The Locus of Looking - Dissecting Visuality in the Theatre
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[Is] that me still waiting, sitting up stiff and straight on the edge of the seat, knowing the dangers of laisser-aller, hands on thighs, ticket between finger and thumb, in that great room dim with the platform gloom as dispensed by the quarter glass self-closing door, locked up in those shadows, it's there, it's me — (Beckett 1974: 38).

In Beckett's *Text for Nothing no. 7*, a narrator describes himself sitting on a bench in a small railway station, waiting for nothing. Trains and time pass by while his mind is absent, floating elsewhere, performing what Hugh Kenner has called "fantasies of non-being" (1973: 119). The narrating subject in *Text for Nothing no. 7* inhabits, as Jonathan Boulter puts it, a curiously 'located' space: "a space in which the subject is at an ontological or at least psychological distance from itself" (1999: 7).

Beckett's text confronts the reader with a merely disembodied voice speaking of itself to itself. In his text, this disembodied condition is related to particular type of vision "as if from Sirius," and opposed to this "heap of flesh" sitting over here in the railway station (Beckett 1974: 37). Separation from the heap of flesh allows the mind to travel elsewhere while in fact "I had not stirred hand or foot from the third class waiting-room of the South-Eastern Railway Terminus" (Ibid.).

In 1986 and again in 1999, Dutch choreographer Beppie Blankert presented a staging of Beckett's text in a performance titled *Double Track*. Playing with a huge mirror, Blankert turns the question of the location of the subject into a riddle for the audience. The audience finds itself located in between two raised stages. On the stage in front, a mirror shows the reflection of a dancer. This dancer is actually present on the stage behind the audience, sitting on a bench, waiting, like the character in Beckett's story.

Just as Beckett's text presents its reader with self-reflexive remarks about the condition of the speaker sitting, watching and waiting in "that great room" while his mind is floating elsewhere "I don't know where," so Blankert's performance confronts the audience with self-reflection by exposing the audience as body seeing within the architecture of the theatrical event. In Blankert's performance, Beckett's text 'migrates' from the domain of text-based theatre to dance. With this move, she sheds new light on questions of traveling, tracking movement, and positioning as they are brought up by Beckett in his text. Train travel turns into a metaphor for navigating attention through a performance, and the architecture of this performance into a positioning system defining where and how we, the audience, are.

**Heap of Flesh** — In the first part of this study, I wrote about perspective in order to explain the address presented by dramatic theatre in terms of positioning. Like perspective in painting, the architecture of the dramatic
theatre presents the seer with a stable and detached point of view from where he or she is able to see it 'as it is.' It is precisely this stable and detached point of view that allows for the seer to 'step inside;' that is, to leave this 'heap of flesh' in the auditorium and to project him or herself into the world on stage. With this strategy, the dramatic theatre aims at bringing the seer closer to what is seen, while at the same time this means a certain distancing of the seer from his or her body as the locus of looking.

I also pointed out that the strategies of de-theatricalization as they are often part of the deconstruction of dramatic theatre can be seen to serve a similar purpose right at the moment that the dramatic theatre lost its power to evoke the effect of direct contact between seer and seen, and was no longer able to absorb the seer into the world seen on stage. Like the perspectival construction of the dramatic theatre, these strategies of deconstruction aim at bringing the seer closer to what is seen. They do so by breaking up and taking away the dramatic frame which mediates between seer and seen. As a result, the seer is no longer presented with a fixed perspective but instead free to 'wander around.' This wandering around on stage, however, again involves a position for the spectator as subject of vision at a certain distance from him or herself as body looking.

In this chapter, I will further investigate the relation between this position of disembodied eye as it is part of the address presented by the theatrical event and the bodies of actual seers conditioned to perceive in culturally specific ways. Therefore, I will understand the theatre as an instance of what Jonathan Crary has termed managing attention (Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture, 1999).

Crary shows attention to be a hinge between issues raised in the most influential reflections on vision and perception and the work on modern effects of power on social and institutional constructions of subjectivity through disciplining the body, as theorized by Nietzsche, Benjamin, Foucault, and others. This hinge helps him to explain visuality (understood as a separate category isolated from the other senses) as a product of culture rather than a natural given. He explains how its production is related to practices of organizing the relation between seer and seen typical of modern western culture, and also how these culturally specific practices mediate in producing and sustaining not only this notion of vision, but also a particular type of subjectivity.

Crary argues that Western modernity since the 19th century has demanded that individuals define and shape themselves in terms of their ability to pay attention. What takes place is a disengagement from a broader field of attraction, whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focusing on a limited number of stimuli. Methods of managing attention are inseparable from the operations of what Foucault has described as 'disciplinary' institutions: the wide variety of disciplinary practices that organize modern life and produce the modern subject by literally subjecting the body. According to Crary, the modern notion of attention is a sign of reconfigurations of those disciplinary mechanisms:
If disciplinary society was originally constituted around procedures through which the body was literally confined, physically isolated and regimented, or set in place at work, Foucault makes clear that these were but the first relatively crude experiments in an ongoing process of perfecting and refining such mechanisms. By the early twentieth century, the attentive subject is part of an internalization of disciplinary imperatives in which individuals are made more directly responsible for their own efficient or profitable utilization within various social arrangements (Crary 1999: 73).

No longer does the power of disciplinary institutions manifest itself by means of a guard or a prison wall producing the subject through enforcing discipline on a body quite literally through incarceration. Power now can be seen at work in practices of self-discipline to which the body is subjected. Power manifests itself in the ways in which responsibility is assumed for the constraints of power, and makes them play upon oneself. At this moment, strategies of managing attention appear as means of sustaining, reinforcing or further developing the self-regulatory practices that produce the self. In this sense, managing attention is inseparable from the operations of Foucault's 'disciplinary' institutions, but as an inversion of his panoptic model in which the subject is an object of attention and surveillance. This inversion turns Foucault's most famous example of a disciplinary institution, Bentham's Panopticon, from a prison into a theatre.

**Bentham's Theatre** — In the Panopticon, disciplining is the effect of how seeing and being seen is structured through the spatial set up of the building. An important aspect of this 'architecture of vision' is what Foucault names the "dissociation of the see/being seen dyad" (Foucault 1995: 202). The Panopticon is a circular building with a tower in the center. This tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring. The circular building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building. Each cell has two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower, the other, on the outside, allowing the light to cross the cell from one end to the other.

By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out against the light, the small captive shadows in the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small *theatres*, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible (Foucault 1995: 200, my italics).

The guard in the tower observing the 'small captive shadows' is invisible to the inmates. These inmates on the other hand are all the more visible to him or her.

In the Panopticon, the inmate is forced into the position of object of vision. Yet, as Foucault points out, in order to achieve its effect, the inmate has to "inscribe himself in the power relation in which he simultaneously
plays both roles" (Foucault 1995: 202-203). That is, the Panopticon derives its effect from the way it sets up a relationship between an object of vision and a subject of vision. With this relationship, the Panopticon presents an address to individuals coming to the viewing scene.

Like the Panopticon, the address presented by architecture of the theatre implies a position for the audience as subject of vision. This position is comparable in many ways to that of the guard in the Panopticon. Now it is the audience that is sitting in the dark, watching figures on a well lit stage. However, the situation in the theatre, seen from the point of view of the audience, is not simply a reversal of the Panopticon. Rather, the position of the audience in the theatre derives its effect from the internalization, or incorporation, of precisely those notions of vision and subjectivity as they are implied by the architecture of the Panopticon. These are conceptions of the seer as subject, as well as of what it means to see, for which the architecture of the Panopticon presents a spatial metaphor.

In the Panopticon, a disembodied all-seeing subject of vision is opposed to a body as object; subject and object are strictly separated. The disembodied subject appears as master over the body seen. This power is closely related to knowledge. The body/object cannot escape being known and mastered in its entirety by the subject seeing. It is this seeing, dissociated from the body and the other senses, that provides the subject with its power and knowledge. In short, the Panopticon presents a spatial metaphor of Cartesian subjectivity and modern notions of objective and disembodied vision related to it.

Bentham's Panopticon was designed as a prison, but as Foucault points out, it could be model for all kinds of disciplinary institutions. In the course of time, it has become the image *par excellence* of modern technologies that locate, identify, fix, and define the subject. In the Panopticon as it is disciplinary institution, these definitions of subjectivity and vision are enforced upon the inmates. The theatre on the other hand, manages attention in such a way as to sustain or reinforce (or contradict) already internalized notions of this very same type of subjectivity.

Attention, Please! — Crary shows how the management of attention helps us to understand the effects of subjecting bodies to cultural practices. This management does so not only in terms of how bodies appear as objects of vision, but also how bodies are turned into subjects of vision. Furthermore, such management sheds light on the body as a combination of perceptual systems, which are disciplined in order to pay attention in culturally and historically determined ways.

Again, this is not to presuppose a 'real' material body on the one hand and its cultural and its historical transformations on the other. Historical and cultural practices themselves produce the body, even the 'real' material one. Bodies have however, as Elisabeth Grosz puts it, the ability to "always extend
the frameworks which attempt to contain them, to see beyond their domains of control" (Grosz 1994: xi). Bodies are both the location of operations of power and the potential for resistance. Crary’s notion of managing attention goes to the heart of this field of tension.

Crary points out how attention emerges as a discursive and a practical object right at the moment that vision and hearing have become progressively severed from the various historical codes and practices that had invested them with a level of certainty, dependability and naturalness. He locates its appearance in the early 19th century, at the moment that the Cartesian notion of objective, disembodied vision begins to lose its self-evident character.

Prior to the 19th century, the perceiver was generally considered a passive receiver of stimuli from exterior objects which formed perceptions that mirrored the external world. In the early 19th century, the emergence of subjective models of vision in a wide range of disciplines turned perception into a problem. Dominant discourses and practices of vision broke away from a classical regime of visibility and grounded the truth of vision in the density and materiality of the body. Sight, once considered the noblest of the senses and the best way of knowing the world, gradually but irresistibly lost its privileged position. This is the development Martin Jay (1993) has termed ‘the denigration of vision.’

With the collapse of the Camera Obscura model of vision it became increasingly clear that perception is not a matter of relative passive reception of an image of an exterior world. That, instead, the observer’s capacities and psychological make up contribute to the making of perception. One of the consequences of this shift was that vision became dependent on the complex and contingent physiological make up of the observer, rendering it faulty, unreliable and, it was sometimes argued, arbitrary.

At this historical moment, attention emerges both as a problem and as the promise of a solution. Attention appears as a means by which the perceiver becomes open to control and annexation by external agents, but it also seemed to hold within it the promise of the possibility of transcending these subjective limitations. Crary refers to the rise of phenomenology and its method of ‘bracketing,’ as well as to the ways in which much late 19th- and early 20th-century aesthetic theory posited various modalities of contemplation and vision that were radically cut off from the processes and activities of the body (Crary 1999: 46).

Crary illuminates how these strategies of organizing relations between seer and seen have aimed at achieving an effect similar to what Michael Fried terms ‘absorption.’ Crary also draws attention to how the theatre can be understood as part of a broader tradition of producing and sustaining this effect. One of his examples of historical strategies of managing attention is Wagner’s Festspielhaus theatre in Bayreuth (1876). Crary describes at length how this theatre was designed to prevent distraction. The aim was to absorb the spectator into the spectacle; this was done not so much by means of a
tableau-like composition on stage, but by means of a theatrical apparatus designed to evoke sustained and continuous attention throughout the performance (Crary 1999: 253–254).¹

Phenomenology, formalism, as well as the architecture of Wagner's Festspielhaus, thus appear as attempts at restoring or preserving the autonomous, self-knowing and unitary subject of Cartesianism, and ways of seeing typical of the disembodied and detached eye, at the moment this became threatened by subjective and embodied notions of vision. As such, practices of managing attention can be understood as attempts to maintain or preserve the historical fable that lies at the foundation of our own epoch. This historical fable is not just some story. It is part of what Kaja Silverman (1992) has named 'the dominant fiction': the powerful constellation underlying our conception of truth, objectivity, of the world 'as it is.' The conjunction of themes and powers typical of the modern period is still ours to live today, yet parts of it start to become more and more visible as a fable, as fiction. At these moments, managing attention can turn into a tool for deconstruction.

Just as the theatre derives its effect from an internalization – and not simply a reversal – of the Panoptic model, so Crary's concept of managing attention presents a shift in approach that is by no means a simple change in direction, from a focus on the body as object of vision, to a focus on the body as subject of vision. Rather, to specify cultural practices as instances of managing attention, involves exposing the story that connects the appearance of the body as spectacle and the disembodied observer 'just looking.' This story is not that of the body staged, nor the story of the body looking at the body staged, but the story of the staging of the relationship between them.

With his notion of managing attention, Crary makes space for a distinction between the actual practices in which bodies are involved and the presuppositions, expectations and ideas that are part of internalized disciplinary institutions. He shows these practices and ideas to be related, yet not in a one-dimensional, causal or linear way. The theatre does not discipline audiences by enforcing ideas upon them; it does not turn people into disembodied subjects 'just looking.' Rather, it presents its audience with an address that resonates with the implications of this culturally mediated type of self-awareness. Either by supporting it – as in the conventional theatre situation – or not, as it is the case in Double Track.

Body Double — Double Track does not present the seer with a position that suggests his or her bodily absence from the viewing scene. On the contrary, the seer is placed literally in the center of the theatrical event and presented with an address that redirects attention from the world projected over there behind the shiny glass screen towards the 'heap of flesh' that is the locus of looking.

The spatial set-up is reminiscent of Plato's parable of man in the cave watching mere reflections of what is actually present behind their
heads. But unlike the people stuck in the cave and deceived by mere shadows on the wall, the spectator of *Double Track* knows what he or she sees to be a reflection. When spectators enter the theatre room, both the mirror in front and the stage behind the auditorium are fully lit and a dancer can be seen present on the stage behind, sitting on the bench.

The mirror splits the presence of the dancer in two. Two video monitors on the stage in front of the audience take the splitting to another level. They show the very same dancer sitting on a similar bench at a small railway station, waiting for nothing. Then, this dancer splits in two. The dancer, wearing a light colored costume, is sitting on the bench and remains seated, while at the same time, another dancer in a dark costume rises from where the man in white is seated, and walks away.

This second person, as it appears, was actually seated on a similar bench behind the mirror, invisible to the audience. Invisible, until the light behind the mirror goes up. Through the see-through mirror the two dancers perform a duet that actually takes place in two different locations. They are on two different stages – one in front and one behind the audience. The dancer in front is seen through the mirror, while the one behind is seen reflected in the mirror. Often, it is hard to say who is where.

The dancers constantly change positions: sometimes they are together behind the mirror, sometimes they are behind the audience, sometimes they are together on the same stage, sometimes they are not. This presents the audience with an address that positions them differently each time, while positioning them differently in visual and in auditory space. When the man seen in front starts to talk, his voice is heard from behind. When the two dancers perform a duet, the sound of their feet – coming from two different directions – undercuts the unity seen in the mirror.

The complicated address presented by the image seen in the mirror in front and the sound heard from different directions, causes disturbing instances of bodily dys-appearance that redirect attention from the bodies seen in the mirror that is the stage, to the ‘heap of flesh’ perceiving them. The architecture of *Double Track* manages attention in a way that undermines, instead of supporting a position for the seer as a disembodied and detached observer. The sounds deny the seer what he or she is granted by strategies of managing attention such as the conventional theatre situation. That is, they prevent the seer from being absorbed into this world seen ‘over there,’ and instead, make evident the body as locus of looking, seeing it as such ‘over here’. These disturbing moments of bodily dys-appearance are what has to be suppressed or ignored in order for the spectator to leave the ‘heap of flesh’ in the auditorium and become absorbed in the image seen in the mirror. Yet, these moments can also function as what I have termed the navel of the performance, and shift attention from what is seen to the relationship between seer and seen. Such moments can show how this relationship involves a story.
Crary's history of managing attention helps to understand this story as the story of a seer conditioned to see "as if from Sirius," willingly leaving his or her body for "I don't know where" (Beckett). Internalization of the cultural practices described by Crary, has shaped the expectations and desires of these seers and this, in its turn, has resulted in the demand for practices that confirm and support this notion of self, as well as the notion of disembodied vision that relates to it. *Double Track* makes us aware of this conditioning by denying the seer a position that would support his or her expectations. By confronting the audience with a mirror in place of the stage, *Double Track* draws attention to the similarities between this way of managing attention in the theatre and the Lacanian mirror stage model. This comparison works in two ways.

On the one hand, these similarities help to understand why the mirror stage model might be useful to explain effects of closeness and immediateness that the theatre can evoke – the effects of being able to get so close to bodies seen on stage that one is actually able to feel what they feel. The mirror stage model, based on a similar 'staging' of the relation between body seeing and body seen, presents an explanation of this sense of closeness as the effect of mixing up bodies seen over there with the sensations of the body seeing them over here.

The similarities between the situation sketched in Lacan's mirror stage essay and the way of managing attention in the theatre might lead one to wonder whether the architecture of the theatre is understandable as a response to the desire of a subject who, after having gone through mirror stage identification and now, marked by lack, constantly seeks for lost completeness. Thus perceived, the refusal of the audience to take up a position of subject of vision from within the body is symptomatic of this lack.

On the other hand, comparing the similarities between the set up of the mirror stage and the theatre as an example of culturally specific practices for managing attention, might lead to a further historicization of Lacan. Does the mirror stage help us to understand the relationship between bodies seeing and bodies seen in the theatre, precisely because it implies a subjective perspective? A subjective perspective that is the product of this very same history of managing attention, of which the architecture of the theatre is a prime example? So perceived, the behavior of the audience is not sym pathetic of a lack that drives them to assume the image seen in the mirror. Instead, describing it as lack is a way of accounting for a behavior that results from being disciplined to perceive in certain ways rather than others.

Crary's history of managing attention and Lacan's mirror stage model appear as two different ways of accounting for the effect of the address presented by the constellation of elements that make up *Double Track*. Crary and Lacan appear as two different stories, two different ways of accounting for the uncomfortable effects of the address presented by *Double Track*. Two ways of accounting for part of it, at least, for *Double Track* does something else as well.
Double Track does more than undermine automatic identification with a disembodied point of view. The piece also makes one aware of how one as seer tends to actively compensate for the disturbance caused by the address presented by the performance. My response to the architecture of Double Track made me aware of how my body tended to re-produce this position of the disembodied l/eye, even against other evidence. The curious thing in experiencing Double Track is that although the sound confirms ones position at the center of the event, and thus confirms what one can see (namely that one finds oneself are at the center of a performance taking place around oneself), it is nevertheless the sound that causes the uncomfortable sense of dys-placement.

Strangely, these sounds, educating the audience about the actual situation in which they find themselves, only add to the confusion. Although the audience of Double Track is reminded repeatedly of the fact that the unity perceived in the mirror is an illusion, it is difficult to perceive it as such. Although I knew from the start that what I saw in front of me was a mirror image of someone present behind me, I perceived the performance as if it were taking place in front of me. I continued to do so even though the sound of the voice of the person I saw speaking in front of me and the sound of his feet reminded me time and again that at least part of what I was seeing was, in fact, taking place behind my head.

His Father’s Voice — Blankert’s strategy of evoking dys-placement in Double Track recalls an observation made by Henri Wallon in his study Les origines du caractère chez l’enfant (1949). In this study, cited many times by Lacan, Wallon describes a situation of an infant smiling in recognition of its father’s image in the mirror. When the father speaks to the child, the child, surprised that the voice emanates from a different place than the image, seems shocked and turns from the image towards the father holding him.

Wallon takes this as an indicator of the fact that the child has not yet grasped the differences and connections between its father’s physical presence and his specular reflection. In normal development, the child will eventually learn to understand how the image in the mirror and the father’s physical presence are different yet related to one another. In Lacan’s mirror stage story, this ‘being the same yet different,’ is crucial for the pleasure that the child finds in recognizing its own image in the mirror, and for the promise this mirror image seems to offer. This is a promise of a unity and coherence that it does not feel from inside.

The members of the audience of Double Track are not children, but grown-ups who presumably already know the difference between mirror images and physical presences. Nevertheless, the architecture of Double Track somehow appears to evoke a similar confusion as that described by Wallon. I experienced a strong tendency to perceive the mirror image as the real thing. In the case of Double Track, this ‘mistake’ happens even though...
everybody ‘knows better.’ Not only did I already know what the child still has to learn but, more than that, Double Track made me aware how this illusion is preserved at the cost of signals that suggest otherwise. Although the sound of voice and feet reminded me repeatedly of the fact that I was watching a mirror image, it was very hard to grasp it as such.

Wallon suggests that the child’s confusion results from he or she not (yet) knowing the difference between mirror image and reality. He suggests that this difference is something to be learned, after which it would cease to be a source of confusion. In Double Track, on the other hand, the situation is confusing even though one knows the difference between mirror and reality. It is confusing exactly because one knows.

The sound of the feet and voice of the dancer in Double Track causes a confusing oscillation between bodily disappearance and bodily dys-appearance. My response to it made me aware of my body as what Merleau-Ponty termed ‘a place of intertwining.’ It made me aware of my body as the locus that produces the unity of the world, and also of how the unity of the world as I perceive it is not a matter of matching or reconstructing a ‘natural’ pre-existing unity given in the world ‘outside,’ but rather a construction that involves a subjective point of view.

Double Track made me aware of how the production of the world ‘as it is,’ as I perceive it, also involves producing a position or the self as seer in relation to it, even if this awareness is the suggestion of being not involved. In Double Track what Drew Leder terms the ‘phenomenological condition of bodily absence’ is produced and re-produced at cost of denial of the ‘sound track.’

Double Track thus suggests a much more active involvement of the body in what we think we see than either Lacan in his mirror stage essay, or Crary in his history of paying attention, accounts for. Hence, Double Track can be read as a critique of the assumption underlying both Crary’s approach to subjectivity as the effect of cultural conditioning of bodies, and the Lacanian psychoanalytical account of subjectivity as the effect of assuming an image of a body seen in a mirror.

Although these two approaches to subjectivity as they are represented by Crary and Lacan differ in many ways, and are perhaps not even compatible (or maybe they are?) there seems to be at least one thing they share and this is a conception of the body as ultimately materiality, mere matter, as opposed to subjectivity, to notions of agency and creativity and the capacity to think. The effect evoked by Double Track, undermines this assumption and points to the necessity of conceiving of what we think we see as the product of a more active and creative involvement of the body.

Mimicking the Mirror — If, as Kaja Silverman argues, mirror stage identification is an ongoing process of attempting to match bodily sensations with visual imagos, it seems to leave space for a more active involvement of the
body than Lacan's mirror stage, or even Silverman's re-reading of it, accounts for. That is, Silverman's definition of mirror stage identification seems to leave open the possibility of a body actively adapting itself to an image seen or actively producing unity in what is seen.

In chapter 7, I introduced John Martin's theory of inner mimicry as an alternative account of the relation between bodies seeing and bodies seen. Alternative, that is, to Lacan's mirror stage model. Martin describes how we see other bodies on stage through a process of bodily 'mimicking' them. Through this mimicking, we actively align our bodies felt with bodies seen and in this way, grasp them. Whereas Lacan argues that we learn to perceive our own body as unity through the introjection of the image of a body seen, Martin on the other hand suggests that seeing other bodies happens through an active process of mapping using the kinesthetic awareness of body seeing to grasp the other body seen.

Both Lacan, in his mirror stage essay, and Silverman (1996), in her reading of it, mention mimicry to account for ways in which the body can adapt its posture and movements to match an image of 'itself' seen from a point of view outside itself. Mimicry is a means of assuming this image through a process of bodily matching. Lacan refers to the behavior of pigs and migratory locusts, as well as to Callois legendary psychasthenia to explain this behavior as a way of installing a relationship between Innenwelt and Umwelt, just as in the mirror stage (Lacan 1977: 3-4). He comes back to this notion of mimicry in his later Four Fundamental Concepts in Psychoanalysis, where he argues against the idea that mimicry in certain animals serves as a protective device. Instead, he argues, mimicry is part of a strategy to become part of a particular 'picture' (Lacan 1981: 73, 98-100, 107, 109).

Silverman elaborates on this possibility in Lacan in order to describe how human subjects do not always wait passively and unconsciously for the gaze to 'photograph' them in the shape of a pre-existing image. On the contrary, they may give themselves "to be apprehended by the gaze in a certain way, by assuming the shape of either a desired representation or one that has come through less happy circumstances to mark the physical body" (Silverman 1996: 201).

Both Lacan and Silverman discuss mimicry in relation to the self-awareness of the seer, how the seer as body mimics what is seen, and how this contributes to the identity of the seer. Mimicry thus helps to understand how these images mediate and transform the seer as body and how this involves a body actively involved in assuming the image. Yet, neither Lacan nor Silverman theorizes mimicry as a force at work in the constitution of what we think we see: how this takes place and how body might be actively involved here as well.

At this point, Martin's concept of inner mimicry be a useful addition to Silverman's 'spaced-out' model of the mirror stage. Read through Silverman - understood as a process that is culturally mediated rather than 'naturally' given - inner mimicry might help to elaborate the mirror stage towards a
model that opens up a whole spectrum of possible relations between bodies seeing and bodies seen, a spectrum of which the positions represented by Lacan and Martin mark the two opposite poles. Between Lacan and Martin resides a whole spectrum where the senses are not understood as passive receptors of image seen, but as actively involved in constituting what is seen in relation to an also actively constituted point of view. This is a whole spectrum, furthermore, where the senses do not function separately, but rather as what James J. Gibson has termed perceptual systems.

Perceptual Systems — In *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (1966), Gibson explains senses as active systems that orient, explore and investigate. He opposes this notion of the senses as perceptual systems, to notions of senses as passive receptors. Understood as active systems, the senses are neither passive senses nor channels of sensory quality, but ways of paying attention. Furthermore, understanding them as perceptual systems helps to account for the ways in which the sensors traditionally associated with different senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and proprioception interact and overlap in the constitution of our perceptions of the world. Understood as perceptual systems, these senses are not mutually exclusive or separate systems. Instead, they interact in the constitution of a world that is visible, audible, and touchable at the same time (Gibson 1966: 1–6 and 47–58).

With his notion of the senses as perceptual systems, Gibson objects to the model of a receptor mosaic for each sense connecting with the central nervous system and projecting the pattern of excited receptors in the brain. He argues that, instead of supposing that the brain constructs or computes the objective information from a kaleidoscopic inflow of sensations, we may suppose that the orientation of the organs of perception is governed by the brain so that the whole system of input and output resonates with the external information.

If this formula is correct, the input of the sensory nerves is not the basis for perception but only half of it. It is only the basis for sense impressions. These are not the data of perception, nor the raw material out of which perception is fashioned in the brain. The active senses cannot be simply the initiators of signals in the nerve fibers or messages to the brain, instead they are analogous to tentacles and feelers. The function of the brain when looped with its perceptual organs, is not to decode signals or to interpret messages, nor to accept images. The function of the brain is not even to organize sensory input or to process data. Perceptual systems, including the nerve centers at various levels up to the brain, are ways of seeking and extracting information about the environment from the flowering array of ambient energy.

Considering the senses as perceptual systems helps us to understand the world as a construction which depends on our way of interacting with what we are confronted with. This also helps to explain how it is possible that
we perceive of the world as stable and unitary even though our impressions of it are constantly changing. Conceiving of the senses as perceptual systems, allows for an understanding of how the senses work in interaction, but also how they can be separated out, either by choice, or by the effects of cultural practices. At this point, Gibson's notion of the senses as perceptual systems is in line with Crary's idea that not only see and seen, but also what it means to see, have to be understood from the ways in which perceptual practices take place within, and are organized by, specific cultural and historical situations. But what Gibson adds to this, is that the senses themselves are active and creative systems.

If the senses are perceptual systems, then infants do not have sensations at birth, but start at once to pick up information from the world. Initially, the infant's detection equipment cannot be finely tuned. Nevertheless he or she looks at things and touches, and mouths and listens. As he or she grows, he or she learns to use perceptual systems more skillfully and attention is educated to the subtleties of stimulus information. The infant learns to perceive and this learning process is the effect of his or her interaction with his or her surroundings. It is from this interaction that both a sense of this world and a sense of self in relation to it comes into being (Gibson 1966: 266–288).

Gibson's ideas originate in biology, but the philosophical implications of his ideas seem to be useful for visual theory as it has developed within the humanities. The senses understood as perceptual systems, allows for an understanding of subjectivity as the effect of an active engagement of various perceptual systems (which do so simultaneously) with what the body finds itself confronted with. Subjectivity is the effect of how these sense systems probe, map, and bring together the results of their engagement with the world.

Gibson's proposal to consider the senses as perceptual systems, suggests the possibility of understanding seeing in the theatre as a process of bodily response and investigation, measuring, exploring through sight and hearing, as well as through proprioception and kinesthetics. The response of the seer is the product of a body as the place where these various perceptual systems intertwine; they probe the world around us. In this response, various information is produced and gets connected. How this happens will depend both on the physical possibilities of the body to engage with the world, and on the way this body is marked by culture. The response of the seer will depend on how the body has learned to perceive itself and the world around it according to culturally specific parameters, how the body has learned to behave, how it is marked by experience and the address of others.

**Möbius Strip** — Conceiving of the senses as perceptual systems affords an understanding of how seeing takes place in *Double Track*, as an effect of the process of probing and combining through various sense systems simultane-
ously. Both a sense of self as seer, and of what is seen, are the effect of how this probing and combining takes place. That is, they are the effect of the ways in which various systems extract information, how they are related to one another, mapped and matched, and how this is also measured against expectations and desires that result from cultural conditioning. Here, Crary’s notion of managing attention still proves useful in analyzing the way bodies are cultured to perceive according to specific parameters and how this results in a culturally specific self-awareness as seer. His model is still useful, provided that the central metaphor is replaced by one that allows for the possibility of change, and of bodies seeping beyond the domain of control.

Crary’s model is historical. It exposes the relations between the grand narratives of modernity and the disembodied subject ‘just looking.’ In Crary’s model, the Panopticon functions as historical point of reference. The Panopticon appears as the blueprint for all kinds of cultural practices for disciplining bodies, and as a spatial metaphor for the type of vision and subjectivity resulting from these practices. In Crary’s argument, the Panopticon represents a kind of origin, both in the sense that it is presented as the model of cultural practices of managing attention, and also in the sense that it represents an ideal state, a perfection that can only be approached but never regained. Like the Lacanian mythical fullness, it functions as an image of that which is lost. This lack induces a desire for the originating fullness that drives subsequent attempts to regain it, thus turning managing attention into a ‘recovery narrative.’

Expanding Crary’s model to include the possibility of change would involve replacing the Panopticon with another central metaphor that account for subjectivity by acknowledging the influence of the past on the appearance of the present, without depending on the past as a fixed point of reference. I propose to do so by replacing the Panopticon by Elisabeth Grosz’ model of the Möbius strip, the inverted three dimensional figure eight.

The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. This model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside (Grosz 19: xii).

With the image of the Möbius strip, Grosz, like Crary, argues for a model of subjectivity in which interiority and exteriority are understood as the effects of the interaction between the body and the world surrounding it. Unlike Crary’s Panopticon based model though, Grosz’ model of the Möbius strip lacks a notion of origin. It recognizes influences of past experiences and practices, but only as moments in ongoing process of transformation.
Grosz' model of the Möbius strip is useful in conceiving of attention management taking place in theatre as a process that does not necessarily confirm already internalized parameters or strive to do so, but can also be used to invoke changes in self-awareness. Accounting for these not only as deviations from the historical model but as useful contributions to reconfiguration, theatre performances can ask for a re-positioning of the seer in the theatre and in theory.

1 — Crary explains how Wagner felt dissatisfied with French and Italian opera composed around a few brilliant arias that would only attract the audience for their brief duration. Dissatisfied as well with theatre design that allowed (or even encouraged) audiences to look at each other, and let their attention wander around, he sought a construction of visibility that would more rigorously structure the spectator’s perceptual experience. To achieve this effect, he eliminated the lateral views of older theater design to achieve a frontal engagement with the stage for every spectator. He also initiated the idea of near complete darkness as a way of heightening the intensity of lighting effects on stage and preventing peripheral distraction. The multiplication of proscenium arches combined with the extreme darkness of the theatre was intended to detach the illuminated stage from any legible relation to the rest of the opera house (Crary 1999: 247–257).


3 — This implication of theories of subjectivity is extensively discussed by Elisabeth Grosz in her Volatile Bodies; Towards a Corporeal Feminism (1994).

4 — Silverman (1996):

Lacan’s recourse to the metaphor of a stain when accounting for the image in the guise of which we invite the gaze to affirm us suggests the need for a more supple understanding of the relation between our bodies and the representations which make up the cultural inventory suggested by the signifier ‘screen.’ The stain metaphor accounts for that relation in three-dimensional rather than two dimensional terms, and it collapses the distance between the body and the image which defines it. [...] It designates, in a way the screen cannot, the transformation of actual muscles and flesh into a photographic representation, and it helps to understand that this representation can implicate the postural schema and indeed the whole of what Wallon calls ‘proprioceptivity.’ It can thus involve a corporeal assimilation of the image (201–202).
Mimicry does not always imply a resistant or even a conscious intentionality: on the contrary, it may bespeak a subject's completely unconscious compliance with the images to which he or she is accustomed to being apprehended by the camera/gaze. The pose needs to be more generally understood as the photographic imprinting of the body, and that imprinting is not always apparent to the subject in question. It may be the result of the projection of a particular image onto the body so repeatedly as to induce both psychic and corporeal identification with it. And the image may be generative not of pleasure, but unpleasure (205).

S — Grosz (1994: xii) explains that she came across this model of the Möbius strip in reading Lacan, but also that she uses it in a different way and in a different context than he does. In Volatile Bodies (1994) she uses the Möbius strip to rethink the relation between body and mind. The model helps her to conceive of body and mind not as two distinct substances or as two kinds of attributes of a single substance, but as somewhere in between these two alternatives (xii, xiii, 36, 116, 189, 209–210).