

“The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now”

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Rosen writes of the mirror as the very model of an egocasting technology, providing its user with a readily available image of him- or herself and encouraging self-consciousness and introspection. Of course the mirror has also served as a model for contemporary art practice, with Rosalind Krauss characterizing the television monitor as a species of mirror or “sustained tautology” in her famous 1976 article “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism.” Krauss aligned video’s feedback loops with the reflection seen in the mirror; “the agency of reflection” itself, she wrote, is “a mode of appropriation, of illusionistically erasing the difference between subject and object.” And such a bracketing-out of the object, of the other, is precisely the mechanism of narcissism. Krauss was, in the mid-1970s, addressing artists such as Vito Acconci (whose 1970 *Proximity Piece*, in which the artist unnerved visitors to the Jewish Museum’s “Software” exhibition by furtively impinging upon their personal space, was documented in “The Art of Participation”). But this mirror-logic applies even more clearly to spectacular projects like that of Galloway and Rabinowitz, where the video screens on opposite walls of the gallery come to resemble the configuration, invoked by Krauss, of two “facing mirrors” that “squeeze out the real space between them.” Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s more recent interactive installations indulge in a similar narcissistic gambit: At SF MOMA, for example, his *Microphones*, 2008, consists of a theatrically lit circle of vintage microphones, into which one is invited to speak; your voice is recorded and that of the previous participant is immediately played back through a tiny loudspeaker installed in the mic, producing a kind of aural collage. Beyond the meagerness of the level of participation, what is striking here is the solicitation of pleasure in hearing one’s own voice amplified through the microphone, which functions as a mirror of sound, followed by the acoustic illusion of a response from the disembodied



What had once promised to be the site of a confrontation with the unexpected—new modes of art practice that propose different models of relationality between subject and world—is transformed into the site of a reassuring encounter with the self.

voice of one’s predecessor, in a form of distorted echo. What might have been realized as an instrument of ego loss, of the subsumption of the self into some larger, anonymous aural mass, instead takes the shape of a tool for an almost infantile gratification in the fiction of a call-and-response played with oneself.