

Aissa Santiso

Ways to Understand the Screen

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By way of introduction: Why bring the screen to light as a theme?

Recalling the critical eye of a good friend, a significant part of my art is to bring to light that which remains irrelevant to us, which draws attention to the natural in everyday life in way unusual to common sense.

Perhaps by purely associative coincidence I began to call my installations "light environments" projected in space. Defined by Brea in his book *La era Postmedia (The Postmedia Era)*, "screen art" is a line of work that typifies a formal modality within so-called new media. However, some modality is still indefinite within the pyramid of values of new media art. Could it be because of its singularity, its commonness, or naturalness?

At first, I saw a facility and time economy in digital media and the laptop as an efficient resource to produce works that could be transported in a small drive. Then the way in which this image or work was presented, video, depending on the medium through which it was present, was something that could contain a multiplicity not only of readings, but of possibilities for the work itself.

This simultaneity contained in a single piece gave me a flexibility when thinking about the work conceptually and this provoked in me a rethinking of what I believed as truth and reality in art. From there, out of sheer curiosity I began to think about the perceptual, psychological, and interpretative implications that they brought for me, and the experiential relationship I had with the laptop and the art that was produced with it, seen, assimilated, and felt through the screen.

The screen, as a cut of reality or plane of the physical present in which the individual abstracts oneself from physical presence

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and time to form part of another form of presence and time simultaneously, gives us an elasticity and wave articulation of thought in which the precepts and concepts apprehended begin to rethink, coming out of its immutability. Already the screen is not the one thing by which a message is enunciated so that we all attend to its order as it was in the past century. It has changed culturally and has transformed today with new advances in telecommunications and the internet, in a space of communicative freedom allowing a flexibility of the mind for the individual oneself to be the selector and manipulator of the information that one acquires and generates.

New relationships with the screen have changed the way we interact with one other, to communicate with each other, see the dynamics of time in relation to distance, and think about space. It has taught us a different way of dealing with the ephemeral, matter, the real, ethics, memory, concepts ... the way we think about ourselves, a metaphysical other and the organic. That is the space of freedom to which I am referring. With this multiplicity of functions, the screen itself became, and is, a necessity of our time. It is the vehicle by which the whole virtual techno world becomes present in the present, in all stages of everyday life, in the one in which the light appears illuminating its surface, being the screen surface and light at the same time.

Presence and absence

All visual information that comes to us today is made real through the screen. However, what makes the screen the chosen object by which the world begins to express itself? We realize today that it is not enough just to relate things by how they are given to us through consciousness in comparison with the object referent. Rather, we are dealing with a more volatile referent that exists in the simultaneity of being enduring and ephemeral in itself in its absence of matter.

The screen encompasses what Kant posited in the past—to a form of being in its sensitivity. Only the development of virtual

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techno and telecommunication now encloses the thought of being as being in itself and has expanded to all aspects outside of a human being. We live in constant proposals that exist not as matter but as presence of matter.

It could be that just naming the thing, project, or idea suffices for each person to understand the message and at the same time to experience their own vision or projection of form for each individual who thinks about it. That is understandable for all and all can produce it, but this brings another need, that of presenting, making present through the light those individualized projections of the message. There begins the game of the screen and its blur and incision in the most minute and common aspects of everyday life.

What seduces us on the screen, what makes us depend on it once we have it? If we think about the screen in its genesis, we could go back to its presence before the cinema, the dark camera, and the cultural dimension of light. Its essence can be light. Without the presence of light on the surface, there can be no screen. Since the screen is a clipping of light, a dimension towards another type of light that not only illuminates, but also causes an external image to appear to an internal space as an appearance that can be brought to a surface, it does not belong to a place; it is everywhere. The screen is contained in space; it is a presentation of a ray of natural light (principle to the *camera obscura*).

This presentation is ephemeral, is part of nature, and is its nature. Containing it has been our work not to depend so much on the randomness of nature and its processes. As it was with fire, kerosene, and electric light, to contain the light, which was to contain the sun, in itself contains a durability of lifetime, an idea of progress. Perhaps this tendency to contain and preserve, in this case the light that makes the image in everyday life, is one of the reasons why we project light on a surface that we call the screen as an object. Therefore, there is an absence of appearance but no presence when the screen

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light goes out. However, the presence is never completely absent; perhaps we are looking in the light, in the screen, as a way of integrating ourselves to nature, To understand its oscillatory processes, fluidity, organicity, gesture, and integration is closely related to the sense of seeing, to creating existences through vision and ways of perceiving oneself.

With it comes all that can still happen and be realized. It does not represent exhaustion, but rather the opposite, to degrees beyond the imagination itself. It has occupied two key functions, that of seeing and doing in temporal simultaneity. There is no time to compete, but is both. It offers the possibility to rectify, re-elaborate, and recycle what you are creating, and has allowed an acceleration of the mind and a self-awareness of its own processes in an empirical and automatic way, functions and accelerations that would not have been possible without the evolution of computer science, the personal computer, and the hybridization of the component "television" to those existing relationships with the internet and telecommunications.

Interface. Fractions of a process

The interface is a code that is shown as a mediator of two forms of language in continuous processes of simultaneous coding and decoding generated in the media. It has innumerable ways of showing itself. In writing, for example, the interface is the matter or surface that makes communication possible, when an orality is inscribed, immaterially, by means of writing referring to a visual semantic form that is material.

If we look at it from the point of view of language, we could say that the interface is found in the syntactic and cultural grammar, the final stage that connects the immaterial forms of sound emanating from the vocal cords as a phoneme with the syntax that would be the form of matter of that immateriality and the grapheme as its tangible form. It also involves relationships of the internal functioning of the body that are connected through nerve conducts that enable the responses of sending and entering external and internal signals (interfaces) with the other

organs of the body for the processing of that information received by the senses and cognitive processes. From a semiotic point of view, it would be a kind of micro-space at the edge or boundary by which two distinct semiospheres are connected.

Therefore, the technological interface is a phenomenological construction of the basic praxis of communication. Language becomes interface, just as inscription is the means used to make this language viable and materialize. Therefore, the interface is a common process that we exercise and manifest in the actions and means with which we communicate with others and with ourselves. We live exposed to it and its semantic games. The same is presented in both the language and the screen.

New technological means of communication have evidenced a massive expansion of the capacity of semantic mutability and the variability of the message that travels through the interface in as many ways and senses as possible, before completing the circulation cycle inscribed in a *fractalidad heterogénea*⁵⁷ capable of posing new challenges to the great corporations of the twenty-first century. The interface appears as a mediator between two forms of language, or two semantic codes, and is exposed to re-signification once an actor knows and interacts with these two types of codes.

The Big Blue Eye

In part, what motivates me to work with the idea of new media is that most speeches refer to what happens in the present, everything that can be raised and unveiled, transformed or mutated at that moment, in real time.

⁵⁷ “fractalidad heterogénea” from *Teorizando el media hoy* by Abdel Hernández San Juan, from his books *The Presentational Linguistic* and *The Intangible*, <http://www.digitalcultures.org/Library/EI%20Presentacional.htm>, <http://www.digitalcultures.org/Library/Lo%20Intangible.htm>

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In the pieces that make up the series *The Big Blue Eye* and others derived from the same operative, like *Horizonte 2* (*Horizon 2*) and *Moon*, they speak through this interface on the alterability of what is shown to us through the screen. This was raised by Juan Martin Prada on Jodi.org and in his book *Prácticas Artísticas de Internet en la Época de las Redes Sociales* (*Artistic Internet Practices in the Age of Social Networks*): "Critically and creatively investigate what is hidden behind the crystalline luminosity of our screens."

The YC waveform graphic is a visualizer used in editing programs to correct the luminance and color levels of the video sequence. Mainly there are two patterns: the luminance ranges of 7.5 of 100 IRE in the United States, and that of Japan that sets a luminance pattern in a range of up to 0 to 100 IRE. Each image or sequence before airing or circulation is first regulated by these schemes. These patterns established by the telecommunications industries have helped to create a perceptual and visual culture in contemporary societies in search of their own benefits, manipulating our perception through the image. This is the reason why I use this graphic as a pretext in several of my serial works as an operation.

The histogram, the program itself, presents itself projected onto a surface as visual and pre-textual motif in my pieces. *Horizontes*, for example, is presented as a video projection on a screen that consists of a minute-long looped video that shows an urban landscape, first documented and fragmented in twenty-four sequences to be seen through the YC waveform. It is an image of an abstract video of light and color that undulates in the margins of the scheme that proposes the graph of waves.

The Big Blue Eye consists of generating several environments, video installations, and site specifics that simplify a series of experiments that I have been developing around this graphic that alludes to numerous and heterogeneous motifs

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accompanying diverse urban landscapes. They sometimes reference great works of art and cinema like the blue paintings of Ives Klein, Nam June Paik with electronic moon, or *Fantasia* (1940).

This series of installations/environments are the result of a close of previous experiences working with this graph, where I poeticize the random dynamics that are observed and manipulated within a value system. The gesture is to show that mediatization enclosed in its own parable, in its own contemplation and seduction.

A work like *Acción 1* (*Action 1*) was an audiovisual experience that as a first stage sought to try to find communication between the computer and me. As a ritual, it consisted of facing histograms in a state of concentration during the time of the staging. While the piece invited spectators to hypnotic contemplation, these histograms were changing color after finishing a cycle of sequences that were repeated in a loop. In this action, the histogram represents the sequence of an orchestra director directing the tocata and fugue minor from Bach, taken from the experimental film *Fantasia*.

However, now as new data, the screen comes to be modified in my art. While previously using a conventional screen as a surface to project an immaterial image, in *Acción 1*, the screen becomes part of the experimentation, creating a three-dimensional structure distributed in space as an aesthetic form. At the same time, the immaterial projection loop now comes to be perceived on an intrinsic and imbricated spatial volume that in the end is summarized in only one screen.

This experimental principle is not only with the image, but also with the surface on which the image comes to be projected. This is not only circumscribed to the volume built into a space; it has come out of the white box, however, this time going to a surface that is given to us from reality, in which, in a specific piece, I select an old oxygen factory as a stage. The image is

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now projected on the ruins of what was this factory, on its walls and columns, providing the visitor with the facility to intervene in the creation of the environment from my laptop, changing everything that was around in the same moment the visitor enters and projects his or her own image on the surface.

In test two, the sequence translated to the histogram is the flashing red dot used by some of the radial recording studios. Ambient sounds are the ones that activate the movement of the sequence, transforming it into a living organism.

As Abdel Hernández points out in *Teorizando el media hoy* (*Theorizing Media Today*), “The world has been transformed into telecommunication itself; the recipients of languages have been transformed themselves into transmission devices that no longer mediate representations about the world of things, but transmit micro-representations infinitesimally as tiny narratives.”

In test three of *Moon*, the sound disappears, excluding the only element or track that connects it with the referent of its matrix. The reading of the same turns to its riddle, seduction, and mediatization. The sequence appears suspended in space as it is projected onto horizontal strips of paper.

This series is the presentation of a natural coexistence with the signal, with an electric impulse to which we disguise in an image. Through this presentation, I try to show mutability. Therefore, I do not consider these pieces as closed objects in themselves, but as laboratories open to the mobility of their contents.

Meanwhile from *Horizontes 2*, until arriving at the *The Big Blue Eye* series, the other pieces are moving from a precise idea towards randomness and rationality into space-temporal coexistence. So the relationships of art as experience and certain forms of video installation, multimedia, net art, and video games come to be part of a sensorium other that speaks

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more of sensory and behavioral relations with a different way of seeing and interacting with the space.

Ranciere posited as "a change of sensibility" that which makes the relationship between art and experience more attentive to sensory and intellectual meanings and impulses that arise in the space that the piece transforms. The spectator is in a more proxemic relationship with the site specific, or in site, in the artistic dynamics of today.

Already the circuit of art and its external agents is becoming part of a type of space and time art that is born of the consummation of multiple experiences, in a diversity of sensoriums that defines some of the new changes between art as a gesture and its socialization as a field. Today I recognize explicitly this relationship between the spectator and the work of art beyond aesthetic prejudices.

En lo alto...la luz se Despoja de su ropa. (In the High ... The Light Undresses) 5min. This is an intervention in Antigua Fábrica de Oxígeno de Althabana (Althabana Old Oxygen Factory), developed as a duo with musician Rafael Rodríguez. Through the intervention of light and sound, we seek a different way of relating to urban spaces. As a workshop, this intervention starts from a gesture of direct coexistence with the creation process and the physical space.

5MIN. This invites the viewer who unexpectedly happened to stop the senses for at least a few seconds to learn to see common space in another way. The passer-by intervenes in space either through passive contemplation or through interaction with the program via the webcam. The image was controlled by the music and by the spectator's play with the camera. The dates of the viewer's perception change when interacting with spaces forgotten in a natural state. Through the incidence of light, sound and gesture not only come to life, but this posture is transformed into a poetic halo to suggest a state of coexistence with the ruins of a frozen time. Everything

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generated was based on a closed circuit and data process in real time.

This action was not announced as art, nor was it an inauguration; anyone who passed near the intervened space was part of the gesture as long as he wanted to become part of it. The visitor was given a flashlight and the webcam to play with it for five minutes and thus be himself a participant and generator of the environment. The purpose of the one-day action was very simple, to call attention to spaces forgotten by their ruined condition by means of a change of perception when intervening with light. The images were generated in real time. Here reference is made to practices of environment, mapping, happening, and public intervention.

Something about the screen in contemporary art

If we go into the study of the screen, we will find that there have been few attempts on the subject. Usually criticism has focused on two main aspects. One analyzes the screen from the negative of the culture of mass media, obviating the cosmogonic field that it proposes to the senses within the culture. Another form comes from its relationship with the space of the cinema and video art, where for the latter the screen is not content, only demands attention for the critic that projects on it. However, there is another group that repairs the screen as a culture, exploring it as a form and as a concept. The sensory, aesthetic, and conceptual aspects that the screen produces as a phenomenon in itself modulate ways of doing that are no longer consistent with the conventional criticism of video art and video installation, nor with the culture of mass media. This repairs the harmonious relationship that connects spaces of the intellectual and pure art with the sensorial and aesthetic that comes from the form. There is no conflict between both parties.

The cymatics that come from the field of physics has become an experimental space in the visual arts and electronic music. It has become prevalent in art with dynamic representation of the

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modal frequencies of electronic sound in modular schemes of visualization of waves projected in space. Alva Noto is the alias of the German sound artist Carsten Nicolai who uses cymatics to represent sound in abstract audiovisual sequences of data in waveforms, oscillators, and tone generators. These sounds of electrical information transmissions such as fax tones, modem sounds, or phone clicks are sampled and organized into loops to which Nicolai adds other electronic sounds on different planes as the composition progresses. Ryoji Ikeda one of the most important artists of electronic music in Japan, has developed numerous installations and multimedia presentations, like *data.tron* [prototype] (2007) and *spectra II* (2002) where his work focuses on the minutiae of ultrasonics, visualizing its frequencies and other similar graphs. His work focuses on the perception of the time with which we are given the information that travels in the physical space. Together with Carsten Nicolai, she works on the collaborative project "*Cyclo.*," with programmed music and audiovisual modules for real-time synchronization of sound and image. Both take from video installation, video art, and mapping.

In my pieces, the histograms connect with cymatics, aesthetically displaying the presence of the digital world and its possibilities of visualizing processes that were not previously seen so easily. Although they differ in part from the field of research, since the cymatics seeks to represent mathematically through physics and technology sounds, in my case, the image is not a display of sound, but the image itself turns frequency. The multimedia facilities, interactive video installations, mapping, and urban micro-cinemas are thought to exist on site. The sensorial and synesthetic relationship as direct experience they offer in space is a transcendental component to understanding about what they are speaking. The art cannot be separated from the lived experience, since it exists in a short space-time. Many of these works maintain a harmonious and necessary relationship with the site specific and depend on the links that the space itself demands. Expanded screen genres

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are ways to socialize the mind space beyond the window or clipping of the desktop, showing its transcendence.

The pieces I make are no more than a consequence of that audiovisual culture that our relationship with the screen has created in the repetitive, mutable, and malleable, and in the synchronic of time as language; in the perceptive sublime, aesthetic, and retinal; in the relational that evokes within its existence in the nomadic and in its expanded image in space. It is a territory open to contents that are changing and reconfiguring with the passing of time, being in itself a complex and inexhaustible thematic space. This discourse on the present warrants our attention immediately.

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