

Over the past fifteen or twenty years, the screen has come to dominate our lives. What used to be a means of entertainment--the movie screen, the television screen--is now a practical device of communication, as we come to rely more and more on our computers and smartphones. In other words, what used to be social intercourse is now also a type of entertainment. The effects of screen culture are profound.

We will trace what I call "screen culture" from its beginnings in silent film, through talkies, and the advent of television, and evolving technologies of cinema, to the laptops of today. Throughout, we will concern ourselves with what is unique to screen culture. Does visual meaning make us impatient with words? Does it make us impatient with actual life? Does the constant experience of fictional selves in an actual-seeming form onscreen make other people seem possessable, or manipulable, or disposable? Or does it make fantasy a muscle of upward mobility?

Finally, does the fact that the computer is never autonomous and alone like a book or a newspaper--a computer depends on electricity, the Internet depends on a modem, the screen contains links to a perpetually wakeful, watching universe of a billion eyes--does this always "on" aspect of the Internet socialize us away from ourselves? Can the Internet be used to deepen our original instincts, rather than assimilate them to what the Internet gurus call the "hive mind"? These are only some of the questions we will be asking, as we attempt to think critically about a medium--The Screen--that we have all come to take for granted.