

The Body, the Screen, and Representations: An Introduction to Theories of Internet Spectatorship

Individuals do more than use the Internet and computer; they are instructed to personalize things and follow rules. They are also encouraged to interact, find community, and identify with representations that “live” within Internet “space.” For instance, an instant messenger client offers the “ICQ Universe,” Cheap Tickets directs the viewer to “just click, you’re there,” and a webcam site is “just my little space on the web which houses me.”¹ Through these devices, Internet sites and computer interfaces address the individual, depict the kinds of bodies that are expected to engage, and render and regulate the spectator. Spectatorship affects how settings and interfaces are understood and helps to shape larger conceptions of self and society. The significance of such positions should encourage academics to further incorporate spectatorship into Internet and new media studies. Academics, journalists, programmers, and users might also consider these forms of spectatorship because hardware, software, and Internet settings increasingly facilitate communication and analysis. Nevertheless, few extended critical considerations exist in this area. This book introduces Internet and computer spectatorship and provides theoretical models that readers can employ when considering other settings. Internet and computer spectatorship is conceptualized through apparatus and feminist psychoanalytic film theories, art history, gender studies, queer theory, race and postcolonial studies, and other theories of cultural production. I provide general comments and detailed case studies of how spectatorship is constructed in synchronous MOO settings, women’s webcams, net art web sites, the Virtual Places graphical “chat” setting, digital imaging, and sites that describe programmers’ bodies.

The bodies of Internet and computer spectators are rendered through a variety of visual and textual strategies. An active and empowered Internet “user,” who is in control of the interface, situated within the screen, and moves actively through Internet “space,” is suggested by AOL’s striding yellow figure and the interface hand, which appears when manipulating software and hypertext links. “Welcome” messages and

links that are labeled “enter” indicate that there is a way for the spectator to get into the setting. For instance, the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s report on the “Ethical and Legal Aspects of Human Subjects in Cyberspace” uses an image of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*, which employs geometry to indicate that all aspects of the body are rational and knowable, and directly maps him onto the computer screen (figure I.1).² The image supports the report’s claim that there are subjects “in” or within Internet “space,” suggests that the gender of this subject is male, depicts his arms and legs encompassing the whole screen, and indicates that he controls the technology. Gateway’s depiction of a young male student, who is standing in front of a chalkboard, drawing a laptop, and preparing to materialize his every technological desire, evokes Harold’s creation of a world in *Harold and the Purple Crayon* and also suggests a male control of the technology.³

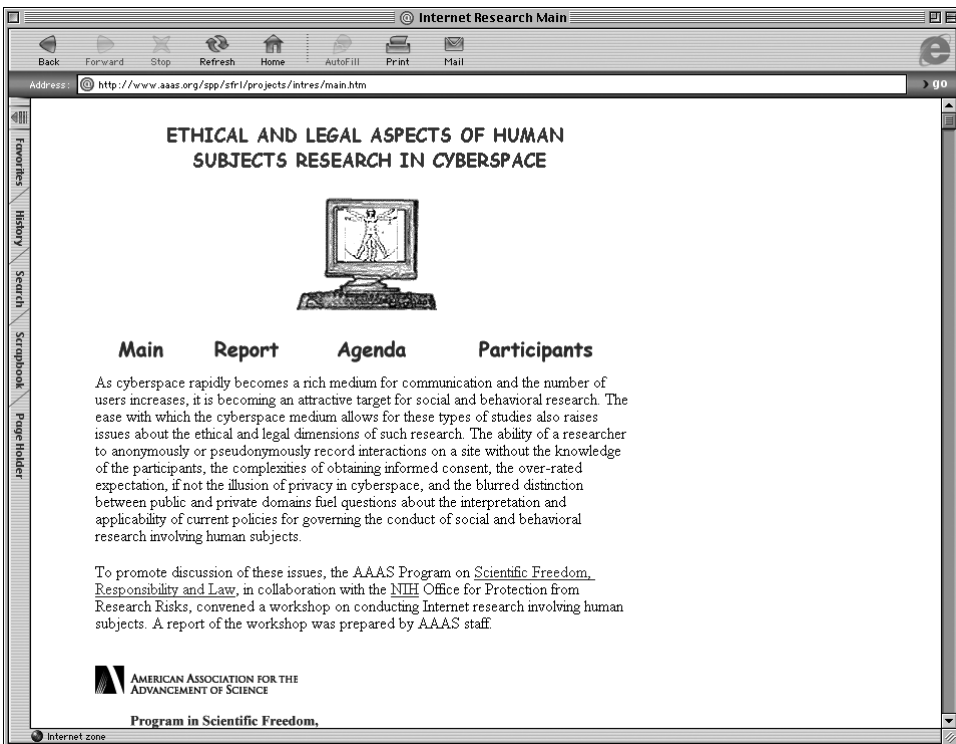


Figure I.1

American Association for the Advancement of Science, “Ethical and Legal Aspects of Human Subjects in Cyberspace,” 1999, 15 Sept. 2004, <<http://www.aaas.org/spp/dspp/sfrl/projects/intres/main.htm>>.

Web sites that market computer technologies address particular kinds of Internet and computer spectators by suggesting what they look like. For instance, the IBM site features an overhead image of a white man working with his laptop and a depiction of a white man standing confidently in the doorway, while some undifferentiated figures sit in the background.⁴ The images and texts on the IBM site suggest that it is offering “Resources” for “Business,” “Government,” “Education,” “Investors,” and “Journalists” and “Jobs at IBM” to white men. In a similar manner, Logitech presents a businessman who is standing, suited, slipping a mouse into his briefcase, and on the move (figure I.2).⁵ When images of women appear in these advertisements, they are often lounging and reclining, ignoring the technology, engaged socially rather than in business transactions, and available for the visual contemplation of the spectator. Standing or squarely sitting male figures suggest authority, coherence, control, and engagement while reclining females, who are often positioned on a diagonal, provide



Figure I.2

Logitech, “Logitech—Leading Web Camera, Wireless Keyboard,” 15 Aug. 2004, <<http://www.logitech.com/index.cfm?countryid=19&languageid=1>>.

a way for the viewer to look upon the women, visually enter the picture plane, and suggest her immobility, laziness, and reduced control. For instance, below Logitech's image of the male businessman is an advertisement for webcams and video dating that features a woman sitting near the computer, her head tipped to the side and her mouth open in laughter, performing for the camera and a prospective date, and not working with mouse, keyboard, and screen. The Dell computer web site also represents a white woman lounging in the grass and looking-up expectantly, with her laptop almost cut out of the picture.⁶ Her similarly tilted head and welcoming smile suggest that she is greeting the spectator and welcoming "his" view of her.

Representations of these available women situate white heterosexual men in a familiar spectatorial position. Other individuals may find it more difficult to engage. Risks exist in identifying what race and ethnicity look like, but it is important to note that there are few images of people of color working with computers or standing in an authoritative way on web sites marketing computer technologies.⁷ Women and people of color are more likely to be depicted lounging together in social and leisure settings and using such technologies as stereo systems, headphones, and boom boxes. These images threaten to perpetuate stereotypes about unruly urban behavior because the groups depicted with stereo equipment are often comprised of people from the African diaspora, Asians, Latinos/as and other people of color. Microsoft does depict a white woman, a white man, and a black man arranged on a diagonal, which directs the spectator's attention to the question: "Are you ready for the new school year?" (figure I.3).⁸ The white woman in the foreground is half cropped out by three edges of the image, so close that her face becomes blurry, and she is looking down rather than meeting the spectator's view. The black male is pushed to the background, slumped, mostly blocked by the middle figure's shoulder, and also looking down. Only the white male figure addresses the spectator and is sitting erect and "ready."

Depictions of eager white male heterosexual computer users, which appear in *Wired*, other media sources, and Internet forums, are not surprising since the web sites for computer graphics designers, gamers, and programmers implicitly address these individuals and often include renderings of sexualized female bodies for their pleasure. Computer-generated depictions of nearly naked women with large breasts, narrow waists, and puckered lips regularly appear on web sites for computer graphics software and related hardware. For instance, ATI Technologies presents a computer rendering of "Ruby" looking down provocatively and inviting the spectator to look at her.⁹ Ruby's large breasts, narrow waist, and expanses of pale skin are still partially mapped with the kind of grid used in rendering her. This suggests that she is forever adjustable to the desires of male viewers. The otherwise naked body of another light-skinned,

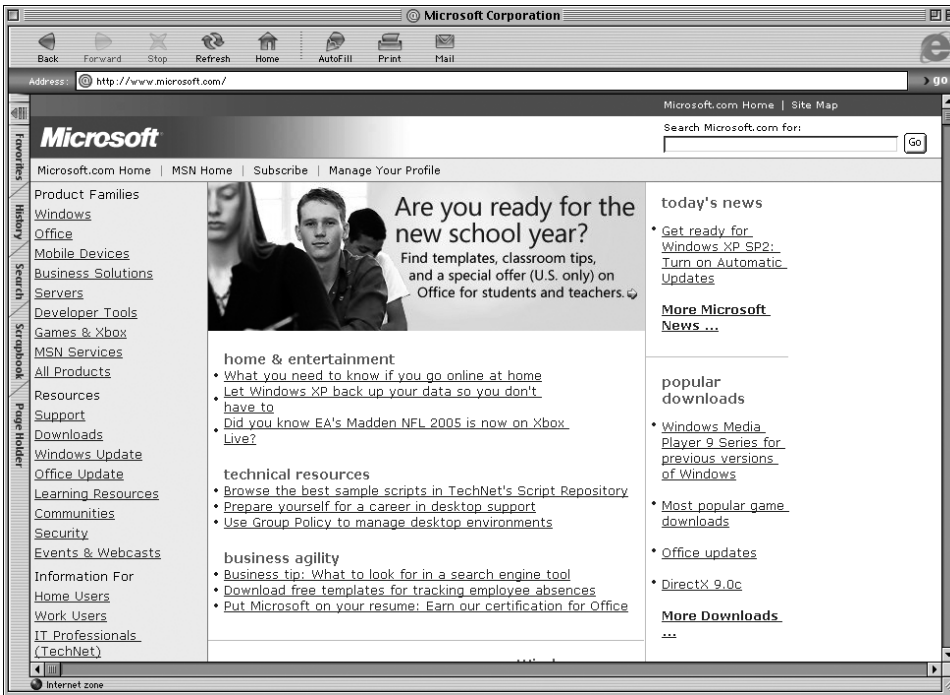


Figure I.3

Microsoft, "Microsoft Corporation," 14 Aug. 2004, <<http://www.microsoft.com/>>.

computer-generated woman is only partially concealed by NewTek's spiraling LightWave 3D logo, which hovers in front of her breasts and directs the spectator's attention to her cleavage.¹⁰ Web sites, software boxes, and other forms of advertising present fairies, swimming mermaids, and other scantily clad fantastical female figures as appropriate output.¹¹ These renderings indicate the kind of images and spectatorial positions that should be produced by Internet and computer technologies.¹²

Employing the term "spectator," when considering these Internet and computer settings, indicates how individuals are looking at representations, are acknowledged or displaced by visual and textual addresses, and gain an understanding of the setting and their experiences through narratives and renderings. This approach is significantly different from engaging with Internet and computer technologies as unbiased tools, which are directed by individuals and always under their control. My use of the term is intended to suggest how Internet spectators continue to be rendered and regulated by technologies and representations and to reference apparatus and feminist psychoanalytic film theory, feminist art history, and visual culture studies. As it is currently

employed in film theory, spectator indicates “an artificial construct” that is produced and animated by the apparatus and cultural beliefs.¹³ Spectatorial positions do not exactly describe the experience of any individual, but all viewers are addressed and shaped by media forms. Spectatorship indicates the processes of watching and listening, identification with characters and images, the various values with which viewing is invested, and how these ideas continue even after the spectator has stopped viewing.¹⁴

My use of the phrase “Internet and computer spectator” and the term “spectatorship” also indicates a commitment to employing theory in order to understand texts and an interest in developing hybrid critical models that can assist in analyzing specific Internet and computer settings. Theories by such film scholars as Mary Ann Doane, Christian Metz, and Laura Mulvey are an important part of this book.¹⁵ Their work has emerged from or even articulated apparatus and feminist psychoanalytic film theory, a set of methodologies that sometimes overlap and at other times are resistant to the other discourse, and their theories continue to inform research about spectatorship. These approaches were first articulated in the 1970s, influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, and their limitations have generated lively debates and other forms of media history, criticism, and theory.¹⁶ Theories of film spectatorship are paralleled, informed, and influenced by philosophers’ inquiries about the rendering of the subject and literary critics’ concern with the production of the reader.¹⁷ This introduction addresses the significance of such literature and suggests its productive redeployment for Internet studies. However, my intent is to provide the reader with critical revisions of these and other methodologies, which are suited to specific Internet settings, rather than an account of apparatus and feminist psychoanalytic film theory and the debates that continue in the field. Critical works by Judith Mayne; Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis; Kaja Silverman; and a variety of other scholars successfully outline and critique psychoanalytic models of film theory.¹⁸

Film theorists indicated, in the 1970s, that Hollywood cinema represented the desires and beliefs of modern Western industrial countries.¹⁹ While psychoanalysis can be problematic and reproduce these underlying myths, it also provides ways to understand and reveal the invisible ideology of cinema, society, and aspects of sexual difference, including the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity.²⁰ These myths that society lives by and assumes to be part of a natural and unproblematic reality also tend to provide the spectator with mastery and stability.²¹ Nevertheless, the spectator is subjected to the power of another vision and assumes positions with significant cultural ramifications when viewing the cinema and Internet sites, reading,

and listening. Most film theorists differentiate between the subject, or the position that is assigned to the film viewer by the varied aspects of the cinema, and the viewer, or the person who watches a film, but the differences in these positions have never been fully resolved. Doane distinguishes between the subject and the individual, and she relates the cinematic subject to the psychoanalytic investigation of the spectator, but this book is more aligned with Mayne's indication that the term "spectator" indicates some level of distrust in fully separating the subject from people.²² In Internet and computer viewing, the forms of spectatorship articulated by the technologies and representations are constantly acted out by using the system.

Apparatus theorists like Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz describe a centered spectator who is "within" and in front of the screen and the power that is derived from such a position.²³ While these film theorists tend to suggest that viewing provides cohesion and mastery, the psychoanalytic models they employ indicate that wholeness is an illusion. Despite contradictions in their work, the theories of Baudry and Metz help explain and critique how Internet images render coherent and empowered spectators. Mulvey's apparatus-based approach, Doane's theory of masquerade, and more recent feminist scholarship provide important methods for considering the production of male Internet spectators and the forms of identity and embodiment that are not acknowledged.²⁴ Mulvey attributes the production of sexual difference, or the articulation of inscribed male and female positions, to the structures of pleasure and identification that occur in classical cinema. She indicates that the subject of the gaze is male, and his empowered position is supported by the camera's viewpoint, while its object is female, and she exists in order to be viewed.²⁵ A version of such positions is articulated by web sites marketing computer technologies, computer-generated images of women that are rendered in order to be erotically enjoyed, and depictions of bodies in textual and graphical communication settings. Doane's theory of a female gaze and women's indication that they also operate webcams and other Internet technologies can help rethink these culturally produced positions.²⁶

Theories of spectatorship and the gaze are also employed in considering other cultural forms.²⁷ Formalist examinations by Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg, which are concerned with the internal terms and questions of art, conceive of the spectator as a disembodied eye that sees and surveys everything.²⁸ John Berger's account, which is distinctly different from their formalist investigations, indicates that paintings and other static visual images produce particular ways of seeing. He critiques the ways the spectator is gendered as male and suggests that spectatorship is based on a binary opposition between men who "act" and women who "appear."²⁹ Griselda Pollock and other feminist art historians provide more detailed analysis of gendered

forms of looking, apply psychoanalytic film theory to static visual images, and consider the relationship between constructed spectators and historical viewers.³⁰ Pollock resists formalist analysis, which is based on “eyesight alone,” because it does not address the embodied positions and identities of spectators.³¹ Her indication that traditional renderings of space establish gendered spheres and forms of spectatorship suggests that there are also problems with depictions of Internet space.

Apparatus theory can be complicit with its object of analysis and produce limited conceptions of women.³² Feminist psychoanalytic film theory challenges this absence of viable positions for women and indicates that the female spectator articulated completely by her sex does not exist, as Doane argues, except as “an effect of discourse” and the “focal point of an address.”³³ Feminist theorists are also concerned that psychoanalytic models of spectatorship do not consider physical people, simplify and misunderstand psychoanalysis, ignore the historical specificity of viewers and film production, rely solely on the camera obscura as the model of vision, do not consider how some genres address women, leave no possible positions for women’s spectatorial resistance, and fail to consider issues of class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and other forms of difference.³⁴ Apparatus and feminist psychoanalytic film theory have limitations, which need to be questioned, but they also offer the most comprehensive critical approaches to film as well as significant methods, especially when adjusted to acknowledge problems, to address Internet and computer spectatorship.³⁵ Academics, critics, and spectators should always question theoretical choices but exceptions to critical models do not indicate that they are always unproductive. E. Ann Kaplan argues that psychoanalytic theory explains the myths that society lives by at a particular time and can be employed critically without accepting that the narratives of sexual difference are real and necessary.³⁶ In this book, apparatus and feminist psychoanalytic film theory are combined with other critical models to interrogate the forms of spectatorship that are promised by Internet settings and to indicate when these positions are not delivered.

The term “spectator” is rarely employed in Internet settings and in academic and popular literature about these sites, perhaps because it emphasizes the processes of reading and viewing. I intend for the term “spectator” to evoke the concept of the Internet user but disagree with Anne Friedberg’s notion that computer “‘users’ are not spectators, not viewers.”³⁷ Looking is a significant aspect of Internet and computer use. Yet Internet viewing is sometimes referred to as lurking, which indicates that when spectators are looking, reading, and thinking, they benefit from the shared ideas without contributing.³⁸ References to Internet and computer spectatorship should highlight how individuals spend time reading and viewing as well as writing and

interacting. A discussion of spectatorship and the structuring of the individual can foreground the passive aspects of engagement and the mediation of the screen. These elements are downplayed because they do not support the concept of an active and animate Internet. However, it is also the case that no spectator is a completely unmoving and passive receiver of ideology. In her work on spectatorship, Mayne encourages theories that complicate such dualistic thinking as “critical” and “complacent” spectatorship.³⁹ I hope to offer similarly complicated theories of Internet and computer spectatorship, which focus on the ways spectators are constructed by the technologies and cultural narratives, and to indicate that resistance is difficult but possible. While it is tempting to write an account that is completely about the possibility of “oppositional gazes” and alternative spectatorial positions, this does not provide the critical strategies needed to consider the ways Internet spectators are constructed.

Using terms like “spectator” and “spectatorship” can produce an uneasy experience or even a sense that the wrong term is being employed because of how we have been trained to understand Internet and computer settings. However, this rupture can also provide opportunities to examine Internet representations. My use of this and other critical vocabularies is not meant to be an overarching dismissal of the ways meaning and value are produced for setting participants. Instead, my descriptions should indicate my own attractions to Internet and computer technologies and my resistance to some of what results. I have also employed the term “user” in other research, in my everyday speech, and to a more limited extent in this book. However, the term presents problems when performing close textual analysis and critique because it is so embedded in the language that renders particular notions of the Internet and computer. The concept of the user and Internet use, which suggests that something is put into service and employed, is also problematic because it makes these settings and technologies appear to be completely under the spectator’s control.⁴⁰

Academics like Espen Aarseth employ “user” because it indicates all the “textual practices that can be observed or imagined,” is “ambivalent,” and suggests “active participation and dependency.”⁴¹ Aarseth’s description of the user as an employer and dependant is promising. However, the construction and regulation of the Internet and computer spectator remain largely unnoted. George P. Landow indicates that technology “empowers those who possess it, those who make use of it, and those who have access to it.”⁴² Friedberg suggests that the “‘user’ interacts directly with the framed image on a small flat screen . . . to manipulate what is contained within” it.⁴³ Narratives about interactivity produce spectators and replace visual contemplation with a discourse about agency and participation. Such Internet forms as instant messaging (IM), “chat” settings, and “bulletin boards” are constantly contextualized

with descriptions of talking, participating, entering a spatial environment, and being connected with “real” people. These visual and textual representations of Internet activity and empowerment displace the more static processes of Internet looking and reading, the significant ways interactions are scripted, limitations on what can be manipulated, and how some individuals are disempowered.

Considerations of spectatorship indicate that media forms are “culturally significant events” and have an effect on viewers even after they disengage from a particular representation.⁴⁴ Diane Carr notes the intense correlation between spectator and manipulated computer representation and observes that viewers often respond to gaming by “flinching when their avatar bangs their head” and moving when the avatar changes position.⁴⁵ Her indication that avatars are “our emissaries and, at least to a degree, our doubles,” which is repeated in dictionary definitions and synchronous communication setting descriptions, suggests how identification continues after leaving the screen. The ways spectators are structured to engage and society’s ideas about the medium determine the questions that can be asked and whether the representational aspects of stereotypes can be perceived and critiqued. All of this suggests that there are significant ramifications of how Internet and computer representations downplay the computer screen, processor, and constructed viewing positions. Internet and computer spectatorship has an even more consequential effect on identification than do film and other media because the spectator spends significant amounts of time engaging with computers; computers and networks also appear in film, television, and print advertising; dream or trance-like experiences are often part of the engagement; the connection with characters and other representations can be intense; and there is an idea that the spectator is part of the setting, people are alive, and bodies are accessible through the Internet.

Highlighting the processes that render spectatorship indicates how Internet and computer settings function and provides ways to oppose dominant narratives about viewing that would otherwise shape individual experiences. These strategies of resistance include emphasizing the limits and failures of the technology, examining how Internet and computer positions do not meet the promised cultural ideals, and depicting producers who are a different age, gender, race, and sexuality than those proscribed by cultural norms. Focusing on spectatorship also provides a broader understanding of the function of Internet and computer representations, the constructed aspects of Internet settings, and the ways that texts and images become spatial environments, material objects, and embodied human subjects. I quote a variety of sources, which are commonly available to Internet spectators, to support the arguments in this book and provide references for the information. I try to be

sensitive to the ways spectators produce and use Internet and computer settings and critical of the problems and stereotypes that are instituted. Guidelines exist for ethical Internet research, which all Internet researchers should note.⁴⁶ However, the tendency in these documents to conclude that all Internet research is human subject research does not address the deeply produced aspects of Internet settings and the humanities methods that apply when writing about such representations.⁴⁷

The guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), which I contributed to in a small way, encourage academics to consider whether “participants” are “best understood as ‘subjects’ (in the senses common in human subjects research in medicine and the social sciences)—or as authors whose texts/artifacts are intended as public.”⁴⁸ The AoIR document poses important questions about different types of research, disciplinary approaches, existent guidelines, and the ethical research models already established in particular countries. However, it does not address how Internet settings convey cultural forms rather than physical authors. This book considers the texts of cultural producers and highlights how Internet depictions of artists, authors, designers, programmers, and spectators are rendered as real. A different set of critical models is employed in each chapter because there is no theory that fully explains the ways Internet and computer interfaces produce spectatorial positions. These critical approaches include apparatus and feminist psychoanalytic film theory, gender and queer theory, conceptions of technological failure, ideas about reader response and authorship, fan and hypertext studies, postcolonial theory, issues of photographic reproduction, and discourses about morphing and the fold. In some cases, these models are used in different configurations in other chapters to suggest how academics, journalists, programmers, and viewers can continually restructure theories to address particular Internet and computer settings.

Chapter 1 describes how spectators are produced by Internet settings, provides an introduction to the academic and popular discourse about Internet engagement, and presents methods that can explain how sites function. Internet and computer settings are often represented as a space that the spectator can enter, a place where real objects and bodies exist, and as living things. These depictions of materiality, renderings of the empowered user, addresses that appear to acknowledge the individual, sign-up forms that render binary gender, and conventions of the monitor and computer design are important to note because they structure the spectator’s experience. For instance, a brief analysis of web-based sign-up forms, where the spectator must indicate a binary gender and “male” is usually listed above or before “female” on the form, indicates how traditional genders and desires are reproduced. Males, who are often presumed to be the employer of many of these interfaces, are promised a right to

technology through such devices. However, when the flaws in the technology and representations are highlighted, they present some problems with understanding Internet spectatorship as inherently empowered and the spectator's position as coherent. A close analysis suggests that despite the cohesive position that the spectator is promised, fragmentation and confusion are a constant aspect of Internet spectatorship.

Chapter 2 indicates how spectatorship in Lambda and other MOOs (multi-user object-oriented settings) is produced through writing and system-generated texts. The textual processes of looking and gazing, which seem to allow the spectator to view real bodies, can be understood through feminist theories of the gaze by Mary Ann Doane, Judith Mayne, Laura Mulvey, and Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek.⁴⁹ The "gaze" and the "look" are privileged terms in these settings because of the programming decision to associate information inquiries with the typed command to "look <character or object name>." The constructed nature of the MOO character, which is literally produced by text, is partially concealed by the insistence that the metaphorical sight of the look is the equivalent of truth. The virtual look of certain characters, which seem able to penetrate into any "space" in order to examine other characters and determine their gender, renders an empowered spectatorial gaze. The mastering gaze of spectators and characters and the voyeuristic terminology of MOO commands, which include @watch, @peruse, @kgb, @fbi, @scope, glance, @peep, and @gawk, perpetuate a series of limiting identity constructs. Understanding how the look functions and developing critical methods to consider Internet identity processes can also inform studies of other Internet and computer settings.

Ideas about looking also play a significant part in women's webcams. I reflect on the functions of women's webcams in chapter 3 and argue that the webcam spectator cannot fully achieve the empowered looks and erotic engagement with bodies that are promised. Instead, the presence of the camera, delivery failures, and webcam operators who refuse to meet the spectator's demands are common aspects of this form. Feminist considerations of spectatorship and the gaze, which are established as important methodologies for Internet study in chapter 2, and critical considerations of closeness and voyeurism, by Noël Burch, Mary Ann Doane, and Christian Metz, offer techniques for considering the position of the webcam spectator and operator.⁵⁰ Being intimately close to the screen, which is a basic aspect of computer spectatorship and is highlighted by the functions of the webcam form, is related to the confined cinema viewing positions that are associated with women and culturally coded as undesirable. The webcam spectator may have less control than expected, but women operators exert authority and achieve agency through their visibility. While spectatorship is

being culturally and technologically reconceptualized, the webcam form and its failures, which are produced by the technologies and operators, offer some unique opportunities to intervene in the ways certain versions of gender and sexual difference are produced through spectatorship.

The spectator also engages with intentional failures in many net artworks. Chapter 4 describes how net artists like Jodi, Peter Luining, and Michaël Samyn reflexively quote the technological failures of Internet technologies. Jodi's *%20Wrong*, Luining's *D-TOY 2.502.338*, and Samyn's *The Fire from the Sea* have been described as formalist, but they do more than consider the medium because they employ misquotation, misdirection, and interface breakdown in order to question the Internet's ordinary effects and critically comment on its vernacular.⁵¹ Theories of failure and repetition, by such authors as Judith Butler, Jonathan Crary, and Stuart Moulthrop, provide ways to critically consider the political effects of these artworks.⁵² Net art may encourage the spectator to address the medium or allow the initiated spectator to engage while others are prevented from understanding. An aesthetic of failure can invite the spectator to critically look at technology, reproduce power discrepancies, or become no more than a style.

The Virtual Places (VP) graphical "chat" setting also provides opportunities to consider how spectators engage with Internet art forms. Chapter 5 suggests how the setting-specific reading and meaning-making practices of VP help the spectator understand avatar images as both bodies and original artworks. VP painters make avatars from previously produced material—mostly from music, movies, and erotic magazines and web sites—and offer them to other participants in web-based paint shops. VP presents some uncommon concepts of authorship, cultural works, and the ways that previously produced materials should be identified and treated. Painters tend to conceptualize the avatar images that they "cut" from popular sources, using software commands as originals while preventing the reuse of avatar images on other VP sites. Fan, hypertext, and other theories of authorship by Roland Barthes, Jay David Bolter, Rosemary J. Coombe, Henry Jenkins, and George P. Landow offer vital ways to understand how such texts are read.⁵³ However, academic claims for the liberating potential of subcultural practices are not mindful of the tendencies in VP and other Internet settings to reinstitute hierarchical structures and traditional conceptions of the body. Combining these theories with feminist, postcolonial, and queer theories of authorship, including works by Nancy Hartsock, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Edward Said, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, provides models that are more attentive to gender, race, and sexuality issues and can indicate how power is reinscribed.⁵⁴

Chapter 6 indicates how Carol Selter, Susan Siltan, and Ken Gonzales-Day foreground their digital image production processes and the resultant viewing positions.⁵⁵ The popular tendency to refer to digital images as “photographic representations,” “digital photography,” or “post-photography” connects computer imaging to photography, encourages the spectator to understand these representations as records of real things, and limits the critical interventions that can be performed because the mediated and produced aspects of the image are elided. The work of Roland Barthes and other photography and apparatus theorists provides ways to address digital engagements and cultural conceptions of photography.⁵⁶ Theories of folding and morphing by Gilles Deleuze and Vivian Sobchack offer further methods for articulating the occurrence of fragmented and disempowered Internet and computer viewing.⁵⁷

When Internet and computer spectators indicate that their bodies are fat, folded in chairs, painful, and unruly, they also contradict the narratives about empowered users. The afterword considers the many self-identified male programmers who write in Internet forums about their soft flesh, “extra” weight, and long periods of time slumped in computer chairs. These programmers represent male flesh in ways that are quite uncommon in physical settings, and their descriptions deserve more attention since women have long been identified with the body in Western society. The connection between men and mind is continued in early cyberpunk fiction and in Ray Kurzweil’s and Hans Moravec’s artificial intelligence narratives, which indicate how men will leave the “meat” behind. Depictions of seated and folded viewers and the writings of Susan Bordo, Luce Irigaray, and Klaus Theweleit offer a different way to theorize the body of the Internet and computer spectator, resist some of the narratives about users, and consider how other forms of spectatorship may be less vertical than expected.⁵⁸

These chapters indicate that there are reasons to simultaneously address Internet and computer settings, academic and popular descriptions, and the construction of the spectator. For instance, the most common image of the spectator is the rendering of white and white-gloved hands that are part of the interface.⁵⁹ The computer’s arrow-shaped cursor, or pointer, turns into a pointing and clicking hand when “mousing” over web links and a grasping hand when programs or images can be changed. These hands move when the user manipulates the mouse, emphasize the relationship between physical hand and representation, and indicate “where” the spectator is in the setting. The different images of the hand render an empowered user who can point, move, grasp, and touch. The depictions of hands stand in for the whole body, suggest that the individual can enter the setting, and provide complicated messages about race. Spectators become attached to these hands because they chronicle actions

and options within the setting. However, these hands do not equally represent all individuals. They tend to be white, light pink, or white and gloved, and they provide spectators with constant messages about what individuals who use Internet and computer settings look like.

The indication that Internet spectators are white continues with the images that appear on web sites. For instance, the representations that accompany the Ask Jeeves search engine site depict the computer interface as a Caucasian butler.⁶⁰ His hands are positioned in order to evoke the pointing, clicking, and mousing hand of the interface.⁶¹ Whether white or a pale pink, the hands of the Ask Jeeves butler, hand-pointer of the interface, references to hands in IM emoticons, and the evaluative thumbs-up hands of web sites race the interface. The white hand-pointer acts as a kind of avatar, supports other renderings of the body, and becomes “attached” to depictions of Caucasians in advertisements, graphical communication settings, and web greeting cards. It may seem that the white color of the hand is a design convention and is needed to make the interface hand visible against varied screen backgrounds, but the arrow and cursor are often black, outlined in white, and quite visible. Instead, the white hand-pointer suggests a racial “inside” and “outside” in Internet and computer settings.⁶² Visual analysis, critical race studies, and postcolonial theory offer methods to further address the implications of this device. Without such possible interventions, the representation of the Caucasian individual’s hand, which seems to float over various landscapes, promises that some spectators can possess all situations and terrain.

This book provides theoretical models for rethinking aspects of the interface, including the hand-pointer, and critically using Internet sites and computer software. Each case study indicates a strategy and critical concept, which include gazing, closeness, failure, reading and meaning making, morphing, and folding that can be used to engage with and question Internet and computer representations. I suggest instances in which Internet and computer settings provide new techniques of control and theorize strategies of resistance. However, it is unwise to presume that such interventions are available to all spectators or that they will prove powerful enough to always disable dominant modes of representation. This book is meant to model another language for thinking about, writing, and viewing the Internet. It is my hope that this analysis and language encourage a reconceptualization of the Internet and computer.