Pages 44–49: Summary, Themes & Critical Questions

Summary

- The essay opens with a viral image: children holding a **chappal (sandal) like a smartphone**, mimicking a selfie. It's *not* an actual selfie, but a **performance of one**.
- The image sparked mixed reactions—some saw innocent joy in poverty, others read it as a critique of digital inequality.
- Prince moves from the image to a broader meditation on how subjects attach themselves to technological screens—particularly smartphones.
- He draws on thinkers like Goffman (face-work), Frosh (phatic sociality), and Marwick (microcelebrity), to argue that selfies are:
 - 1. Strategic performances of self for attention.
 - 2. Social gestures of connection, like waving or nodding.
- The concept of "face" is reworked—both in the literal sense (as image) and in the Goffmanian sense (as social value).
- Prince introduces the gaze (via Lacan, Mulvey, Foucault) as central to how we are shaped under visibility.
- The "stain" is introduced as a Lacanian concept: a trace of the subject in the picture, a point of desire/attachment—but also of vulnerability.

🞭 Course Themes Connection

Theme Analysis

Reality/Fantasy The chappal selfie is a *fantasy of interface*: the children simulate being part of the screen culture they're excluded from. This isn't delusion—it's a performance of aspiration and critique.

Image & The smartphone screen is both a **tool of connection and projection**. Interface

The "selfie" becomes an interface for becoming visible—but always under

the logic of the gaze.

Space & Time Prince shows how screens reorient social temporality. A selfie is not

> just a frozen moment—it circulates, gets liked, commented on, and recirculates. The subject is stretched across time through interface

rhythms.



Critical Questions + Answers

Q1. What does the chappal-selfie image reveal about the subject's relationship to interface and screen culture?

Answer:

It shows that even in absence of the actual device, the ritual of the selfie is internalized. The children participate in the idea of interface culture, revealing how deeply screens have restructured the terms of visibility, identity, and belonging.

Q2. How is the selfie both strategic and affective, according to Prince?

Answer:

Strategically, the selfie is a **performance for status** (microcelebrity). But affectively, it's also phatic—a way of connecting, like small talk. It's social, symbolic labor done to produce recognition and sociability.

Q3. What does Lacan's concept of the "gaze" add to our understanding of screen-based selfhood?

Answer:

Lacan's gaze is not just about looking—it's the idea that we see ourselves being seen. The subject is not in control. Instead, we become the picture shaped by what the Other wants to see. The interface reflects back desire, not truth.

Q4. What is the "stain" in Lacanian terms, and how does it relate to selfies?

Answer:

The **stain** (la tache / l'attache) is the point of **attachment and distortion**—where the subject appears in the image, but as an effect of desire, not essence. In selfies, the stain is where the subject **clings to the image** hoping for recognition, but also becomes vulnerable.

Q5. Why does Prince consider the chappal selfie a critique of the selfie, not a celebration?

Answer:

Because it **exposes the structural absence**—there is no real screen, no tech, only mimicry. The image performs the lack at the heart of digital visibility: to be seen, one must still have **access**, and even then, one becomes only a **picture among pictures**.

COMMENT 1:

Trying to mimic an interface to go to the fantasy.

Evaluation:

 Strong and succinct. This line captures a central point of the chappal selfie: it is not delusion, but a performance of inclusion in a world structured by screen visibility.

X Suggestion:

You could expand slightly:

The children don't need a real device to engage in the fantasy. The act of mimicry itself demonstrates how deeply the interface logic has been absorbed—as a way to stage presence and belong to a screen-mediated world.

COMMENT 2:

They want to be part of the crowd.



 True, and connects well to Goffman's "face-work" and Marwick's microcelebrity—everyone wants to be part of the scene of attention.

X Suggestion:

• Consider rephrasing to reflect **visibility desire** rather than crowd conformity:

They want to be part of the circuit of visibility—the social economy where having a "face" on screen equals being present, worthy, real.

COMMENT 3:

Two photographs in one: photograph of children + photograph of children taking of themselves.

W Evaluation:

• Excellent observation. This is a **meta-image**: it's both an image **about performance** and a **performance within the image**.

X Suggestion:

• You might connect this to **Baudrillard's idea of simulation**:

The chappal selfie is a simulacrum—a copy without an original. It stages the selfie without a phone, highlighting the performative loop of digital culture where even gestures are repeated without devices.

COMMENT 4:

People do strategic performances of self for attention.

Evaluation:

 Yes, this ties directly to Marwick's microcelebrity and Frosh's phatic sociality—posting is often less about communication than affirming one's presence.

X Suggestion:

Bring in the idea of ritualized visibility:

Like digital small talk, these performances are phatic—they create social presence and align the subject with the rhythms of platform life, even when no information is exchanged.

COMMENT 5:

Comparison to the gambler's autoplay...

Evaluation:

 Very interesting and creative analogy! You're arguing that just as gamblers are drawn into a responsive loop, so too are smartphone users—and now even the attention economy itself has been automated.

X Suggestion:

Sharpen the comparison by being clearer:

Like Schüll's gamblers, early smartphone users were tentative, but interfaces quickly learned to mirror and modulate desire. The shift from user-initiated interaction to algorithmically managed visibility (e.g., suggested posts, autoplay reels) reflects how control is automated—and how users become reactive components in a system built for endless attention loops.

COMMENT 6:

Face compared to the gambler's zone—not comparable.



• You're right to pause here. **Goffman's "face"** is about **social value and interactional performance**, while **the zone** is about **disembodied flow** and **disconnection**.

Great Instinct:

 You noticed the mismatch—this is what smart reading looks like: not forcing parallels when they don't fit.

COMMENT 7:

Fetishistic scopophilia—children want their selfie; the act of being in the selfie is the joy.

Evaluation:

Beautiful insight. You're taking Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure and flipping it—this
isn't just about being looked at by others, but about experiencing oneself as an object
of fantasy.

X Suggestion:

• Frame it through **embodied joy and aspiration**:

The children's joy comes not from being photographed, but from imagining themselves as already photographable—as worthy of the gaze. The selfie becomes a ritual object of self-recognition, even if imagined.

COMMENT 8:

The selfie acts as the "stain"—a point of desire and vulnerability.

Evaluation:

 Nailed it. This is the core of Lacan's stain as applied by Prince: it marks both attachment and failure, presence and exclusion.

Expanded Suggestion:

The stain here is where the child-subject clings to an image they cannot fully enter. The chappal-as-phone marks their attempt to inhabit the interface world—but also highlights the material absence (no real device), and thus, the structural inequality of digital culture. It is the child's trace in a system that cannot yet accommodate them.

Pages 50-55: Summary, Themes & Critical Questions

Summary

- Prince elaborates on Lacan's gaze, explaining how the subject is inserted into the field of the visible not as a viewer, but as something being seen—shaped by the Other's desire.
- He introduces Zizek's notion of "stain" as both trace and wound: a mark of the subject's presence, but also their entrapment in visibility.
- The **selfie** becomes the surface where this stain occurs—a site where the subject appears not as themselves, but as **a response to the gaze**.
- Prince links this to **Mulvey's "fetishistic scopophilia"**—a mode of pleasure in looking that **freezes the subject into an object**.
- The **scroll** (on a screen) becomes a new form of repetition—users compulsively swipe, seeking recognition but never fully attaining it.
- This is tied to Lacan's theory of desire: repetition doesn't bring closure; it sustains lack. We scroll not to find, but to maintain fantasy.
- He connects this cycle to Deleuze & Guattari's "territorialization": the screen becomes a soft space where subjectivity is constantly being redrawn through repetition, rhythm, and minor adjustments.

Course Theme Connections

Theme	Analysis
Reality/Fantasy	Fantasy isn't just what's imagined—it's what structures how we behave . Scrolling and selfies are rituals of desire, performed to sustain fantasy , not escape it.
Image/Interface Function	The screen becomes a psychic surface —an interface that organizes subjectivity , not just transmits content. It is a site of repetition , recognition , and erasure .
Space and Time	Scrolling creates a new temporality : endless present, always now, always almost. It's not linear time, but repetitive time —a loop that never ends, always craving but never resolving.



Critical Questions + Reflective Answers

Q1. How does Prince reinterpret the act of scrolling through Lacanian theory?

Answer:

Scrolling is not about discovering new content—it's a ritualized pursuit of a missing object (objet petit a). It's a repetitive action that maintains desire without satisfying it. Like the gambler's loop, it's a fantasy-sustaining interface gesture.

Q2. What does it mean to say that the selfie contains a "stain"?

Answer:

The stain marks the moment the subject is **trapped by the gaze**—no longer author of their image, but object of someone else's viewing. The stain is a trace of desire, but also evidence of loss, because the subject cannot control what they become in the image.

Q3. How does Prince use Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "territorialization" in relation to digital interfaces?

Answer:

He suggests that screens territorialize the subject: not in a physical sense, but in terms of

rhythm, affect, and repetition. The interface maps the user through gestures like scrolling, liking, and pausing—**turning identity into patterned micro-behaviors**.

Q4. How is repetition (in scrolling, selfies, or posts) related to the Lacanian concept of desire?

Answer:

In Lacan, **desire is sustained by lack**. Repetition keeps the subject in motion—**never reaching satisfaction**, always chasing the gaze of the Other. The interface becomes a **machine of repetition** that structures this endless pursuit.

Q5. What is the political or critical value of recognizing the "stain" in digital subjectivity?

Answer:

It allows us to see that **subjectivity is never whole or autonomous**—it's shaped by interfaces, gazes, and structures of power. Recognizing the stain is a way of **undoing the fantasy of digital mastery**, and confronting how deeply we are embedded in systems of mediated recognition.

COMMENT 1:

This further elaborates on the fact that the children want to be part of the crowd and that's why they are performing for the attention of the crowd.

Evaluation:

- Yes! You're continuing the thread from earlier—the performance of inclusion, of wanting to be part of the scene of attention.
- This links nicely to Marwick's microcelebrity and Goffman's face-work.

X Suggestion:

Frame this idea using the "gaze":

The children's mimicry becomes a response to the gaze—not just of the photographer, but of the imagined audience watching through the screen. To perform is to claim a place in a digital crowd whose membership is determined by visibility.

🗩 COMMENT 2:

Again the selfie becomes the surface where the stain occurs; subject appears not as themselves but a response to the gaze of the people -- What is this gaze??

Evaluation:

 This is a key question. You're correctly identifying the Lacanian structure of the gaze—but want clarity.

Explanation:

- In Lacanian theory, the gaze is not just "being looked at"—it is the moment the subject becomes aware they are an object in someone else's field of vision.
- You don't control your image—the Other does.
- So, in the selfie, the subject appears not as they are, but as they think others want to see them. This is the "stain"—the trace of their effort to be recognized under the terms of the Other.

Suggested line:

The gaze is the symbolic position from which we imagine ourselves being seen. In the selfie, the subject is not presenting the self—they are presenting what they think others desire to see. That distortion is the stain.

COMMENT 3:

Mulvey's fetishistic scopophilia - pleasure in looking that freezes the subject in the object.

W Evaluation:

This is a sharp and correct use of Mulvey.

X Enhancement:

Add the idea of visual arrest:

In Mulvey's terms, the subject in the selfie becomes an object frozen under the gaze—fixed and aestheticized. Their movement and agency are reduced to image, curated for pleasure and consumption.

🗩 COMMENT 4:

Doomscrolling becomes the new thing in the masses... people don't know what they are doing or where they are going and those are lost in the crowd.

Evaluation:

- This is a powerful image—doomscrolling as a modern crowd logic.
- You're linking compulsive digital behavior to Benjamin's flâneur and Poe's "Man of the Crowd", and Lacan's unresolvable desire.

X Suggestion:

Build the metaphor:

Like the flâneur who walks endlessly through the city, or the gambler trapped in Schüll's zone, the doomscroller is caught in a loop of meaningless motion. They scroll not to find something, but to remain within the interface—sustaining a fantasy of connection while being severed from clarity, purpose, or endpoint.

COMMENT 5:

This is Lacan's theory of desire, but also we can compare it to the Benjamin's text... people don't know where they are going or for what they are doing the things.

Evaluation:

 Beautiful synthesis. You're connecting Lacanian desire (structured by lack) with Benjamin's experience of urban alienation.

Enrich with terminology:

- In Lacan, desire is never fulfilled—it is what keeps the subject moving, repeating, longing.
- In Benjamin, modern crowds dissolve individuality—people move without agency or destination.

Suggested line:

Desire, for Lacan, is sustained by lack—it never reaches satisfaction. Benjamin's crowd mirrors this structure: people move not to arrive, but because movement is the only thing left. In doomscrolling, this repetition becomes digital—a flânerie without legs, where the screen becomes the city and the gesture becomes the trap.

Pages 56–61: Summary, Themes & Questions

Summary

- Prince intensifies the discussion of the "stain" using Lacan and Zizek. He now
 describes it as a kind of trace of failure, a moment where the subject is included in the
 image but can't master it.
- The stain is not just a spot—it's a site of instability that makes the image uneven or "broken."
- He connects this to **interface aesthetics**: the stain disturbs **clean surface/interface logic**, much like a pixel glitch, an error in the scroll.

- Prince critiques how most readings of screen culture assume that visibility = power. He says visibility is double-edged: it can expose, erase, or exploit.
- He compares scrolling to **Zizek's "ticking bomb of anxiety"**: it's an endless ritual meant to **ward off lack**, but it only deepens it.
- The subject is caught in a loop of seeking visibility, yet constantly denied stable presence or recognition.

5 Theme Connections

Theme Insight

Fantasy vs. Reality Fantasy promises clarity, legibility, and presence. But the stain shows that reality is uneven, glitchy, full of lack.

Image/Interface Interfaces aim for smoothness, but stains interrupt the logic of clean user experience. They are a reminder of what can't be processed.

Space & Time Scrolling creates a looped temporality, but the stain breaks that loop—it introduces rupture, a non-smooth time that pauses or disturbs.



Q1. What does the stain represent in visual or interface terms?

Answer:

The stain is a **trace of subjectivity that resists legibility**. It's a glitch in the smooth interface—a point that reveals the **imperfection or trauma of the image**, the point where meaning fails to stabilize.

Q2. How does scrolling relate to anxiety in Prince's argument?

Answer:

Scrolling is a **ritual of control**—a way of trying to manage the uncertainty of selfhood and recognition. But like Zizek's anxiety, it **only deepens the lack**, since satisfaction never arrives.

Q3. How is the image never truly "owned" by the subject, according to Prince?

Answer:

Because the gaze (of the Other) **overcodes the image**—the subject appears in the image not as they are, but as they are **seen**. The stain is that moment of misrecognition.

COMMENT 1:

We see a similar stuff to the triangular stabilization—it is opposite to that.

Evaluation:

You're referencing the **Lacanian triangle** (Imaginary–Symbolic–Real) or possibly the **triangular relation of desire** (subject, Other, object). You're also implying that the **stain disrupts** the usual narrative closure or identity loop.

That's sharp.

In Lacan's logic:

- Fantasy is the stabilizer that helps the subject deal with lack.
- The **stain breaks that fantasy**, revealing the instability beneath.
- So yes, the stain *opposes* the fantasy triangle—it is the **crack in the system**, the thing that **refuses to be sutured**.

X Suggested rewrite:

If fantasy stabilizes the subject's relation to the gaze, the stain destabilizes it. It interrupts the triangle of subject—Other—object, revealing the underlying instability that fantasy usually patches over. This is why the stain feels like a threat.

COMMENT 2:

The people's reaction we see or the people being frustrated are because of the fact of the viewer's gaze being uncompleted due to the stain—it is the stain that is pissing them off.

V Evaluation:

You're tapping into a very precise psychoanalytic insight: that frustration arises when the fantasy doesn't "work." The stain makes visible what the image cannot contain, and that creates anxiety or even anger.

This also connects to **Mulvey's theory of visual pleasure**:

- When a subject **fails to cohere as a clean object of the gaze**, the viewer doesn't just lose interest—they feel **irritated** or **exposed**.
- The stain is not what we expected to see—and it ruins the satisfaction loop of recognition.

This is also why **glitches or non-readable posts** often feel disturbing online—**they refuse legibility**.

X Suggested rewrite:

The stain frustrates because it breaks the fantasy of perfect visibility. The viewer cannot fully 'see' or 'know' the subject, and that incomplete closure creates anxiety. This aligns with Zizek's idea of enjoyment being tied to repetition and failure—the stain marks the place where our desire fails to be satisfied.

Let's Revisit the Key Terms and Bring Them Together:

Term	Clarified Meaning
Stain (Lacan/Zizek)	A trace of the subject that disturbs the image; a remainder of the Real that resists symbolic closure.
Interface Aesthetics	The pursuit of smoothness , legibility , flow —which the stain disrupts.

Scrolling	A compulsive ritual of desire; not to find something , but to keep going—like a gambler's loop.
Frustration (as affect)	What arises when the gaze is interrupted —when the viewer cannot resolve the image into pleasure or meaning.

V Overall Feedback

Criteria	Evaluation
Theoretical Insight	High—you're correctly diagnosing how the stain operates as both visual disruption and psychoanalytic rupture.
Clarity & Language	Medium—your concepts are strong but would benefit from slightly more precision in phrasing .
Intertextual Fluency	Very strong—you're intuitively connecting Lacan, Zizek, Prince, and Mulvey.
Course Themes	Well-integrated—especially around fantasy vs. reality and interface design as psychic architecture.

Pages 61–65: Summary, Themes & Questions

Summary

- Prince now turns to algorithmic governance—platforms that sort, filter, and amplify visibility.
- He critiques the logic of quantifiable visibility (likes, views, shares) as a kind of violence—subjects who don't perform well are excluded, erased, unseen.
- He proposes the "stain" as glitch—an act or trace that resists the algorithm by refusing clarity, refusing to perform well.
- Drawing on Fred Moten and Édouard Glissant, Prince proposes opacity as a kind of resistance: being present without being fully legible.

- The politics of visibility are thus inverted: *to be unseen, unreadable, misaligned* becomes a form of **freedom from capture**.
- He ends by calling for a **reading of interface aesthetics** that celebrates the noise, the irregular, the excessive—the parts that escape categorization.

5 Theme Connections

Theme Insight

Fantasy vs. Reality Fantasy: that being seen equals empowerment. Reality: visibility is regulated by algorithms, and often results in exploitation or exclusion.

Image/Interface The interface is a sorting mechanism. It filters lives, ideas, and bodies into legible or illegible categories. But the stain disrupts this.

Space & Time Algorithmic platforms operate in real-time, yet the stain interrupts this flow—it introduces opacity, stillness, or failure as a mode of presence.



Q1. How does Prince reframe visibility as a form of violence?

Answer:

Because platforms don't just show—they **rank**, **exclude**, **and erase**. Visibility is not neutral; it is **governed** by performance metrics. Not being seen is often an effect of **algorithmic erasure**, not personal failure.

Q2. What is the political power of opacity in digital culture?

Answer:

Opacity means **resisting full capture**. It is the refusal to become a profile, a metric, a clear story. It is **presence without transparency**—a kind of fugitive selfhood that resists being known on someone else's terms.

Q3. How might users "stain" the interface in subversive ways?

Answer:

By glitching, resisting, misnaming, mislabeling, refusing to explain themselves. These are **tactics of minor disruption** that resist the interface's demand for **clarity, order, and legibility**.

YOUR COMMENT:

We see that is similar to the things like the gambling machine or the person in the crowd, like in the gambling machine the algorithms are set up for max profit extraction, here the algorithms do the same work not for the max profit extraction but for the most visibility and People who don't do enough work to be in the crowd the crowd rejects them.

Evaluation:

This is **spot on thematically**. You've made a strong link between:

- Schüll's gambling machine → Interface that optimizes engagement for profit.
- Prince's algorithmic visibility → Interface that optimizes attention and visibility, but similarly extracts value.

You're correctly observing that both systems:

- Use algorithmic sorting,
- Create a loop of participation and exclusion,
- And enforce performance-based inclusion—if you don't perform, you're invisible.

Your idea that "the crowd rejects them" can be sharpened: it's not the literal crowd, but the systemic logic of algorithmic attention that filters them out. You're describing digital precarity.

X Suggested Refinement:

Just like Schüll's gambling machines are engineered to extract maximum play for profit, algorithmic platforms optimize content for maximum visibility. But here, the reward is not money—it's attention. Those who can't or don't perform well—don't post, don't engage, don't conform to platform rhythms—are filtered out. Their failure to be visible becomes a kind of algorithmic erasure. Visibility becomes labor; non-performance becomes punishment.

SECOND PART:

We see a typical modern "vibe" from this—for example, if we go to a village most people don't try to be part of the crowd (except when they're looking for people's support to stand in elections or something).

Evaluation:

You're trying to draw a contrast between **digital cultures of constant performance** and **slower, non-performative life rhythms**, like in a rural village. That's a **sharp and subtle point**, but it needs clarification.

You're really talking about:

- The modern subject as always "on"—optimizing their identity for recognition.
- Versus the offline or less mediated subject, who doesn't feel the pressure to constantly appear.

That "vibe" you're picking up on is the pressure to be visible at all times, which is absent or minimal in less saturated environments.

X Suggested Reframe:

This dynamic contrasts sharply with non-platform-based social life—like in rural communities, where people don't feel the same pressure to perform for attention unless it serves a clear social purpose (e.g., elections, community organizing). In algorithmic culture, the self becomes a product, constantly optimized for visibility. In other contexts, visibility can still be relational, slow, and tied to embodied presence, not digital metrics