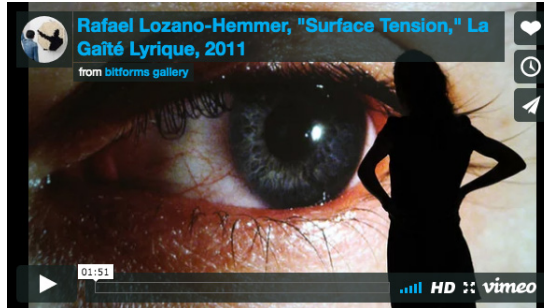


THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

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1. **Scopophilia** or **scoptophilia** (from Greek σκοπέω *skopeō*, "look to, examine" and φιλία *philia*, "tendency toward"), is deriving pleasure from looking. As an expression of sexuality, it refers to sexual pleasure derived from looking at erotic objects: erotic photographs, pornography, naked bodies, etc.

The act of watching and being watched has always been present in art history. Be it in theater in which, before the introduction of dimmed lights, the emphasis was long laid upon the social convention of watching and being watched and not so much on the play itself. Or simply in the unidirectional and asocial gazing at nude sculptures.

Surface Tension (1992) is an immersive video installation by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and introduces a similar experience of art but reverses the interplay. Whereas watching a painting like *l'Origine du monde* (1866) by Gustave Courbet or *The Absinthe Drinker* (1876) by Edgar Degas might feel inappropriate and voyeuristic. Lozano-Hemmer makes the viewer prey of its own actions. By making use of a surveillance camera to track the movements of the watcher, and transferring them onto the screen, this work is looking back, keeping the visitor in direct line of sight. Never losing track.

"Its" **gaze** thus penetrating and invading deep into the spectators' individual space. In this way he becomes almost compelled to redirect his or her gaze to avoid any confrontation. Which is in fact raising awareness of the impossibility to become invisible. This feeling generates a certain uneasiness which reminds me of Adrien Ghenie's *Pie Fight Studies*. In which the people almost seem the have ripped their own faces of. Or George Orwell's infamous science fiction novel *1984*. In which the monitor is also used for vigilance and observation. And in fact more important, used by one so-called *big brother*, a person who's existence is doubted. Or more recent: the unknown spectator at the other side of the webcam.

Perhaps the most alienating is thus not knowing whom is watching back from the other side of the screen. So instead of assisting in generating the feeling of physical

contact between two people, the screen is now in fact generating contact with a computer. A piece of software that's taking on a human form, to be transposed and projected on a silk screen. And although the viewer might be aware of all this, the presence of this (unknown) gaze remains nonetheless uncomfortable. Discomfortingly as this already might seem, this could also be pointing out that in a way we as humans are not fully capable to make the distinction between a human and an android pretending to be. Keeping the future in mind, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer was in fact on top of something far ahead of its time.

Andy Warhol once said: "*In the future everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes*". Much did he know that right now the opposite is desired. Not be famous for, but the desire to be invisible for 15 minutes. In *How not to be seen: a fucking didactic Educational.mov* Hito Steyerl responds to Warhol by offering 5 ways to become invisible for digital technology. 5 ways to remove oneself of the grid. Being visible or not, one dictating the other, it's a blessing and a curse. But one thing is for sure. The desire to be seen might be problematic but nonetheless it seems to highly present among the digital native generation. And after all, if everyone is doing it, it's okay. Right?