

Mirror Images

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Somewhere near the surface of the glass and silver nitrate, a mirror's image optically responds to a human observers' movements, reflecting the environment based on the viewers position. As the viewer approaches the mirror, its' appearance opens up a wider and deeper view of the room. It magnifies the image recognized by the perceiver and visually reflects the three-dimensional scene atop its flat surface. Nearly 40 years after Dan Grahams' written reflections on the mental and visual appearance of the mirror image,¹ the design for All Square, a restaurant and non-profit in Minneapolis, expands this interest.

The name "All Square" is a reference to the notion that those who have paid their debts to society are square and free to move forward with a clean slate, as well as a nod to the shape of the fast-casual restaurant's signature dish. The grill cheese eatery offers its formerly incarcerated employees a professional--development fellowship in addition to a living wage. To give the non-profit mission and branding of All Square a physical presence, the project uses the name and motif of the 'Square' as the starting point and repeats it at varying dimensions



Figure 1. Advertisement. Courtesy of Whittier Advertising and Brandlab.

throughout the space. The square is materialized as mirrors and aluminum frames to form thresholds that divide and unify the large room.

Dan Grahams' project 'Performance, Audience, Mirror' works through four stages that over time uses verbal cues and body movement to mentally challenge the position of the spectator and performer. To Graham, the mirror inverts the position of the spectator that is looking forward into a projected space; the apparatus allows the viewer to reconstruct the view that they see and occupy in reverse (the exterior and interior view).² Significant to the function of the performance is the alignment of the audience, stage, and mirror. Simply put, the appearance of the mirror image is first a function of the viewers position, it confuses the boundaries between the identity of the viewer with the scene they occupy. It encourages the spectator – or myriad participants – to see themselves both as individuals and integral members of a crowd.³

At All Square each mirror is positioned strategically to reflect the appearance of another, producing points of visual interactions that challenge the depth of the space. In doing so they act as Graham describes, 'they expand the image of the perceiver not only of the room, but also of the people within and oneself.' One example of the mirror image can be seen when sitting at the bar of the restaurant. The mirrors' reflection behind the bar counter flattens the identity of visitors and kitchen workers, as well as, friends and families, atop its' glass surface. The reflection confuses traditional service boundaries by focusing the audience on looking and being looked at, and observing and being observed. When looking across the room the mirrors construct different points of views and perspectives that complicate the threshold between the diners, who watch, and the employees, that work. They create connections without distinction by making occupants sequence through the space with self-awareness.

The 5 mirrors of All Square are 7 feet high and vary from 5 to 7 feet wide. Each pane floats in front of the wall, they are mounted with a hidden French-cleat system, that positions the mirror to visually depict a space between the floor and height of a human occupant. Each mirror neighbors a 1-inch-thick



Figure 2. View looking from bar area looking towards the entry. Photograph by Caylon Hackwith.



Figure 3. Multiple reflections in the dining room mirror. Photograph by Caylon Hackwith.

frame, that is the equal in its overall size. Frames are placed at a ninety-degree angle from the mirror to frame a scene within the restaurant. The frames are located at the point of sales counter for physical and verbal transactions, at the dining area to focus interactions across tables, and at the bar as a threshold to access the bathrooms. Each frame supports a single colored LED light – cyan, magenta, and chartreuse – that blend with the textures of the room to reflect the image of the brand.

The view through the storefront window is the only position where the visitor can see but is not seen by another. When seen from the road, the lights act as a sign to reflect the spirited image of the brand. While on one hand, from a distance, the ensemble of colors envisage a restaurant sign to unaware drivers. As one approaches, the window frames a scene with numerous images of the space.

Altogether the lights, mirror, and frames physically and visually shape the room by encouraging the occupants to “Don’t Judge, Just Eat,” and to look closely to the other side. These elements partition, focus, and unify the interactions between users that are both frontal and planned—the point of sales, at the bar, at the entrance—as well as, indirect and unplanned.

By configuring the locations of mirror images, they blur social and spatial boundaries by displaying myriad circumstances throughout the day.

ENDNOTES

1. Dan Graham, “The Mirror Image / The Video Image,” *Video Architecture Television: Writings on Video and Video Works 1970 – 1978* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1979), 67
2. *ibid* 67
3. Swenson, Kirsten. “Be My Mirror.” ARTnews.com. *Art in America*, May 1, 2009. <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/dan-graham-be-my-mirror-kirsten-swenson-62790/>.
4. Graham refers to Jacques Lacan, the mirror is a metaphor for the western concept of the ‘self.’ In his theory of the ‘mirror phase’ Lacan posits that a baby first discovers their ‘self’ through a mirror-like identification of an image of another. *ibid*

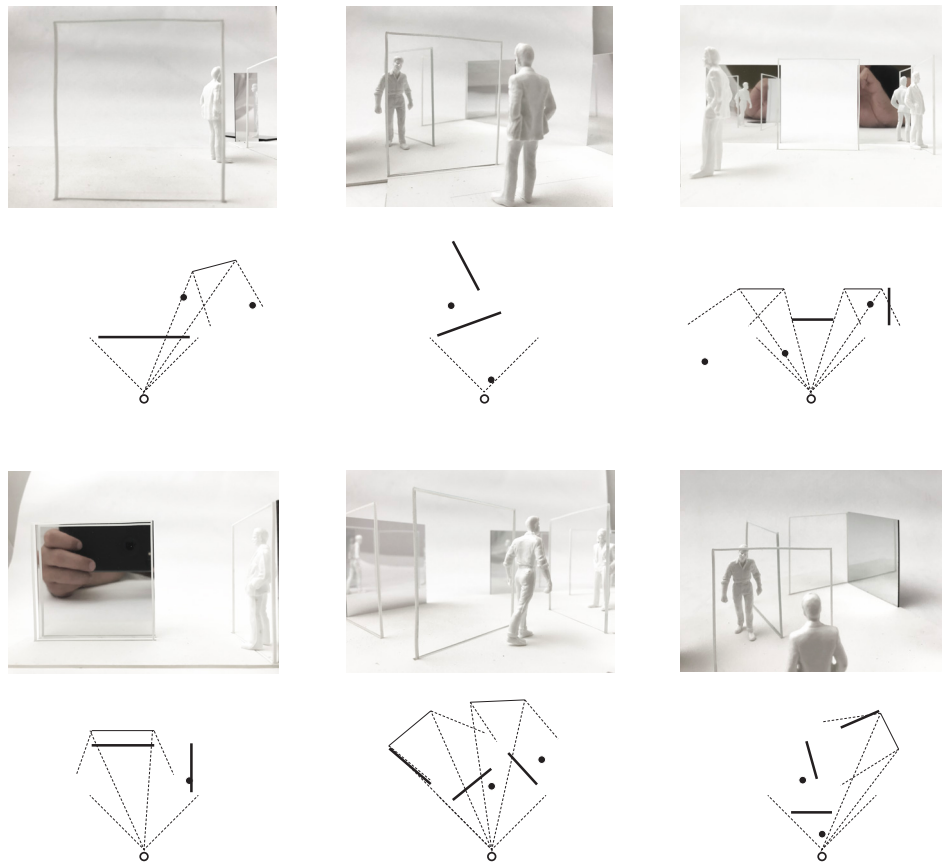


Figure 4. Point of View Diagram. Courtesy of the Authors.



Figure 5. Split View. Photograph by Caylon Hackwith.

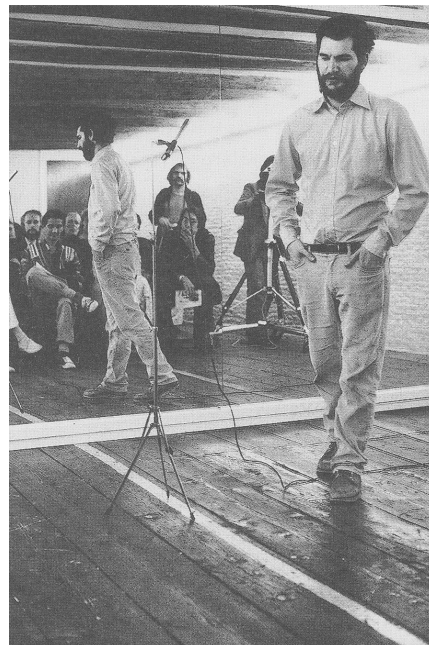


Figure 6. Dan Graham performing 'Performer/Audience/Mirror, 1977'; at de Appel arts centre, Amsterdam. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7. Cyan, Chartreuse, and Magenta lights confuse the boundaries between street and restaurant. Photograph by Undeniaby Dairy.



Figure 8. View of the myriad restaurant scenes through the Storefront Window. Photograph by Caylon Hackwith.

