In Pliny’s story of the origins of painting, a maiden of Corinth, daughter to the sculptor Butades but herself nameless, is spending a last evening with her lover, who has to leave on a long sea journey. The lamplight throws a silhouette of his much-loved profile on the wall. She finds a charcoal stick among the embers of the fire and traces his outline on the wall. And this is how the world of art enters human life. As David Bachelor has argued, this classical authority for the preeminence of drawing helped establish the Western tradition of the preeminence of disegno over colore, the rational impulse of mimesis over the irrational luxury and femininity of color’s rapture. Interestingly enough, the Buddhist tradition offers a rather different story about the origins of art. When the Buddha was still alive and living in Bihar, a young man was sent to make his portrait, despite the fact that painting had yet to be invented:

when he arrived at the place where the Buddha was in meditation, our first artist realized he had a problem: he was so overwhelmed by his subject’s enlightened glow that he could not look at him. But then the Buddha made a suggestion. “We will go down to the bank of a clear and limpid pool,” he said helpfully, “And you will look at me in the reflection of the water.” They found an appropriately limpid pool, and the man happily painted the reflection.²

The world we see is but a reflection of a reality that escapes its reflections: this Buddhist myth of origin contrasts neatly with Pliny’s tale in which, as Stoi-chita points out in his remarkable History of the Shadow, the original painting
delineates not the lover but his absence. I cannot help thinking here of Bazin’s argument that art has always been an attempt to cheat or at least outlive death; to secure some record of presence that would fill in for the real absence of the deceased. I imagine the maid of Corinth saying goodbye as if her lover will never return from the unutterable dangers and unknown reaches of ocean. Both tales, it might be argued, are about absences. The Pliny version is about line as the origin of painting in projection; the Buddhist version is about reflection and concerns the whole figure, not just its outline. The Tibetan myth of origin includes color where the Greek omits it. The Buddhist version does not distinguish line and color. Nor does it, perhaps unexpectedly, pause as Plato did before the vanishing reality of the reflection of a reflection. Pliny emphasizes light’s absence, shadow; the Buddhist tale emphasizes light itself. Nonetheless, the Buddhist version and its Greek parallel share a sense that the beginning of art lies in projected light.

I like to begin lectures on the history of cinema in a darkened room with a flashlight, making hand shadows in its beam to indicate that while the moving image technologies may be the most modern of media, they are also grounded in the most ancient. How swiftly must our first ancestors have discovered, as they danced, their cast shadows in sunlight or in the firelight on the walls of their dwellings? The point is made more strongly still by the “Hands of Pechemerle” addressed by Leroi-Gourhan in his path-breaking work in structural archeology. This right hand was outlined sometime in the upper Paleolithic by someone blowing clay or charcoal over a hand to leave its outline on the rock. It is hard, probably impossible to decipher what was intended by this gesture: a record of a life like Friday’s footprint in the sand in Robinson Crusoe? A hunting signal? What is clear is the method of its making: the puffs of pigment round the hand are, I want to say, a projection of the hand, size for size, on the rock wall.

In her work in psychoanalysis, Melanie Klein proposes the mechanism of projection as a vital step in the development of the child. The child, she surmises, has immensely powerful, self-destructive tendencies which, were they ever to be enacted, would destroy the infant once and for all. Projection allows the child to transfer these emotions to another or others. We use the phrase occasionally in adult life, suggesting that a colleague is projecting his or her paranoia onto others, or imagining that his or her insecurities motivate people who are entirely self-assured. For Klein, this ability to project inner life onto external objects is a key and distinguishing element of human development, a
primary process on a par with Freud’s condensation and displacement, indeed integral to the latter.

These three senses of projection establish three types of origin: one mythical, one archeological, and one psychological. As metaphor, projection has a powerful place in the ways we construct our conception of humanity, from the idea of the self and its masks that recurs throughout social and anthropological reports, to the aspirations we have to beam some word of our existence out to the furthest reaches of the galaxy. Klein’s proposal for a psychoanalysis of childhood and the hands of Pechemerle share an implicit thinking of the body as light source, a perception which provides the backdrop to the more specifically cinematic metaphor of “astral projection” associated with Madame Blavatsky’s theosophy and later New Age spirituality. There is something charming, naive even, about these inferences that the human body might be in some sense made of light, a childlike and Christlike faith in the innocence and capacity for divinity of embodiment. More recent work on the concept of projection has been more resolutely critical in its production of a sense that projection is necessarily and forever an ideological action.

The critique might be taken back as far as Plato’s simile of the cave in The Republic, with its sadistic image of the prisoners restrained in their hole, their heads and necks braced so that they can only see the screen at the back of the cave. Equally constraining, equally sadistic, and older still is the second commandment of the Decalogue, which forbids in very definite terms the making of images:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

Like the Law of Moses, Plato’s simile rests on the premise that the projection, which the captives see, is illusionistic. They fall for it as reality because it resembles reality. Even though they may not know reality too well, the hypothetical prisoner who makes it to the outside world can, with a little philosophical education, recognize that the shadows he thought he knew are indeed projections of an ideal world that he now can see. The moral problem for Plato is not the reflection or the projection but the illusion: that the scene
on the wall of the cave might be mistaken for reality. The simile of course is an analogue for a more contentious argument, that the phenomena we all sense are merely projections of a higher reality which exceeds them as much as our world exceeds its shadows on the wall.

The night after Maxim Gorky attended the first film screenings in Russia, he wrote:

Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows. If only you knew how strange it was to be there. It is a world without sound without color. Everything there—the earth, the trees, the people, the water and the air—is dipped in monotonous grey. Grey rays of the sun across the grey sky, grey eyes in grey faces and the leaves of the trees are ashen grey. It is not life but its shadow, it is not motion but its soundless specter. . . . Noiselessly the ashen-grey foliage of the trees sways in the wind, and the grey silhouettes of the people, as though condemned to eternal silence and cruelly punished by being deprived of all the colors of life, glide noiselessly along the grey ground. 8

This vision of the cinema as the realm of those who have passed over Lethe hums in harmony with Plato's account of the cave as much as it does with Virgil's and Dante's visions of the realm of the ancient dead. The realm of the dead is the realm of absence, and therefore the realm of the silent, colorless line. Gorky's land of shadows reveals the fear of death that lies behind Pliny's story of Butades' daughter making the silhouette on the wall ahead of the loss of her lover: the act of drawing as a kind of *memento mori*. The realm of shadows also equates to Plato's cave in that it is the colorless, odorless, flavorless simulacrum of the world stripped of what most makes it real, of sensuous materiality for the nineteenth-century Russian, of ideal abstraction for the ancient Greek. Likewise Gorky seems to echo the iconoclasts of the Orthodox Church who smashed every sacred picture in brutal obedience to the Second Commandment. Gorky's realm of shadows in this sense seems a pre-echo of Jean Baudrillard's three phases of the icon, which first "masks and denatures a profound reality," then reveals the awful truth that "it masks the absence of a profound reality," and finally crumbles under the discovery that "it has no relation to any reality whatsoever." 9 The avenue opened by anchoring our beliefs about imaging in general and projection in particular in the duty to represent cannot but lead us toward this nihilism. At such a juncture, subject disappears along with object, since they are mutually constitutive. Those damned by the God of the Old Testament for idolatry, the prisoners in Plato's cave, and the

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dupes Gorky observed that night in Nizhny-Novgorod are all themselves mere specters as a result of their spectral engagement in the illusions of projection. Where projection rules, they argue, there is no self to generate a world, no world to determine a self. The final truth of the realm of shadows is that representing leads not only to the loss of object but to the loss of the self, not just the depiction of death, but depiction as death.

From the delineation of the maid of Corinth to Baudrillard’s disappearance is a long but unavoidable trip. The privilege granted to line in Pliny’s tale is the beginning of a task of abstraction, which is of course why the line became so central to the emergent rationalism of the Renaissance, and why it maintained that ascendancy at least into the nineteenth century, and perhaps as late as minimalism and conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. Form is the visual analogue of the physical sciences in that it extrapolates from the world the mathematical expressions which appear to function as its underpinnings. Beneath the world of phenomena, we believed, there lay a deeper, truer, and more real reality of physical laws expressible as formulae or as essential forms, a reality of which we mortals might only sense the projections. Everything else, but especially color and the proximal senses of touch, taste, and scent, was epiphenomenal. It was not then sight as such which was feared so much as the temptation that sight evoked, the temptation to enter into dialogue with the phenomenonality, the material textures of the world.

And so it happened that the one set of theoretical accounts that have addressed the idea of projection with any degree of rigor and precision sought to understand, in its origins in perspective, the establishment of the groundwork of ideology. Building on Panofsky’s 1925 essay entitled “Perspective as Symbolic Form,” apparatus theory in France and later in the UK and the United States proposed that the dual vanishing points within the image and without it, at the place where the viewer stands to receive and decipher the illusion of three-dimensionality, is a machine for the production of subjection.11 Thus roboticist and artist Simon Penny could launch his remarkable attack on virtual reality as “completion of the enlightenment project,” because it employed Cartesian coordinate space to generate an immersive experience of perspective which reconfirmed the centrality of the experience of individuality, not as social construction but as metaphysical given.12 In rigorous materialist critiques grounded on the most meticulous art-historical scholarship, the machinery of projection stood accused of being the ideological instrument of oppression regardless of what material was shown.
Artists working in projection began to unpack the machineries they worked with. Brakhage disassembled the camera, seeking a pristine vision untrammeled by habit. Structural-materialist filmmakers like Gidal and Le Grice emptied the scene of depth, refused narrative, and despised depiction. Early videomakers intervened in broadcasting to upset the transparency of the receiver. In fact it was largely video that began to remake the possibilities of moving images, around the time that Baudrillard was first influencing our understanding of televisual culture.

The first distinction came from the realization that the video monitor is a light source rather than a reflecting surface. In David Hall’s *A Situation Envisaged: The Rite II (Cultural Eclipse)*, a bank of monitors is stacked facing a wall, so that only a corona of light escapes, while on the back, facing the audience, is a reconstructed vertical-scan Baird televisor image of the moon (fig. 20.1). The possibilities of broadcasting began to appear as complex and rich resources rather than an enemy predestined to destruction. For Hall, too, the sense began to emerge that when we deal with broadcast and video projection has a number of new qualities. First, the unique locus of projection is no longer the cinema, a special, quasi-social space, governed by ritual, where the crowd is addressed as individual. In domestic media, the “projector” is still central, but the screens on which it beams its images are scattered across cities and nations. And with the beginnings of satellite transmission and earth-orbit telemetry, and especially the live broadcasts of the *Apollo* mission in 1969, it slowly became apparent that human beings were not the only ones to be engaged in projecting images. As the Early Release Observations (EROS) images from the Hubble Space Telescope have made abundantly clear, the universe is just as busy projecting light (and radio and other spectra) as we are, and has been doing it for a long time. While the geometrical point-source (and its derivative, the field source investigated by Renaissance perspectivists and intrinsic to the working of cinema projectors) retained its metaphorical centrality, broadcasting gave a new sense of the radiation of light outward not to one but to a huge multitude of screens, each of them in turn a light source.

As the ill-fated Star Wars weapons program reminds us, projection is not exclusively a peaceful or a leisure activity. From Speer’s searchlight architecture at the Nürnberg rallies to Reagan’s elaborate satellite defense system, projection has lived out a second (dare we say “shadow”) existence as a weapon. When George Pal set about realizing *The War of the Worlds*, his Martians came
equipped with one of the more impressive ray guns of the 1950s. In those early days of television, as Jeffrey Sconce's history of haunted media reminds us, the technologies of broadcasting came ready to hand as metaphors for paranormal and extraterrestrial anxieties. The projector as projectile is a variant on this theme, and suggests in the oblique manner proper to popular media a deep understanding of the nature of mediation. Every missile is a massive, and every act of war and violence a clumsy, defeated, but unmistakable effort at communication, even though its message is simply "surrender or die" or even just "die."
When even popular culture is capable of clear-sighted analysis of the nature of projection, the lack of substantial contemporary concern with it seems even stranger. In the era of early broadcasting and the first inklings of what might be meant by “network media,” Pal and other science fiction directors established a critical sense of projection as a deadly weapon, and made their parodies of television into “mind rays,” ideological instruments of terrifying efficiency. Yet this was not the only area of popular culture where projection as ideology was and remains clearly understood, as becomes clear if we turn to the second great governing visual regime of modernity, the map. As everybody knows, a two-dimensional map has to make compromises in order to present a three-dimensional world. The familiar Mercator projection stands accused of emphasizing the northern latitudes at the expense of the equatorial; the Peters’ projection pushes in the opposite direction. The upside-down map
plays on orientation (the word originally denoted East's position at the top of the map in honor of the Holy Land); the Surrealist Map of the World, in origination a parody of rationalist geography, is today legible as a forerunner of semantic mapping, where nonspatial indicators like GDP, population, and density of communication usage are depicted by geometrical expansion of boarders, while the maps generally preserve in topology the geopolitical relations between territories. Pacific-centered maps adjust for the North Atlantic bias of Mercator. The hemispheric map suggests how powerfully ideological issues can play out—since the Cold War ended, you hardly ever see hemispheric maps; and the square map emphasizes the vulnerable zones of the poles. Many, many others are possible. The necessity of projection as a translation from three to two dimensions is not entirely the same as projective geometries used in perspective, but it is a close relative in the sense that distortion is inevitable, and ideology therefore relatively visible. On the other hand, unlike images, maps are expected to be tested against the actual topography of the territory they depict. Few cartographers are naive enough to believe that the mode of projection is without impact on the meanings (and the uses and pleasures) their maps can provide. Ironically, such naivety has become an unexamined premise in the arena of video art, where you would expect it to be most tested.

The majority of video artworks presented currently in biennales and major galleries are projected foursquare onto either white walls or occasionally silvered screens. The artists involved talk of a relationship with some sort with cinema. It is a bitter shame that so few of them have come across the rich history of projection as a medium for video over the last two decades. British vanguard theater group The People’s Show, in a performance at the Green Room in Manchester in 1994, projected two discrete images onto a corrugated screen. Depending on your position, you could see one, or the other, or a striped rendition of both. As part of an installation for Video Positive at the Tate Liverpool in the 1991, Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas placed their projector a matter of centimeters from the wall, and angled obliquely to it. The image distorted anamorphically across the wall, as well as being intense and crystal clear closest to the projector and diffuse, fading to nothing, at its furthest reach. In the 1970s Chris Welsby at the London Filmmakers’ Coop projected one of his films vertically onto a pool of water. A number of exterior and interior installations are using the powerful illumination of new generation data projectors to project onto scrims (Bill Viola), playing with
translucence as a performative element of projection (Char Davies). I touch only the surface here: Oursler’s projection’s onto dummies, for example, are widely known, as are Simon Biggs’ projections onto ceilings and Mona Hatoum’s onto floors.

The variables here are the screen itself, its materials, shape, and reflectance; the projector, its illumination, and its position relative to the screen; the atmosphere through which the light passes (with the end of smoking in cinemas, audiences are far less fascinated by the beam of light cutting through the air, but scrims and other media can be interposed in the beam); and any intervening reflective, refractive or filtering devices placed between the projector and the surface it projects onto. And yet the practice of projection, common to photography, cinematography, video, and now the digital media arts remains unquestioned in the vast majority of cases, the banal repetition of the unexamined foursquare screen, wide open to a largely forgotten or discredited apparatus theoretical analysis, yet incapable of moving beyond the conditions which made that analysis and critique so compelling a matter of mere decades ago. My first and perhaps most important comment is that we are at the very beginning of understanding how projection might work. If, as I believe, it is a hugely significant metaphor in the ways we understand our relationships with the world and with each other, then the kinds of formal permutations signaled by artists actively engaging in projection as a malleable resource for the making of art are potentially a royal road toward making new ways of seeing. By analogy with the changing conventions of mapmaking, we have not yet made the move away from the Mercator projection. We certainly haven’t made the leap toward the non-Euclidean geometries which digital animation and data projection combined make thinkable and possible as tools for remaking projection. Multiple screens are in some cases at least a basic form of interactivity, but rarely in themselves challenge the basic apportionment of presentation between projection on the one hand and the light-source monitor on the other, cinema and television, mass entertainment and domestic consumption. Hall’s Rite Envisaged II is in this context a satire on domestic consumerism. Where is the parallel satire on mass spectacle?

Multiple screens offer another lesson, however, particularly poignant in the context of data projection and its metaphorical proximity to laser as the medium of organized light and its dependence on coherent light technologies in both DVD/CD-ROM and fiber-optic network technologies. Implicit in Hall’s discovery of the network, brought to fruition in works like Eduardo Kac’s Tele-
porting an Unknown State, a networked installation in which webcams supplied enough light to keep a plant alive in a darkened gallery in Rio de Janeiro. Where Hall redirects radiated broadcast signals to make their nature as light sources apparent, but also to defeat their signal-bearing (and thence ideological) instrumentality by converting the light back into pure signal, Kac extracts from the streams of representational imagery coming from remote users only the simplest, baldest fact of illumination.

Used loosely as a synonym for “digital,” the word “virtual” has a richer history which such art addresses when it makes the act of projection the central technical and metaphorical structure of the work, and especially when the projector is no longer obviously in the same room as the image. Where the term “virtual” refers to the image created at a point in an optical system where the rays of light cross over one another, the virtual image has traditionally been seen, among others by Panofsky at the fountainhead of apparatus theory, as a vanishing point. Like the absence of light that allows the illusion of movement, when the shutter falls and the “entire image” flicks through the projector under the mask of darkness, the vanishing point is a constitutive absence in the technology of projection. This chimes once again with the Plinian maid of Corinth who invents art by delineating the immanent absence of her departing lover. It is as if the whole history of Western art has been an elaborate sepulcher built over the bones of the dead to keep their memories alive, and to hide the brute fact that they are no longer there. This, in effect, is the simpler truth behind Baudrillard’s nihilistic vision: it is not God or the world that has vanished, but the dead who we sought so hard to replicate and so to keep alive. It is perhaps time for us to face up to our mortality. The subjection proposed by Panofskyan apparatus theory is premised on the real absence of the object represented, but also, as we saw, on the real absence of the subject which otherwise is supposed (presupposed) to be its material support in the world. The absence of the subject is as profound a consequence as the disappearance of the object in projection. Subjection, in short, is the grand illusion. There is no subject, because the subject traced in projection is already dead.

In twentieth-century philosophy, however, facing up to mortality has taken on an entirely fetishized role, most of all in the writings of Martin Heidegger, for whom the central fact of Dasein, of human being, was the being toward death. Surely, we all die, thank God. To make death the center of life is, however, something of a dialectical dead end. Instead of such “fatal theory” Hannah Arendt proposed a concept of natality—the principle that
Figure 20.3  Gina Czarnecki, *Nascent*, 2005. By kind permission of the artist. Czarnecki’s title indicates the potential for projection to shift from vanishing point to the “natality” of becoming, from the monocular individuation of perspective to the social palimpsest of multiple layers of image and light, still fraught, still dangerous, but oriented toward a future other than death. See plate 20.
the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought.¹⁷

It is this thought, which chimes so strongly with the concept of messianic time in Benjamin,¹⁸ that inspires the thought that in the process of projection, we might be dealing with becoming, not vanishing. Vanishing points articulate the grounds of all representation in the abstraction of form from phenomenality and thence the risk that, in the absence of the represented, which is the very condition of representation, there can only be the stitching of ideological fripperies over the brute reality of the void. Such a vanishing also governs the disappearance of subjects in the act of consumption of images, as observed by Gorky and theorized by Baudrillard.

Instead of this fatal theory, let's consider the possibility of projection as the typical manner in which all entities, human, animal, organic and inorganic, radiate their signatures across space and time. Our projection technologies then do not have to be limited to the endlessly failing argument that they give an accurate account of the world, or a more accurate one than the neighboring technology. Instead, they can participate in generating worlds, and specifically in the production of meaning as the articulation of points of becoming one with another. Remaking projection practices is going to be one of the most fascinating elements of the development of new media in the twenty-first century, if it opens itself up not to absence but to the perpetual becoming of a world which is increasingly future.

The emergence of wireless technologies over the last few years suggests a further step. We may indeed be moving toward a world of ubiquitous surveillance, in which every citizen is equipped and ready to shine a light into his neighbor's secrets. But then, privacy was only ever a privilege of the wealthy few over a brief century and a half in a remote peninsula at the Western edge of the Asiatic continent. Wireless technology seems unlikely to assimilate all our toys into a single device, but what if it could assimilate the data projector in place of its tiny screen, like the charming holographic projector in the first Star Wars film? What price then a world of ubiquitous communication, a
world whose presence to itself would not be evaporated but redoubled? A ray gun future?

Alternatively, and in parallel, Paul Sermon’s *Telematic Dreaming*, which connects two beds in remote locations on which users interact with the image of another body on the remote bed, something of the sensuality of the proximal senses of which projected light is capable became intensely apparent. As well as working with the most advanced technologies of the day, Sermon’s installation cannot but evoke the sense of projection that Melanie Klein explored in her theory of object relations. His projections engage both light and the psyche, the projection, however, not of rage but of sensuality, shared embodiment, and empathy, a common humanity mediated by technology but experienced as bliss. Another of Sermon’s works appeared in the London Millennium
Dome, alongside Sera Furneaux’s *Kissing Booth*, where users recorded kisses into a database, where they could, virtually, kiss other previous users. The presence of both in a site, which mixed art with funfair, indicates the possibilities of projection in and beyond contemporary consumerism and mass culture, as a medium of copresence rather than one of mutual absence. Kristeva posited the abject as the loathed, feared, and despised undifferentiated indifference which drives us into the cruel separation of subject from object. In the series abject subject–object, there remains the dialectical possibility of a new, third term: project. Quite what this relationship might mean we cannot know: by its nature it is of the order of becoming, a future-oriented operation whose outcome depends on the mysteries of becoming at those points in projector, screen, and eye where the image passes through itself to become both other and more truly itself.

**Notes**


16. The term “entre image” is Raymond Bellour’s.


