Screen Culture

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INTRODUCTION

Technology and media usage cannot be separated from screens. Examples such as television, computer, smartphone, mobile phone, tablet, e-book reader, multimedia player (music and / or audio), camera and camcorder, watch, digital advertising public panels, virtual reality glasses. In fact, if the goal is to understand what can be considered as a screen, the examples will not cease to increase.

The major goal of the article is to explore the screen definition and the way in which it has emerged in society, in a cross way, almost without being noticed, but ubiquitously, even becoming inseparable from most of the necessary activities. Thus, after almost 20 years of Levinson's (1998 [1997]) reflection and analysis on the need to define a screen taxonomy, it is increasingly relevant to reflect on the screens' nature and on their effects in individuals' daily life. So, how did media and screens step into peoples' lives in such a way a new culture was created and disseminated?

Despite true ontological differences between the artifacts that incorporate screens, there is a progressive process of dilution of the specificities, with the convergence of functionalities and contents. The television becomes interactive and its consumption is increasingly customizable and individualized; the computer and mobile devices allow access to television. One uses the computer to make phone and video calls. The screen as a unifying feature turns out to be the visible side of an ongoing process of convergence that in the short term will be felt more systematically in the consumption and sociability logics.

This has a lot of implications in all sort of societal levels. In the political sector (e-governance, active citizenship in political decisions); economic sector (new ways of communication and business structures) and cultural sector (e-museums). But also at a micro level, with the need to reorganize familial, labor, scholar and leisure processes around media.

Nowadays, technology is perceived as extension of man (McLuhan (2008 [1964], p. 82). By recognizing the change enhanced by media one can also recognize the effect in the new medium (Federman, 2004, p. 2). The way the above mentioned societal practices changed are intimately related to the way media (and the perceptions of media) also suffered transformations.

A screen culture arises (Chambat & Ehrenberg, 1988), accepted by individuals as a second culture. Media are included in individuals' lives as a second skin, because they are sensitive, ubiquitous and transparent.

Society had suffered major changes and mutations, in order to include media. People comprise media and use them for him/her best purpose. Cyber and screen culture are becoming the focus of social relations of all types (familial, labor and leisure). These were the justifications for the importance of this reflection regarding screen culture.

The article aims to present a state of the art around screen and media uses, their existence and transparency and provide a definition of the concept.

BACKGROUND

Screen Culture: State of the Art

Considering the importance of screens in individuals' daily lives, it is pertinent to draw a chronological path of the main authors that have addressed the topic of screens and were interested in defining the artifacts that usually arise coupled.

Back in the twentieth century, Lev Manovich (1995), when defining what can be considered a screen, noted that screen characteristics can be attributed to a computer monitor, but also to something more unique, such as a painting or a play. Thus, the screen is the frame that separates two different spaces that coexist in some way (Manovich, 1995, p. 1). This will be the screen definition used here, and for the purpose of this article, screen always appears associated with a technological artifact (television, computer or mobile phone). For Manovich (1995), this screen is not neutral. Instead, it has an aggressive status, "*It functions to filter, to screen out, to take over, rendering nonexistent whatever is outside the frame.*" (Manovich, 1995, p. 2). Thus and complementing the previous idea with Nelson Zalago's (2010) notion of screen (2010), this is the boundary between the device and the individual receiving the transmitted content (Zagalo, 2010, p. 35).

For an analysis of the differences between the screens studied here, the prospect of Levinson (1998 [1997]) is a starting point. When the author addresses the issue of the twentieth century screens, he warns of the differences in their nature, in particular between the television and the computer, and in this context it shows the need for a taxonomy of screens (Levinson, 1998 [1997] pp. 199-211).

Although radio, photocopying, electronic publishing and fax, the twentieth century can indeed be characterized as the century of the screen. It was so from the beginning. [...] We know our culture, both produced things to the screen, as it was substantially shaped by them. We also know

that the screens are not monolithic in its cultural importance and that different types of things are broadcasted by different types of screens and involve different types of cognitive and emotional processes. Our question, then, is what kinds of things appear in what kind of screens - especially computer screens - and for what purpose. To find an answer, to start building a taxonomy of screens [...] (Levinson, 1998 [1997], p. 199).

Adriana de Souza e Silva (2006) carried her study on the use of social interfaces (designated screens under the definition of the present article) in mediating the relationship between two or more individuals, or in the context of social relations established online. For the author, those interfaces redefine either the communication or the space in which these relationships occur (Silva, 2006, pp. 261-262).

In this perspective, screens are not the only artifacts considered, but, above all, spaces and spaces' convergence, which is something associated to screen usage. This convergence and the emergence of a new space is designed by the author as a hybrid space where the physical and digital converge, but more than that, they are mobile spaces, carried by users in their portable devices, once they are connected to the internet and to other users (Silva, 2006, p. 262).

Screens are, therefore (and increasingly so) a medium, a way of mingle in the real world, with this being referred by Introna and Ilharco (2006) as a "screened world" (Introna & Ilharco, 2006, p. 58). For these authors, the screen is not so much what it represents by itself, but what it transmits to the individual, the message, the content that appears represented on the screen, whether text, images, colors, graphics, etc. (Introna & Ilharco, 2006, p. 62). This way, the user relationship with screens is highly focused on the content and context and not so much on the physical artifact. For that reason, expectations placed on screens are very contextual, and linked to its place in a particular context. For example, at a cinema it is expected that video and image are transmitted, whereas

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