Between Fascination and Denial: The Power of the Screen

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The former opening credits of the French TV show Les Enfants de la télé showed babies gathered together in front of a TV set, one of them kissing the screen. Other TV credits are in a similar vein, notably those of the series Dream On, whose successive shots show the evolution of a child, from baby to adult, in front of a black-and-white television set; or those of Homeland where little Carrie is shown from behind sitting watching TV, particularly attentive to the political images displayed on the screen. This obviously suggests considering both the sociological and cultural issue of generations discovering life through television on a daily basis. Dream On follows this pattern in its very structure, since, throughout the series, old black-and-white clips expressing Martin Tupper’s (played by Brian Benben) childhood memories, feelings, or thoughts are constantly interspersed in the plot.

But one can also see other things in these credits, whether it is the baby kissing the screen or the child growing up in front of it. One can see the fascination for this object or, rather, part of this object, that has become a ubiquitous part of our lives, whether today or in the past: the screen, whether it regards the cinema, television, computer, tablet, laptop, etc. I will therefore try to address here the psychological and cultural phenomenon of this fascination for the screen; I will analyze it from the point of view of the iconic effect it produces – and of the denial of representation that follows – in relation to its ambivalent physicality as a medium aimed at transmitting energy, that is, light.

What the Screen Hides and What It Shows

One often mentions the opposition between the screen that shows and the screen that hides. In fact, starting from one approach, one very quickly ends up considering the other, and vice versa. The opposition between what is shown and what is hidden is also a duality. The screen that hides can be something material, an obstacle that hides what could otherwise be seen, but it can also provide protection, the way, for example, a hedge surrounds a house. The hedge stops the gaze in two ways, first, by obstructing the view of the private space and, second, by
being a potential subject in itself, whether well or badly trimmed. One can stop the gaze by blocking or capturing it. One can block it, so it fixes on what blocks it.

There is a kind of barrier, both enclosure and tribune, made of stone or wood, which, in some churches, separates the chancel from the nave; it is called the jube, in reference to the Latin phrase “jube, domine, benedicere” (O Lord, bless me indeed). In English, it is also called the choir screen. Jacqueline E. Jung remarks that “scholars and churchgoers alike have long understood the function of choir screens to separate and exclude,” while current research in art history insists on the idea that they represent “signs of either social or aesthetic disunity”; on one side, an impassable frontier between the clerics and the faithful; and, on the other, an obstacle to the spectacle of the wide open perspective in Gothic churches. Jung highlights another aspect of the issue that nuances these theories. It seems particularly pertinent to call the jube a “screen” as it serves both as a pulpit from which the clerics, although hidden away in their own world, address the faithful, and as a window, since its surface displays representations aimed at churchgoers:

The fact remains that just as the screens were, physically, the place from which clerics spoke to laypeople, so they were, visually, the main architectural feature by means of which clerics spoke to laypeople. And just as those clerics made an effort, when speaking from atop the screens, to talk in a language that their listeners would understand, so on the screens’ surfaces, they strove to communicate with viewers in a visual language that would be immediate, comprehensible, and relevant to them.

One can note here that, due to Christian conception, the image, instead of being banned as in other monotheistic faiths, was used as a means of communication that was easily understandable by the people. Due to its main characteristic, the choir screen served as “the Bible of the illiterate.” That is, as an iconic sign, it has the capacity to directly transmit what it represents and signifies through representation. But the immediacy of the sign does not exclude the fact that a complex mediation involving various apparatuses or devices is at work here.

The image itself is a mediation of the immediate. There is no systematic rule, which would require that the more the constitution of the image is artificial, the more it moves away from immediacy. It is rather the opposite: simplified representations are understood faster than others, as shown by the famous experiment carried out by Ryan and Schwarz (1956): Mickey Mouse’s chubby hand, although it only has four fingers and looks like a glove, is identified as a hand faster than a painting of a hand, which is also identified faster than its photograph.

To return to the shown-hidden phenomenon revealed by the analysis of the choir screen, the way of hiding in order to show or to show in order to hide, one
can also recall the invisibility cloak in Harry Potter, a cloak that makes the one who wears it invisible, not to focus on the piece of clothing itself in the context of witchcraft, but on scientific research, which is still studying invisibility that can be obtained through using a complex set of lenses or, better yet, the properties of a material called negative-index metamaterial. Since we usually see someone because “the material of what that person is made off reflects incidental light into [our] eyes” and that it “blocks this light from what is placed behind,” metamaterial could be used to force the blocked light rays to bypass the obstacle and take the place of the image seen. The invisibility cloak is a paradoxical kind of screen since, reversing the usual relationship of the screen to light; it takes the background to the foreground. By comparison, the “traditional” screen belongs to ordinary perception: a canvas opaque enough to prevent light coming through from behind from blurring the image or a wall on which the screen is fixed. It is obviously this blockage that determines the correct visibility of the image on the screen.

But it is also true that the increase in the variety of screens has led to new configurations, nevertheless prefigured in the rear-projection technique – écran de transparence in French – which provides a background to actors through the projection onto a translucent screen. The type of insulation from the context required by the screen, instead of being obtained by removing any effects from ambient light, as is the case with the blackout of the movie theater, can be obtained by overcoming the effect of light by using appropriate technology that manipulates the projected light. For example, backlight-screen technology, in which the screen is lit from behind and which dramatically improves image quality, allows both to enlarge video screens and, thanks to Light-Emitting Diodes (LEDs), to reduce them. In the same vein, one can also mention the transparent smart window created by Samsung and which offers a touch-controlled interface between transparent glass and the light of a lit room, offering a striking similarity with the technology shown in the film Minority Report (Steven Spielberg, 2002). It is remarkable to see how fiction, especially science fiction, can anticipate technology and science. This suggests that the pre-scientific or metaphorical approach to problems, notably in the absence of adequate technical knowledge, deserves attention, provided, however, that one takes the precautions required by a proper scientific approach.

**The Screen and the Metaphor**

The ambiguity of the visible, which exposes a part of the world to us while possibly hiding another, authorizes all kinds of shifts in meaning towards the metaphorical. Behind the hedge, there is an entire unknown world and this gives free rein to imagination, which overcomes the visible memorized to invent possible worlds. But, in an even more abstract – though more prosaic – way, one
says, for example, that a political speech is a smokescreen that hides the truth. Philosophy even goes as far as making the hypothesis that the whole of reality is a screen that hides “true” reality.

“The picture is literally gray but only metaphorically sad”: this distinction made by Nelson Goodman⁶ has not always received the attention it deserves. Whatever the subject of reflection, one would actually have everything to gain in becoming aware of the difference between the literal level of the properties that actually belong to it and the metaphorical level of those attributed to it by analogy with another domain. The gray color is a property of the pictorial matter, but sorrow is what we feel in front of the image. In this essay, I will start from the literal characteristics of the screen, its real properties in both their permanence and their variations, but I will also try to show that, regarding this subject, a proper use of metaphor – or rather, of the metaphorical, as it is more the cognitive⁷ mechanism than the rhetorical figure that interests me here – could actually provide pertinent results.

Metaphor is obviously part of the poet’s toolkit. A song called Cinéma by the French singer Claude Nougaro begins as follows: “On the black screen of my sleepless nights / I make my own cinema [...].” And André Pieyre de Mandiargues, at the beginning of the introduction to Musée noir, wrote: “The overview provided by the senses in human consciousness is a flimsy screen; constantly pierced by holes, shaken by turbulences, it only blinds those who are precisely trying not to see anything beyond its mediocre readymade.”⁸ However, poetry is obviously not the only discipline to use metaphor. On the contrary, as Goodman points out: “Metaphor permeates all discourses, ordinary and special, and we would have a hard time finding a purely literal paragraph anywhere.” And, reflecting on his own words, he added: “In that last prosaic enough sentence, I count five sure or possible – even if tired – metaphors.”⁹

Beyond this insightful observation, one must recognize that the metaphor, although it sometimes corrupts the discourse, notably when it claims to act as an argument, can be useful as a premise or link in the reasoning. In the same vein as Les enfants de la télé, I have actually seen babies lick the screen of a CRT television. Try it; you will see that they have a very unique taste! However, engaging in a metaphorical discourse on the taste of the screen reminds us of the pre-scientific discussions on the taste of electricity, which Gaston Bachelard considered as an obstacle to scientific progress. He noted in this regard: “There would be no great harm if this metaphor were not interiorized [...]. A mind that continues to think this quality in these terms will gradually become impervious to the experimental evidence belying it.”¹⁰ Apart from its educational use, metaphor can participate in the knowledge process when, instead of replacing reasoning, it is evaluated in the light of rational criteria.

Let us use the metaphor of the screen-retina as an example of the necessity for this evaluation. Beyond the surfaces offered by different apparatuses, considering
the vision device reduced to the eye, one can indeed admit the analogy of the retina with the screen. Besides, as one could say, the image of what is seen is formed as a reversed image on the back of the eye. But this very fact clearly shows that the retina does not exist on its own and that, in addition to its purely optical relationship with reality, its relationship with the brain must also be considered: it is indeed the brain that puts the image back on its feet, so to speak. And this is not the only function of the retina, if one considers the photoreceptors that line it, transforming, decomposing and somehow pixelating the captured image and transmitting this decomposition through nerve messages. The retina is then an extension of the brain, the instrument with which it captures and transforms visual information; and it is the brain that, from the decomposition of the visible into dots (like pictorial Pointillism or pixelation), recomposes the whole image: so, by this reasoning alone, should we not say that the screen is in the brain?

Another metaphorical transfer is then possible. It is found in all kinds of texts from cognitive, philosophical, and cinematic research. For example, during a discussion on the “Cartesian Theater” model of mind, often criticized because it “requires an observer who is all-seeing and all-knowing regarding the perfectly determinate projections on the screen of the inner theater. What is projected there can never be fuzzy or indeterminate, and though the observer may succumb to rapid loss of memory, he can never fail to notice anything on the screen before him at the instant of the presence.”11 Among the metaphorical residues of such proposals, one can find Goodman’s remarks and, similarly, and even more so, when analogy is floating in the uncertain domain of the encounter between philosophy and film studies, as in Screen Consciousness. Cinema, Mind and World in which the precision of the title cannot compensate the fuzzy questioning, as evidenced by one of the yet most precise questions in this collection of texts: “Does the screen of consciousness on which the world appears have specific form and place or is it beyond the fabric of the brain and out there at the very limits of the cosmos?”12 Various other authors have used the metaphor of the screen, such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari regarding the face – “The face constructs the wall that the signifier needs in order to bounce off of; it constitutes the wall of the signifier, the frame or screen”13 – or Jacques Lacan regarding the mask – “Only the subject – the human subject, the subject of the desire that is the essence of man – is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation.”14

We know what role he played in the development of screen theory, which is more a theory of what is hidden behind the screen than a theory of the screen itself. As Laura Mulvey wrote in her seminal article:
What is seen of the screen is so manifestly shown. But the mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy.\textsuperscript{15}

Here, I am less interested in what is seen off the screen than in what is seen on the screen. From this perspective, the pre-eminence of what is hidden over what is shown, so dear to psychoanalytic theory and theology, finds a new balance. The authors who focus on what is hidden, with the intention of bringing it out of hiding or simply to denounce it, have a certain tendency to hierarchy, as in the example offered by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, not only in The Phenomenology of Perception, extensively quoted by Lacan but also in The Visible and the Invisible: “language is a power for error, since it cuts the continuous tissue that joins us vitally to the things and to the past and is installed between ourselves and that tissue like a screen.”\textsuperscript{16} However, contrary to the antinomy that the language barrier, or any other obstacle, forms with life (or, equally, with the mind, the truth, etc.), the phenomenologist, turning away from the single theme of the screen that hides, also borrows that of the screen that shows in a passage concerning the kinds of beings that Marcel Proust drew attention to, especially music (“the little phrase” of the Vinteuil Sonata), but also “the notions of light, of sound, of relief, of physical voluptuousness, which are the rich possessions with which our inward domain is diversified and adorned”\textsuperscript{17}:

[T]hese truths are not only hidden like a physical reality which we have not been able to discover, invisible in fact but which we will one day be able to see facing us, which others, better situated, could already see, provided that the screen that masks it is lifted. Here, on the contrary, there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would be inaccessible to us. The “little phrase,” the notion of the light, are not exhausted by their manifestations, any more than is an “idea of the intelligence”; they could not be given to us as ideas except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the occasion to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart.\textsuperscript{18}

Here, one cannot fail to underline the presence of light among the invisible elements whose mode of existence requires the screen of the visible, the flesh of the visible. The screen gives them flesh in a conditioning whose importance is well known, notably the rectangular frame that usually cuts the screen in the world and gives it its axes, but one must also stress that this depends on the
paradoxical element that is light, due to, as I said in my introduction, its ambivalent physicality as a material means of transmitting energy. One cannot grasp light with both hands as one can do with screens; one cannot touch it as one now does with touch screens. But it is light that allows us to see what there is to see or touch. Light is a quasi-material immaterial in its own mode of existence, but absolutely critical to matter and to any sensory relationship to matter – it is something that painters can obviously feel, especially when, like Pierre Soulages, they profess to systematically use the power of luminous energy reflecting on black surfaces: “[…] the light as I use it is a material. So there are very significant consequences, especially in relation to space. In painting, colors do not exist as such, there are only relationships.”19

The Iconic Effect

With respect to the controlled application of the metaphorical process to the question of the screen, Charles S. Peirce gave us an additional argument by showing us the close link between metaphor and image, knowing that the screen, whether it receives light from the outside or the inside, is a powerful tool for the presentation of images. This argument is particularly clearly put forward when defining the term icon:

A sign may be iconic, that is, may represent its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being. […] Any material image, as a painting, is largely conventional in its mode of representation; but in itself, without legend or label it may be called a hypoicon. […] Hypoicons may be roughly divided into the mode of Firstness of which they partake. Those which partake of simple qualities, of First Firstness, are images; those which represent the relations, mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own arts, are diagrams; those which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are metaphors.20

The image and the metaphor (in the same way as the diagram) are hypoicons, which means that, viewed from the single point of view of what they evoke in the mind, they produce the same effect in the receiver, i.e., the iconic effect. The icon, as defined by Peirce, is a kind of sign, if you will, but not a kind of thing. Specifically, it is a relationship category between the sign and what it targets. It is better to talk about the iconic character of the image to describe this sort of abstraction of representation – no matter whether it is drawn with a felt pen, painted, or photographed – which naturally and spontaneously leads us to see the represented as such, thus allowing us to be moved at the sight of the representation of a cute dog or to be horrified by a report about war. Peirce said:
Icons are so completely substituted for their objects as hardly to be distin-
guished from them. [...] So in contemplating a painting, there is a moment
when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the
real and the copy disappears, and it is for the moment a pure dream – not a
particular existence and yet not general. At that moment we are contemplating
an icon.21

Indeed, Pierce rightly and emphatically refers to a moment: “there is a moment,”
“for the moment,” “at that moment...” It is precisely for the moment that we con-
sider as real what is represented. The feeling of the icon is a moment in the
relationship to the image or an instant, the moment of a passing dream, like a
breath soon extinguished; if it is prolonged, it is because we revel in it, we en-
tirely surrender to the hypnosis of aesthetic contemplation or no less fully to
some kind of meditation. In any case, it is by no means a property by essence. As
such, the image is not, objectively, the oblivion of representation, since it never
exists without an act of representation, it is never minimal, and it both signals
and establishes representation. The image is the attestation and the product of
an act of representation, which it bears within itself; it carries its own cause as a
trace.

In the moment of the icon, we experience a perceptual disorder. The image
wants us to be bipolar. Regarding cinema, though this is applicable to any
image, Edgar Morin talked about “double consciousness”:22 I know it is only an
image, but I am encountering reality and I have the same feelings towards it as I
have in life. Some considered this as deception, at a time when the morals af-
fected the notion of ideology: the illusion of reality, favored by perspective, was
said to be bourgeois. In fact, this double dealing commonly serves us in our many
ordinary encounters with semiotics – too ordinary to be dishonest! In a street, I
look for a house with its photograph as the only reference. I do not care about
the quality of the photograph; I do not care about the theory of photography.
Fortunately, in these sorts of cases, one does not feel guilty about giving in to
illusion. Fortunately, no ideological superego inhibits us. When I look at the
photograph of my deceased parents, I actually look at my parents through the
medium of photography! I would rather feel guilty to switch from the memory I
have of them to a judgment on the photo itself. The ordinary attitude and the
aesthetic attitude towards photography are not the prerogative of two categories
of viewers (as claimed by a certain sociological Manichaicism), but two alternative
practical modes between which we continually oscillate. As Andy Warhol said:
“An artist can slice a salami, too!”23

Far from blaming anyone about the icon effect, what one should emphasize is
movement; the hyperbole that transforms it into the belief that the image would
be essentially transparent. And, as a consequence, that it is a kind of zero repre-
sentation, redundant and indifferent. The experience of the icon then becomes
the denial of representation. The experience is overwhelmed by ideology. The best example of this ideological extrapolation of the icon effect is the theory on the religious icon. Of course, the believer is invited to focus on the presence of Christ or the saints represented; and, of course, the icon effect makes this attitude possible. But this does not prevent the fact that the effect is based on a very specific representation, which is carefully studied by specialists of Eastern Christian art; in addition to the historical conditions of the emergence and development of the religious icon, they make us understand the strict rules of its production, without which there would be no chance for the icon effect to occur. It obviously requires a precise, determined, and targeted representation. In the manner of trompe-l’œil and hyperrealism that, playing on another level, also require extreme care in the handling of the artists’ tools. In other words, the success of the icon effect does not abolish the work on the representation; it only abolishes the consciousness of it in the moment, more or less long, in which the effect operates; the success of this effect also implies that the apprehended object proceeds from representation.

Extending the icon effect beyond the moment, making it the essence of the image, is to transform experience into ideology, the ideology that is the denial of representation. This weapon is even more effective as it uses the very properties of the image, which, as we have just seen, can somehow be cut in two, whether by forgetting the icon effect in favor of convention, or by forgetting convention in favor of illusion. Reflecting on the denial of representation inevitably means drawing the line between the properties and the ideology of the image. It also implies discerning the literal from the metaphorical, as explained by Goodman: making the icon effect the essence of the image is like assigning to the image the feeling that it makes us experience; it is likely that this feeling, in most cases, has to do with the representation shown in this image; but it is equally clear that, due to our personal state of mind, we can feel sad in front of an image that leaves others indifferent.

Semiotics, Ideology, and Aesthetics

The denial of representation works in close collusion with the philosophical thesis that claims that the whole of reality is a screen that hides “true” reality. Obviously, one cannot help think here of Plato’s opposition between the sensory and the intelligible and his “world of ideas,” and the use of the allegory of the Cave, which is no less a cliché of film studies than the duality of the screen that shows or hides. However, approached with caution, this allegory indeed provides an interesting insight on this duality. Its backdrop is actually the opposition between the visible and the intelligible that Plato developed in Book VII of The Republic, but the allegory describes something more precise: not only the conversion of the elected (philosophers) to truth but also the political moment of their
return. Now, through the metaphorical displacement of the allegory, the sensory hiding the intelligible, or the visible hiding the invisible, is represented as a screen in the darkness of a cave where, since childhood, prisoners are chained so that they can neither move nor turn their heads. Their field of vision is thus limited to the shadows of artifacts cast on the bottom of the cave and which, manipulated by marionette players, pass in front of a fire burning above: “Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.”

This is a screen that hides the truth, not because the truth is behind it, transcending exactly what is shown, but because it guides the mind in the wrong direction: towards the projection rather than its source. Light, which is the source of the projection, is also, in the Platonic allegory, a source of knowledge, supreme knowledge, when considered in itself; we must turn our back to the screen to access this source. Now, if one considers the screen itself, Plato’s screen is also a screen that shows, so that the iconic effect works perfectly. Supposedly, the prisoners are fascinated by what happens on the screen. To liberate them, one must tear them away from this fascination by breaking the shackles that keep them in place. They are not “consenting adults” (as one says), who, informed about the immense advantage that represents access to knowledge, through access to its source, i.e., light, decide to break from their current situation, but spectators staring at the screen, mesmerized by what they see, and apparently content with this situation.

The question of contentment indeed arises. Regarding the screen, what interests me here is less the ideology that the projected figures represent – and which, like language, according to Merleau-Ponty, operate as forms of externality that screen the truth, that of life or mind – than the very ideology of the relationship to the screen in general. One can always adopt, regarding the screen, a moralistic position that denounces the fascination it creates, the way Duhamel denounced its mental consequences: “I can no longer think what I wish to think. The moving images have ousted my thoughts,” a concept which, beyond resentment, Walter Benjamin extended in his theory of the traumatic image. In terms of fascination, due to the insistent light it reflects or carries, the screen would be the permanent basis on which occur the spectacle, the spectacular effect, and special effects, all these increasingly superficial levels of audiovisual representation. However, theory is not ideology. Following Benjamin’s example, one must be able to transform denigration into a theoretical idea.

At this stage, it seems necessary to evaluate the fascination for the screen from three perspectives: semiotics, ideology, and aesthetics. The semiotic approach indeed offers us the iconic effect and considers it as the moment of the experience of the screen; I look at an image for what it represents, oblivious for a
moment of its mode of representation. We thus pass from one screen to another. The same film can go from one screen to the other, from TV to mobile phone. It is possible, as we do it, as Aristotle would say. But it does not mean that the experience is the same, as Raymond Bellour pointed out:

The living projection of a film in a cinema, in the dark, for the prescribed time of a more or less collective session, becomes and remains the condition for a unique experience of perception and memory, defining its spectator, and that any other situation of vision more or less alters. And only this experience is worth being called “cinema.”

However, certain conditions of the experience are identical or comparable. Indeed, the perceptive relationship to the screen is not the same if it is the big screen of Kinopanorama or the small rectangle of the mobile phone, notably because the gaze, which is a mixture of ambient and focal vision, is not called for in the same way: a small screen promotes focus, whereas a large screen appeals to a more ambient vision (the viewer who is too close to the screen tends to look as if he is watching a tennis match, sitting at center of the court, following with his eyes and head the ball as it goes back and forth). However, there are similarities between the two screen sizes: their attractiveness is comparable (but not identical, due the psychological and physiological reasons I just mentioned) because of the association of the image to light, whatever its source.

To further analyze the ideology of the screen, it is more interesting to consider the manner in which the iconic effect is essentialized to produce the denial of representation that one encounters both in everyday life, when one takes at face value what is represented on an image, for example as physical evidence of a crime, and in various more or less phenomenological theories that use the effect of presence in its purity, forgetting the artifice that established it. The denial of representation extends the iconic effect even more when it is increased by the effect of the screen; in daily life, the area where it is most effective is the media, given the addiction produced by the TV shows that we watch continuously. But between the iconic effect and the denial of representation, between the semiotic fact and ideology, one must also make room for another kind of continuation and extension of the iconic effect that characterizes the aesthetic attitude. One of the most compelling theorists on this subject, Archibald Alison, considered that the aesthetic attitude means the exclusive focus of the subject’s mind on an object, but also characterizes the captivation of the subject’s mind by this object. Through its light and what it illuminates, the screen promotes or reinforces the paradox of the aesthetic attitude, between voluntary concentration and quasi-hypnotic abandonment.
Hypnosis

I am in a restaurant with friends, sitting in front of a television screen; although I am trying to focus on the conversation, from time to time, my gaze returns to the screen; although I am trying to detach myself from it, something irresistibly draws me to it. This reminds us of insects attracted to a light source that will kill them. Apart from this fatal ending, the comparison is even more pertinent as, in the fascination for the screen, it is actually the light that is the cause, whether it is a light beam of “old school” projection, from the back or rear projection on multiple state-of-the-art screens. According to Plato, one must be helped by a third party (but who will snatch the first prisoner from his chains? Who can escape this common condition of mankind?) to turn towards light, but it is also light, when projected on the screen, that attracts and fascinates – no need for chains when the mind, captured by the screen, forces the body to stay where it is, the gaze fixed on this bright surface where forms appear and come alive!

The screen is hypnotic. Light somehow replaces the stare of the hypnotist. Two characteristics of the screen remind us of fascination as psychoanalysis envisaged it (including Freud and Lacan): first, it depends upon a restriction of the object to one of its aspects and, correlativelv, requires a strong focus of the gaze; second, it captures not only the gaze, but the mind in a way that reminds us of hypnosis. However, there is a major difference between the hypnotist and the screen. Therapeutic hypnosis or hypnosis as entertainment is a relationship of consciousness with consciousness. Freud compared it to love: “subjection on the part of one person towards another has only one parallel, though a complete one – namely in certain love-relationships where there is extreme devotion.” The fascination of the lover for his/her beloved actually resembles the hypnotic relationship, as the first abandons all or part of his/her self to the other. It is also similar to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, particularly the idea that the dominated and the dominant have a reciprocal power relationship in the sense that the dominant needs the dominated as much as the dominated needs him/her. If the hypnotized does not abandon him/herself, the hypnotist fails; if the loved one does not give him/herself up, it is the lover who fails.

The difference between those situations and the screen is that, in the screen’s case, abandonment is all relative. The relationship is necessarily different since it is not two human beings, provided with subjectivity, that are involved; it is not an interrelation of two gazes, man’s vanguard of consciousness. Similarly, the screen indeed speaks, but through characters or some more or less impersonal entity. And the receiver of the screen is a human being, but the thing that, through one of its parts, the bright screen, catches his eye, is without consciousness; it is not even unconscious, as in a temporary halt of consciousness, but literally devoid of any consciousness. Of course, human beings appear on its surface, but although animated, they are only a simulacrum. Hence the hypnotic
game of the iconic effect. Or the double consciousness game that Christian Metz, drawing on Freud’s metapsychology, called paradoxical hallucination. I hallucinate as real something that is real and yet is not. I do this knowingly, with a certain distance, without being numbed by hypnosis or giving myself entirely to love. In film, I can fall in love with an actress, without suffering because she does not know anything about it.

**The New Screens (by Way of Conclusion)**

A recent advertisement for Orange, the mobile operator, shows a very meaningful scene. A man and a woman face a television screen; the man is on one side, at the end of a sofa, the woman on the other, at a distance, sitting in an armchair. She decides to move closer, sitting at the other end of the sofa, grabbing a tablet while simultaneously turning on the TV screen. With one more effort, she gets closer to the man, this time turning on the screen of a mobile phone. No doubt this scene could generate interesting analyses on the relationship between husband and wife, the latter taking the initiative of getting closer, but initially excluded from the sofa. In fact, the Orange advert mainly aims at promoting the multiscreen feature offered by the operator. Like the way the dematerialization of texts did not decrease paper consumption, the dematerialization of image, sound, and audiovisual has not diminished the importance of the screen; in both cases, it is quite the opposite. In the case of image and sound, not only has the need to use a screen increased – the screen has multiplied and become ubiquitous – but the screen types have also multiplied. Hence the possibility of multiscreen usage, which is both a diversification of sizes and functions of the screen, and the ability to constantly move from one screen to another.

In this kind of technological progress, techn aesthesics, devices, and functionality interact to offer new possibilities in terms of action and attitude. Techn aesthesics refers to the sensory features of technology, for example, different image brightness levels; the device is the kind of conditioning in which an apparatus appears, for example, the opposition between cinema projection and the television set; the functionality characterizes the different kinds of potential usages of all or part of the apparatus, for example, the possibility of watching a movie on a mobile phone as well as using it as a phone, or even doing both simultaneously. Take the example of the mobile phone, less to exhaust the subject than to open new perspectives. To these phones with screens, regarding which I have already stressed that the possibility depended on LED technology, was added touch-control techn aesthesics and functional possibility. To the iconic effect, indeed very present in these devices, was added physical connection, the digital contact that not only creates an indexical relationship, as Peirce said, but mainly adds tactile or haptic sensations: the finger pointing on the screen is also...
the finger that touches and caresses it, while the device is cradled in the other hand.

And that is not all. Among other things, every day we invent new pocket video projectors which, using a smartphone, could enable executives in business seminars to project statistics on a screen or a family to watch a movie in their holiday home. A wall is enough, provided it is blank and reflects light well. It can be referred to as a mobile screen.

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