

Chapter 4

Ghostly (Re-)Semblances and Specular (Con-)Figurations: The Age of the Advent of Technologism and the End of Communication?

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ABSTRACT

Many thinkers conceptualize authentic communication in terms of an interpersonal encounter, for example between an “I” and a “you,” a living subject and a living subject, unmediated by objects, electronic gadgets, or ICTs (informatics and communication technologies), or through an authentic human dialogue involving openness, choice, freedom, courage, and almost always, some risk and uncertainty. In the elevated language of Buber and Maritain one might say an existentially charged encounter between two (or more) beings involves opening up to each other, calling each to the other, face to face, thus allowing living truth to emerge.

INTRODUCTION

There can be little doubt that informatics and communication technologies have transformed, and some would say rendered problematic, not just such ways of thinking about relations and authenticity between human subjects, but also the very question of the possibility of such relations, especially given the global phenomenon of simulation, social media, avatars, and technologically mediated communication at almost every point of our personal, interpersonal and professional relationships in

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the digital age. The following questions will be explored in this chapter: What are the changes to and effects of ICTs on our communicative relations in the 21st century? Is it still possible to speak of authentic interpersonal encounters in the light of the emergence of informatics and communication technologies and their proliferation in the digital age, in the paths opened up by thinkers like Buber and Heidegger (for example, 2017, 2016, 2013, 2002A, 2002B, 1998, 1984, 1982, 1976A, 1976B, 1973, 1971, 1967, 1966, 1955, among many others)? And what should one do, given the acceleration and intensification of the advent of technologism in our time?

THE SPECIAL REALITY OF THE INTERHUMAN

The Sphere of Interhuman Communication

Communication is a vast and intricate subject. Many thinkers have tried to give a rigorous and deep account of what it is and what constitutes it authentically. This section will focus on Martin Buber's account, with a brief critical evaluation. Buber introduced the notion of "interhuman communication" in the 1940s. He focused profoundly, and unforgettably, on the question of what it means for one human being to communicate with another human being authentically, particularly in several essays and meditations gathered into these volumes which appeared between the 1940s and the 1970s, namely, *Between Man and Man* (1947), *The Knowledge of Man* (1965), and *I and Thou* (1970).

In *The Knowledge of Man* (1965, p.74), he confronts a dominant existentialist paradigm:

The only thing that matters is that for each of the two... the other happens as the particular other. That each becomes aware of the other and is thus related to him in such a way that he does not regard and use him as his object, but as his partner in a living event.... It is well known that some existentialists assert that the basic factor between men is that one is an object for the other. But so far as this is actually the case, the special reality of the interhuman, the fact of the contact, has been largely eliminated.

What is striking here is the distinction Buber introduces between the other as object, and the other as a particular human being, that is, as a particular, living, conscious, free, thinking human being, the other as "partner" in the event of a living encounter. The "special reality of the interhuman" then highlights the non-objectified nature of this other human being, with whom and in whom we find a living partner, in and through communication.

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