the floor, the furniture, the walls if not a stage for representation? The *Mirrored Room* holds the potential for setting off a chain of endless reflections, an event that hinges on the appearance of an eye, the presence of an *I*. Before a person enters the space of the *Mirrored Room*, the cubicle simply stands there, static, reflecting the materials of its own construction on its six surfaces. When you approach the *Mirrored Room*, you can see yourself fully reflected on the outside walls as you sneak a voyeuristic glance toward the inside, where the mirrors reflect each other in eerie tones of green, the patina caused by the steady stream of the shoeless individuals who have circulated through the room since 1966. But your corporeal integrity is dissolved when you come closer to the doorway that leads inside the structure. You then get your first glimpse of a partial image of yourself that peers back from the panels of that room where it is reflected: you see yourself peeking from some remote corner that transmits the sensation of spatial distance, and you note that your pair of eyes is already multiplied in hundreds of places. You see the beginnings of yourself being seen: you have created a spectacle of yourself in your attempt to see the *Mirrored Room*. For that is the experience of the *Mirrored Room*, or at least the primary one: recreating *yourself* as the object to be contemplated in all your transposed, interrupted fragments. *You* become inseparable from the *Mirrored Room* when you enter it. No longer static, potential, or theoretical, the sculpture has become a type of kinetic “happening.”

But the *Mirrored Room* is located in a museum, that is, a sanctioned, institutional setting that proclaims its contents to be part of the art world. Further, Samaras’s creation does not duplicate any ordinary room full of mirrors, and consequently it does not function in the manner of, say, a mirrored dressing room in a department store. This differentiating effect is of course in part attributable to the cultural, social, and psychological factors that condition viewers’ subjectivity. But because it is stationed in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the *Mirrored Room* literally—that is, optically—reflects *other* works of art that hang on the walls of the partitioned area in which the sculpture room stands. These works change whenever the curators elect to utilize the wall space for different pieces of contemporary art, with the result that the *Mirrored Room* undergoes a shift as well: the outside walls invariably reflect their new surroundings, which are continually subject to mutation, to an always past and an always future. The *Mirrored*

Room, then, like moveable art, enlists constant change as its stabilizing force, but motion in this case does not alter the actual physical structure, but rather what is represented in it, or reflected. For the *Mirrored Room* contains no reflections of things or people past, because those reflections can never be etched or encoded on the structure itself: they can be preserved in an individual's memory or in a photograph. There is a 1978 photograph of Lucas Samaras inside his own sculpture: the camera has recorded the flash of its bulb, creating a view not unlike an aerial shot of a city at night. And that particular camera angle is itself partial, particular: the *experience* of being in the *Mirrored Room* cannot be recorded in a credible manner (including verbally, as I am only too well aware), and for those who have been through the structure, a photographic representation surely must seem highly distorted, even unrecognizable. As we look at the photograph of the work, it becomes obvious that this is not just a room of mirrors, it is a mirrored *room*. Like a "tiled" room or a "painted" room, "mirrored" functions in adjectival complementarity: this is not a compound noun, like the Green Room, or the Dining Room. In fact, I should probably delete the definite article in speaking of the sculpture, reporting instead that "I have gone through *Mirrored Room* countless times," which would emphasize its status as named, unique artwork and downplay its role as a variant of "room." The title of the work does not declare it to be a room made of mirrors, but a room covered over by mirrors. This grammatical distinction, I believe, proves crucial to the psychological structure of the *Mirrored Room*, that is, the function of the mirror in the psyche as Jacques Lacan views it in his formulation of the mirror stage, which will be discussed shortly.

We define ourselves in our reflections in the *Mirrored Room* as we walk around inside it. But we do not actually penetrate it, we do not go *through* the looking glass like Alice: we study surfaces. To fully grasp this experience, we need to look at the psychological dimensions of the mirror. My own observations lead me to believe that when little children approach the *Mirrored Room*, they are at once fascinated by their reflection, yet terrified at the mirage of depth that threatens to suck them into a horizontal downfall. Experiments show that when a false sense of depth is created, young children instinctively back away from the perceived abyss, but can be coaxed to cross the dangerous zone by a trusted individual (usually the mother). In the *Mirrored Room*,

children seek the other to anchor their own sense of self. They delight in seeing the person who accompanies them into the room reflected endlessly, like themselves: they know that the other does not fall through, and therefore they conquer their own fear. They may be terrified by the experience, but, like on a roller-coaster ride or a walk through a haunted house, they derive the thrill from the scare, and they seek to repeat it and thereby master it. Children may think of the *Mirrored Room* in terms of a carnival fun house with concave and convex mirrors that distort the self into a laughable caricature. But this experience in the museum setting is tangibly different for them: rather than signs of sheer amusement, they utter expressions of wonder—and terror—at the sight of themselves infinitely reflected, reduced, reduplicated, and lost.

The notion of “terror” acquires even more relevance to Samaras’s work if we consider the structure of his *Mirrored Cell* (drawn in 1969 and constructed in 1988, currently at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.). As its title indicates, the *Mirrored Cell* places the visitor in a room designed to imprison: the mirrored bed suggests not so much the idea of repose as of perpetual confinement; the toilet and desk do not offer relief or freedom to work, but rather threaten the inhabitant with constant surveillance, by one’s own eye or by the eye of another. There is a small window that allows a viewer from the outside to observe the prisoner within: much like the panopticon as analyzed by Michel Foucault, the *Mirrored Cell* enchains the inhabitant in a psychological state of being-looked-at, a state carried to the extreme of having the spectator serve as his or her own spy while being observed potentially from the outside as well. The fascination with one’s own image in the *Mirrored Room* can rapidly give way to the terror of inescapability that the *Mirrored Cell* sets up on its fragmented, reflecting surfaces. But when excised from the negative connotations of surveillance, the *Mirrored Cell* may offer an imaginary place for repose, meditation, communion, and self-contemplation, much in the manner of a monk’s cell. The mirror as Samaras conceptualizes it therefore does not have to take away our soul or alienate us from ourselves; it may also give us back to ourselves.

Children in the *Mirrored Room* touch their bodies to reassure themselves of their corporeal integrity: they inquire, “Is that *me* in there?” What do we respond? Is that “us” in the *Mirrored Room*? When we cease the viewing process by exiting the structure, we are no longer constituted in the *Mirrored Room*, so in a sense it is

not “us” on display at all: it is a subject viewing the momentary reflections of his or her own viewing action. Upon emerging from the *Mirrored Room*, we perhaps take another glance back in, remembering the sensations that were aroused but relinquishing their status as motion, action, or experience. There is no trace of our having been recorded in the structure; there is only the mental record of perception. This experience is both evocative of the experience of viewing a painting and profoundly different from it. Standing before a painting we construct ourselves as the viewing subject, the spectator, but we are not the “spectator in the picture” in a literal sense. Perhaps we identify with an internal spectator’s position within a painting while we contemplate it, and/or we appropriate the look of another in the process of construing our own gaze; it could be that we project ourselves into the painting and/or that we allow ourselves to be imprinted by the work of art. But when spectators come face to face with themselves as the object viewed in the mirror, they inevitably assume the position of subject and object within the same physical space. If they turn away from the mirror, they no longer see themselves reconstituted there, but the structure still exists in the realm of the real, perhaps reflecting another viewer, or implacably reflecting itself. Like Narcissus, we are fascinated by our reflection, and like him, we are beckoned by the sight of ourselves and may wish to cross over the representational barrier to embrace ourselves.

Accustomed as we are to seeing ourselves in mirrors on a regular basis, we find that it is the multitude of reflections that draws us into the *Mirrored Room*, and therein lies our fascination. We look overhead and see ourselves reflected below; we look down and see ourselves reflected from above. The image that appears before us can never be located in what we think is the viewing space, for it, too, is always a reflection of another space within the chamber of mirrors. We look down and imagine that we are falling into an infinite tunnel, but we realize that it is the few panels of mirror directly above us, on the ceiling, that create this illusion of depth. We turn our gaze upward to grasp this principle of reflecting mirrors, and we see ourselves projected from the floor up, yet we never can look at the floor without viewing the ceiling. The same holds true for the sides of the room and for the corners, where the conjunction of walls creates a false “safe space” in which the infinite reflecting may be momentarily interrupted, since it projects a bisected view of our bodies back to us. We may

reach out to touch a mirror panel (until the guard orders us to refrain from tactile exploration). We are permitted vision alone, yet we are compelled to seek other sensorial dimensions of the experience. The guard may even invite us to try some of the optical “tricks” known to devotees of the *Mirrored Room*, such as standing in one corner and quickly looking up and down to simulate the sensation of riding in an elevator.

In short, the *Mirrored Room* serves as a most suitable metaphor for the exploration of the boundaries of text and art, boundaries that necessarily implicate the position of a subject who seeks to project meanings onto the silver-backed surface. Samaras could hardly have chosen the mirror as prime material for his work without some awareness of the significance that the reflecting glass holds in specific cultural, historic, or mythic contexts. Further, the mirror is par excellence a gender-coded space through which women have traditionally formed an identity (or have had one constructed for them). In his literary iconology, appropriately named *Disenchanted Images*, Theodore Ziolkowski points to three familiar metaphors produced by “man’s perennial fascination with mirrors”: “the mirror of art, the mirror of God, and the mirror of man” (149–50). Those searching for a recognition of woman’s relation to the mirror will be disenchanted with this iconology, which makes the male the originator, receptor, and interpreter of the reflecting glass: that is, he creates it, he is mirrored in it, and he projects the images of his (male) artworld and his (male) divinity back to himself.

Ziolkowski is not the only one to view the reflection in the mirror as prototypically male (I am tempted to call it a critical act of unreflective narcissism): in his illuminating study of the mirror from an anthropological perspective, James W. Fernandez concludes that the mirror can give us “some feeling that there is something of our fathers in ourselves and something of ourselves in them. It can give us some feeling that there is something of the king in everyman and something of everyman in the king. If the mirror can give us such feelings . . . the ‘sensation of relief’ may well be absolute” (37). If indeed felt, this relief, I would argue, derives from having one’s male identity confirmed in the mirror through the channels of patriarchy: there is no intruding female image to complicate man’s bonding with other men; there is no threatening female-other to contaminate transmission of the stuff of a father-king. In Lacanian terms, however, the “relief” at seeing

oneself whole in the mirror, at seeing oneself male, would harbor the unease of the split that must be traced to the mirror stage: here, it is woman who holds up the little boy to the mirror, and here, he does in fact construct his identity in relation—and in opposition—to her reflection as well as his own. The little boy's awareness of his potential as father-king comes when he glimpses himself whole, distinct, but alienated; that is, when he intuits the threatened dissolution of his sense of bodily and psychic integrity by means of the separation of the self from the previous imaged unity of mother and child. No wonder Fernandez de Corporealizes the experience of seeing oneself, and thus claims, following Lévi Strauss's lead, that the mind is what is reflecting upon itself in the mirror (36).¹ What better way to counter the mirror's potential for arousing fear, discomfort, unease, or disorientation than by subjugating it to the mind's control? Lucas Samaras's structure, as we have seen, has the power to reinstate some of the primitive effects of the mirror while simultaneously decontextualizing the ordinary mirror by installing it into the world of art, and, by extension, into the world of the intellect. I, too, want to view the *Mirrored Room* "in the mind's eye," but I do not wish to lose sight of the gendered, embodied experience of the self in reflection.

In response to the trope of the man-in-the-mirror, some critics have indeed focused on the specificity of the female subject in relation to her reflected self in both literature and art. In *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass*, Jenijoy La Belle discusses the notion of the radical otherness of woman as a cultural construct. She sees the mirror as a semiotic surface, the potential site in which woman's identity is not only established or fixed, but also threatened or undone. La Belle compares the mirror to the literary text in that both surfaces aid women in encoding and decoding their identities; we might add, however, that writing may be considered a superior vehicle in that it exacts activity and affirms power, even when it provokes the "anxiety of authorship" (as defined by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar). If writing is an act of liberation for women, the mirror may also be uncovered for its positive force: "By taking the mirror into their own hands, women are eliminating the mirror as tyrant, as dominant male. . . . For women to liberate themselves as women is not to dismiss their bodies but to free them from male/mirror tyranny" (180). This "liberating" mirror, then, becomes the "other speculum of woman," the man-made object turned into instrument of feminist

self-discovery and self-realization. This utopian interpretation of the mirror perhaps parallels—or reverses—the patriarchal view expounded by critics such as Fernandez. In theory, women would see their mothers in themselves and something of themselves in their mothers, or, in other words, the mirror would give us a feeling that there is something of the goddess in everywoman and something of everywoman in the goddess. This mythic elevation of the looking glass intercepts the frightening spectacle of woman as she perceives herself degraded by physical aging, or as she comes close to insanity, or as she is drawn back into the waters of undifferentiated narcissism. The dark side of the glass thus reflects both male and female subjectivity, but certainly with a set of distinctions attributable to constructions of sexual differences, and social and cultural practices (especially literary and artistic practices, to be sure).

Lucas Samaras draws on a long-standing tradition of the mirror in art, which can appear as a subject in a painting or as an actual object: archaeological artifact, architectural form. In a study of mirrors in art, Laurie Schneider traces the evolution of the reflecting glass and lists its key symbolic usages. She believes that “art is a mirror, a reflection of society with all its customs, beliefs, folklore, superstition, religion, even of the artist himself” (283). We might take exception to that initial interpretation, since art can rightfully be viewed as the medium that constructs those very elements she claims it reflects, culminating of course with the image of the artist *himself* as normatively male. Samaras brings this issue of constructedness to bear on the conceptualization of his *Mirrored Room*, which, as I have argued, provides passage to a double-visioned space where the subject undergoes fragmentation and dissolution at the same time that it is made present and brought into being in the mirrored chamber. The thematic structure outlined by Schneider encompasses some analogous functions: the mirror serves as symbol for human vanity, for self-portraiture, and for knowledge of self and other.² When read together, the studies by La Belle and Ziolkowski, which look primarily at literature, along with those by Schneider and Schwartz on the mirror in art, provide fertile ground for our interartistic work on text as the metaphoric mirror of art (or art as the metaphoric mirror of literature), and it will become our task to juxtapose these critical findings with relation to specific word-image analyses.

The function of the mirror has been examined by philosophers as well as art historians and literary critics, and a few words about the ontology of the looking glass are in order at this point. As I have claimed with regard to Samaras's *Mirrored Room*, the act of passing through the structure constitutes a type of "happening," and the viewing process should be likened to a kinetic experience. In "Mirrors, Pictures, Words, Perceptions," Virgil Aldrich distinguishes the "mirror" as "material thing" from the "mirror-intention," which describes the field of representation proper to the looking glass. In strict terms, "nothing *qua* seen in the mirror 'exists' in it, or behind it, or in front of it" (41). Rather, the mirror is "the *occasion* for an image that is quite like the original it intends" (42, our emphasis). Aldrich's language is highly technical and dense, but his description of a man in a room with a mirror merits our consideration here: "the man but not his mirror image is in the room, yet reference to him in the *room* is not reference to him in the mirror's field of representation. They are identical but not 'simply.' It is the original that 'appears' in the field—can be said to be seen in it" (53–54). For our purposes, then, the person who walks through the *Mirrored Room* must be reconstructed along the lines of a subject split into two: the original (who of course is also a viewer) and the represented self, who, to use Aldrich's expression, plays "the role of appearing" (54) in the entire room's reflecting surfaces. Since the whole of the *Mirrored Room* would coincide with the room containing a mirror of Aldrich's example, the field of representation is inseparable from the structure that should theoretically contain it and limit it. Aldrich's metaphors lend a highly appropriate tone to our comparative discussion, since they allow us to look at the *Mirrored Room* as an experience of role playing, theatricality, staging, and acting, notions, after all, that are fundamental to "representation" in the visual arts as well as in the dramatic arts.³

BETWEEN VISION AND TEXT: THE LANGUAGE OF THE INTERARTS

It is significant, we think, that there is no appropriate theoretical rubric under which to place the kind of criticism that seeks to compare the visual arts to the verbal arts, or, more accurately, to use theoretical models in reading the verbal through the visual. The

term *ekphrasis*, although now experiencing a revival of sorts, certainly cannot serve as the house of criticism for the word-image studies that have been appearing in recent years, nor can it easily withstand the challenges leveled at traditional notions of *ut pictura poesis* or the outright attacks aimed at the institution of art historical practices. While ekphrasis etymologically holds the potential for a wide latitude of comparative work (it comes from the Greek verb *ekphrazein*, which means “to speak out” or “tell in full”), the term rarely finds usage outside the line of inquiry that describes how a picture somehow gets painted with words. In fact, the comment that “the author paints with words” is so pervasive in ekphrastic studies that it has become a cliché, an expression that is meaningless in itself. To study the problem of ekphrasis, critics have turned to notions of time and space, metaphor, analogy, imagery, period, style, and so forth. When a poem refers to a painting, it seems logical for the critic to view the pictorial image in an effort to discern what the poet sought to capture of it; in this manner, the critic becomes the interpreter of the interpreter, the spectator not so much of the painting itself but of the poet’s viewing and act of poetic interpretation (which may take shape as recreation, evocation, representation). Narrow ekphrastic studies might find, for example, that the fierce, dagger-like adjectives penned by the poet correspond to the fiery reds painted by the artist. Another study may uncover the stylistic affinities between romantic painters and poets from a historical or aesthetic perspective.

We should mention one study in ekphrastic theory that marks an important stage in the development of interartistic work, since it comes around the time when “new” methodologies in art history began to have an impact on a highly conservative field that traditionally had kept itself isolated from other disciplines. In “*Ut Pictura Noesis? Criticism in Literary Studies and Art History*,” Svetlana and Paul Alpers question the ability of a painting to be “mute poesy” or that of a poem to be a “speaking picture”; further, they trace the philosophical, historical, and aesthetic grounds on which comparatists have performed ekphrastic analyses and show the inherent weaknesses in many of the approaches. However, the conclusion of their study prescribes the critic’s role in most problematic terms: “The critic’s writing should work along—literally, collaborate—with the intentions, both large and small, of art works.” They ask, “In what sense and in what ways are intention, comprehension, historical reality, social situation and purpose, human use

implicit or implicated—literally, enfolded—in works of art?” (457). For our purposes, we will frequently reverse that question and instead ask, In what sense do works of art create or prescribe social situations, historical realities, gender differences, interpretive stances, and so forth? When comparatists who operate interartistically seek only the common human dimensions and intentions in visual and verbal works of art, they function primarily as mediators and thus renounce a potential role as agitators. We resist the intentional fallacy in interartistic comparisons as vigorously as we resist it in textual studies, since we consider that the results of our methods of inquiry could rarely have been “encoded” or “enfolded” in the works. This is not to say that we willfully ignore the contexts of the works we analyze—quite the contrary. We attempt to recontextualize the material we study in light of theories that forge previously unanticipated links between verbal text and visual representation.

At this juncture, we may well ask on what basis ekphrastic correspondences have traditionally been established: on a model of intrinsic differences between the arts, or on one of inherent similarities? This stance determines the attitude of critics, even when they are not aware of it. Thus, one could elect to mediate the fundamental differences that make the visual a world apart from the verbal; one would in effect be approaching the sister arts as family therapist, reconciling their tensions and placing them in dialogue or communication with each other. Or, on the other end of the spectrum, a critic may view the sister arts as twins bound together in symbiotic similitude, their individual distinctions passing unnoticed under a shared essence if not a like appearance. Further, as Carol Plyley James remarks, when “the qualities of pictures and words are compared, a hierarchy develops: pictures are primary, present, clear; words are secondary, abstract, mediated” (“No, Says the Signified” 458). But is this observation thoroughly accurate? Certainly, the “new” art histories would attempt to prove that there is nothing unmediated, direct, or even concrete about the medium of painting, except of course its physical reality (which itself is subject to the dynamics of perception, at the very least). In fact, the visual arts may be profitably studied in terms of a complex linguistic system, as Nelson Goodman’s title, *Languages of Art*, so readily suggests. Although texts themselves bear physical presence (if nothing else, as black symbols on white pages and as printed matter bound up in books), they do not achieve the

immediacy of the visual image, but this gap can be bridged by interrogating both kinds of representational codes and by uncovering the illusory nature of art as a clear, primary, or direct mode of perception and comprehension.

At this stage in our discussion, the sister arts appear to enter into sibling rivalry, into vital combat for primacy: they juggle for position and hierarchy when subject to interarts comparisons.⁴ French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty has made original contributions to this problem. By rooting thought in perception, or, in other words, by ascribing to perception an intellectual energy of its own—"painting's mute 'thinking'" ("Eye and Mind" 285)—he erases the traditional borderline between two activities that are considered to be distinct and hierarchically subordinated (with thought holding primacy over sensorial perceptions in Plato and philosophical idealism). Thus Merleau-Ponty succeeds in introducing a temporal dimension into the domain of the visual arts, which Lessing had called spatial. Accordingly, each painting, like each perception, does not end with the initial effect of surprise that it is likely to produce; rather, it constitutes a departure point for future explorations into the reality that was initially observed. As Jacques Taminiaux notes in his essay on Merleau-Ponty, "The Thinker and the Painter," "The thing that I perceive . . . offers itself as belonging to the future, as a 'hoped-for thing' (*la chose espérée* in Merleau-Ponty's expression); that is, as arousing the power I have of exploring it, of investigating it from all sides. My perception is therefore the overlapping of two dimensions: the present and actual with the nonpresent and nonactual, or in other words, *the visible and the invisible*" (203). Painting, then, may be compared to a text whose final meaning inevitably slips away or one in which the real shows itself, opens up, and conceals itself all at once.

In his seminal article "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Joseph Frank also questions the distinction established by Lessing between temporal and spatial arts, and he does so in more explicit fashion. In early twentieth-century literature Frank sees textual echoes, foreshadowings, and juxtapositions that undermine the sequence inherent in language: the readers of these modern texts, therefore, perceive them more like spatial forms than temporal developments. Or, in other words, "the synchronic relations *within* the text took precedence over diachronic referentiality," as Frank would go on to summarize in a later article ("Spatial Form:

Thirty Years After" 207). For Frank, the best works of literary modernism are analogous to sculptures or illustrated manuscripts that use figures from the Bible or from classical antiquity as an expression of a timeless complex. The coexistence of images from the past and the present contributes to turning history into myth.⁵ And Frank encounters spatial elements in any narrative work of art, not only in modernist ones, since the temporal sequence is constantly distorted, thereby making it necessary to construe relations across gaps in the causal-chronological order of the text. A characteristic of narratives would indeed be this very tension between the temporality of language and the spatiality required by their artistic nature.

Though intent on correcting or extending Frank's ideas, W. J. T. Mitchell in fact corroborates them when he states that "spatial form is a crucial aspect of the experience and interpretation of literature *in all ages and cultures* ("Spatial Form in Literature" 273, our emphasis). Mitchell, however, is original in showing that spatial form does not presuppose an antithesis to temporal form, since one is inseparable from the other. That is, the notion of time cannot be conceptualized without the support of spatial imagery. Similarly, space cannot be apprehended apart from time and movement. Mitchell proceeds to suggest that "every sentence is a picture or spatial form" and at the same time "every picture is a sentence," that is, reading is visionary, while vision is the reading of an informed mind. Mitchell criticizes the distinction between temporal and spatial arts as well: "Instead of Lessing's strict opposition between literature and the visual arts as pure expressions of temporality and spatiality, we should regard literature and language as the meeting ground of these two modalities" (297). Therefore, a concern with space is not completely removed from history, contrary to what Frank's detractors have claimed. Mitchell also takes up recent deconstructionist theories to claim that their attempts to surpass formalism do not constitute a negation of spatiality but rather affirm new and more complex spatial forms. The overlaying of spatial forms onto the temporal narrative flow is, for Mitchell, a necessary element in any act of reading. The incoherence heralded by deconstructionists could lose its energy if the creation of patterns of coherence is not initially established.

Another signal contribution to the study of the relations between painting and literature is Wendy Steiner's work. Accord-

ing to Steiner, the attempt to join both arts obeys a deeper impulse: to erase the limits between art and life, between sign and thing. Painting and literature thereby function as equals when they are understood as an “icon of reality rather than a mere conventional means of referring to it” (*Colors of Rhetoric* 2). Yet, as Steiner says, a fully iconic representation of reality is impossible. Works of art imitate not reality but sign systems or models of reality, which are always conventional. From iconicity, then, we move into iconography, or, one step further, into iconology, an approach epitomized by Erwin Panofsky. A new kind of connection develops here between the visual and the literary arts. In iconographic painting, meaning depends on the knowledge of texts on which the details of the painting are based; alternately, the details of a literary description may have their origin in allegorical pictures. In turn, iconology—or “iconography in a deeper sense,” as Panofsky defines it (*Studies in Iconology* 8)—demands “more than a familiarity with specific *themes* or *concepts*” (14); it also compels us to view the work of art in relation to multiple factors.⁶

Steiner makes another fruitful correspondence between visual and literary arts when she develops ideas originally formulated by Boris Uspensky. The parallel between the two art forms may be buttressed by the different ways in which they focus on their subjects: in painting, the medieval “perspective” places the most important figure in the center of the work and subordinates other figures to it by diminishing their size and distancing them from the center. The Renaissance perspective, on the other hand, subordinates all figures to the painter’s look, which then is taken over by the viewer of the painting. In this way, the painter/spectator assumes a dominant position. In literature the pre-Renaissance stance would find an equivalency in the first-person narration. Steiner says that “a technical comparison of the two arts can consider the correspondence of position and semantic weight. . . . Perspective, then, is an important part of the pragmatics of painting and finds its literary analogue in point of view” (60, 61). However, Steiner also notes some distinctions. In the medieval representational system, the character integrated with its surroundings in the painting, as the center, can see all (and we in turn see *with* him or her); to the contrary, the distant Renaissance vision “limits the perceiver’s knowledge to what can be seen unidirectionally at one moment in time” (62). Conversely, first-person narration limits our vision or knowledge to what the narrating character can

see, whereas an omniscient viewpoint, distanced from the action, constitutes a higher degree of narrative privilege.

Mieke Bal has also treated these problems extensively, as the title of her recent book forcefully indicates (*Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*). She notes that the very expression "word and image" does not bring illumination to the complexity and subtlety of the issues involved, and its confrontational framework often plunges the critic into simplicity or confusion. Instead, she proclaims that there is "an interaction, not an opposition, between discourse and image" (*Reading "Rembrandt"* 24). Bal, like the authors previously cited, seeks to go beyond the arbitrary dichotomy, which she accomplishes by appealing to semiotics, narratology, and psychoanalysis, typically constructed through feminist ideologies. This combination proves particularly fruitful, and it is a model that informs to a large extent the interartistic readings in this study. But of course there is no step-by-step recipe for a workable theoretical model with which to approach the visual and verbal arts, something that Bal certainly emphasizes in her critiques of the history of word-image studies. Perhaps it would be an easier task to follow Bal's lead and point to the failures of interartistic approaches than to ascertain what routes ultimately prove viable. It is the accomplished readings of paintings and literary texts that chart the ground, but it is a cogent consideration of theory that prepares the ground in the first place. The language of theory may be regarded as the suturing device that holds the arts together in comparative work of the sort we undertake. Far from seamless, our studies in this book display their stitches rather blatantly, in defiance of a smooth surface, of an uncracked looking glass.

FEMINIST REVISIONS AND PSYCHOANALYTIC INCURSIONS IN THE VISUAL

We have occasionally used terms such as *deep* and *significant* in our search for common ground between literature and the visual arts, and it would be contradictory with some of our goals if we claimed to eschew those notions in a critical study of this sort. Yet this aim of arriving at "deep significance" may be in tension with the feminist agenda that undergirds much of what is attempted here. To use Naomi Schor's notion of the detail, that which is

insignificant or goes unnoticed becomes an imperative in a visual-verbal analysis. The metaphor of the female body, which Schor, among others, has appropriated for the study of literature, brings us to the larger issues of representation, visual analysis, and feminism. Here we should cite Lynda Nead's recent work, *The Female Nude*, which advances a thorough critique of Kenneth Clark's well-known distinction between the naked (the body outside of cultural representation) and the nude (the body "clothed" in art). The (female) nude, then, would be for Clark an epitome of art itself, inasmuch as the essence of art resides in transforming matter into form. Nead deconstructs Clark's arguments by showing the fragility of the border that separates the naked from the nude: "The female nude strains the value oppositions of western metaphysics to their limits. . . . we can now begin to place the female nude not only at the center of the definition of art but also on the edge of the category, pushing against the limit, brushing against obscenity" (25). In the chapters that follow, we will refer to work from the many disciplines that touch on visual representation, including film studies, analysis of popular culture, psychoanalytic theory, philosophy, semiotics, and, of course, the "new" art histories that have arisen from the intersections of these fields. Other recent studies seek to trace the evolution of sexual difference and the visual arts: of particular importance is Lisa Tickner's cogent synthesis, "Feminism, Art History, and Sexual Difference."⁷ Tickner affirms that "feminist art history cannot stay art history"; that is, it cannot be contained within the traditional disciplinary boundaries that have kept art history a conservative and conservationist avenue of intellectual inquiry. To accomplish their revisionist tasks, feminist art historians need to "account for the traffic in signs between different sites of representation" (94), which is itself a mandate to discard the notion of a discrete, precious object, an individual great "artist," or a closed succession of periods and styles. Feminist art history thus must chart the "battlefields of representation" in order to articulate the production of ideology and subjectivity; to do otherwise would be to remain marginal in the object-centered critical discourse that we have inherited from romanticism and modernism.

Tickner fully realizes, however, that feminism cannot enjoy a privileged, monolithic relationship to the field of art history, since the alliances that are formed among "feminisms" are themselves the products of tensions among incompatible notions of sexual

difference. When Tickner concludes that “we need to work with different frameworks in the full knowledge of their incompatibility, testing them against each other, reading them through the historical material that can itself throw light on their usefulness” (116), she perfectly describes the critical goals of many feminists who study visual representation, and her mandate aptly summarizes some of the theoretical bases for this study. This type of project runs the risk of forcing diverse methodologies upon each other, with the result that the parts may not coexist in some harmonic whole, but we insist on the validity of these approaches to accomplish a “reading against the grain.” The emergence of the “new” art histories has paved the way for a study of the kind attempted here, yet their convergence on these pages presents many complications that we are obligated to point out and to defend, wherever possible.

As we have emphasized, the feminist critique of art history starts with a challenge to the discipline itself: it interrogates the way in which one chooses to study—and construct—the category of “art.” To speak not only of art but also of representation is to push the field of art history further toward the theoretical apparatuses from neighboring disciplines that examine how subjects come into being and how they are recreated and reinvented textually or visually. Griselda Pollock, whose feminist interventions in art history have prepared the way for current directions in research, speaks of representation in several ways. In the first place, the term *representation* stresses that “images and texts are no mirrors of the world, merely reflecting their sources.” For Pollock, representation entails refashioning: something is coded in rhetorical, textual, or pictorial terms. This conceptual framework can also provide the mechanism for articulating social processes “which determine the representation but then are actually affected and altered by the forms, practices and effects of representation.” Finally, representation involves a third dimension in that it addresses a viewer-reader-consumer (*Vision and Difference* 6). Pollock links the three processes entailed in representation to the function of gender and sexual difference in order to make explicit the mechanisms of male power. She believes that “art history is not just indifferent to women” but that it is “a masculinist discourse, party to the social construction of sexual difference” (11). Like many British feminists, Pollock forges theories of representation that accommodate both materialist and psychoanalytic con-

siderations with regard to sexual difference. Jacqueline Rose remarks that “our previous history is not the petrified block of a singular visual space since, looked at obliquely, it can always be seen to contain its moments of unease” (*Sexuality in the Field of Vision* 232–33). Feminist visual analysis actively seeks out these moments of tension or unease in an effort to fracture the illusion of a singular vision or a readily accessible representation. This act is more than a reviewing or revisioning, however, since it interrogates the mechanisms that permit us to view or envision in the first place.

The title of a collection of essays edited by Hal Foster, *Vision and Visuality*, neatly encodes the problem of representation as it concerns us here, for vision is always conditioned by subjectivity (through ideology, sexual difference, class consciousness, cultural difference, and so forth). The term *visuality* more radically questions the naturalness attributed to the act of seeing, for to look is always to interpret, to involve the body and the psyche, and to block something out, whether or not one is aware of these processes.⁸ Further, viewers are as constructed by viewing as they themselves construct that which they see: we are always in a sense “looking on” even when we believe we are “just looking.” Norman Bryson has pioneered the study of visuality in his work on the glance and the gaze, and he has uncovered multiple complications entailed in vision or in a given “scopic regime.” The “logic of the gaze,” as Bryson terms it, in fact constitutes a language of its own, one that yields surprising coherence when analyzed within the framework of ideology, psychology, and semiotics. Thus Bryson says that a painting may direct the flow of interpretation across its surface, and it can mobilize collective forms of discourse present in the social formation; above all, painting has the capacity to exceed the fixities of representation (*Vision and Painting* 170).⁹

Reference has been made to the work of Jacques Lacan, whose discussion of the mirror stage partially informed the “reading” of the *Mirrored Room* in the first part of this chapter. Another influential work by Lacan is the section of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* entitled “Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*.” Lacan questions the possibility of a distant gaze that attempts to establish domination over the contemplated object, and, in harmony with Merleau-Ponty, he locates the gaze within the scopic field where one is both a viewer and on view: “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides” (*Four*

Fundamental Concepts 72). In keeping with this scheme, the superior relation of subject with respect to object is subverted to instead usher in “the dependence of the visible on that which places us under the eye of the seer” (72). The subject instituted by the Cartesian tradition, then, becomes the victim of an annihilating power. For Lacan, what disorganizes the field of vision is the dialectic of desire, that is, the conception of the human being as subject of desire rather than of reflexive consciousness. In this regard, the French psychoanalyst postulates a sort of “appetite of the eye on the part of the person looking” (115). That appetite is met in the showing (*le donner-à-voir*), which in turn emanates from the desire of the Other. Yet not only is the gaze (or the desire) of the Other related to a seer; paintings also function in analogous fashion, which accounts for their hypnotic effect: “in the picture, something of the gaze is always manifested . . . , something so specific to each of the painters that you will feel the presence of the gaze” (101). Understood in this way, the spectator who stands before the contemplated object (a painting or whatever) actually stands in the *place* of that object; or, in other words, the spectator is “*photo-graphed*” (106). It would be hard to imagine a better illustration of these concepts from the art world than Samaras’s *Mirrored Room*.

Lacan’s theories certainly are brought to bear on many of our interartistic readings, but other psychoanalytic models are employed as well (some of which may stand in opposition to his thinking). While it would be quite futile to attempt an overview of all the psychoanalytic theories that undergird these analyses, it nevertheless is imperative that we take a brief look at the ways in which psychoanalysis has been used in the service of visual analysis. In fact, this task has been partially accomplished by Ellen Handler Spitz in her *Art and Psyche*, in which she isolates three principal psychoanalytic approaches to art: the nature of the creative work and experience of the artist (pathography); the interpretation of works of art; and the nature of the aesthetic encounter with works of art (ix). The first model arose from the works of Freud himself, typified of course by his study of Leonardo da Vinci. In pathography, the psychoanalytic critic would analyze biographical data in order to show how the artist’s unconscious manifests itself in his or her creative works. When clinicians undertake analyses of their artist-patients, they also may perform a pathography of artistic expression (or, as is often the case, of blocked creativity