The Black Mirror

**Dream, Screens, Paranoia, Media Magic, the Mythic Frequency, and Allegory**

Course document, Deicidus, Internet School of Magic

*As always, please leave questions and comments in the document if you do not mind sharing them with other students. This makes it much faster and easier for me to answer the questions, in-context. This document will be publically viewable.*

This week I will introduce a number of complex topics which will continue to frame and inform many topics in the future. The package I am putting them in is the concept of the Black Mirror, which refers to any screen or screen-like surface, which I will collectively refer to as screens or *interfaces*.

# Etymology

It’s worth thinking about this word “interface” and its etymology: “Between-the-face” or that which is between two faces. “Face” itself “probably is literally ‘form imposed on something’ and related to *facere* ‘to make’[[1]](#footnote-0). The concept of *faciality* has been incredibly well-analyzed by Deleuze & Guattari’s chapter “Year Zero: Faciality” in their book A Thousand Plateaus:

The face is not a universal. It is not even that of the white man; it is White Man himself, with his broad white cheeks and the black hole of his eyes. The face is Christ. The face is the typical European, what Ezra Pound called the average sensual man, in short, the ordinary everyday Erotomaniac (nineteenth-century psychiatrists were right to say that erotomania, unlike nymphomania, often remains pure and chaste; this is because it operates through the face and facialization). Not a universal, but *facies totius universi*. Jesus Christ superstar: he invented the facialization of the entire body and spread it everywhere (the Passion of Joan of Arc, in close-up). Thus the face is by nature an entirely specific idea, which did not preclude its acquiring and exercising the most general of functions: the function of biuni vocalization, or binarization. It has two aspects: the abstract machine of faciality, insofar as it is composed by a black hole/white wall system, functions in two ways, one of which concerns the units or elements, the other the choices. Under the first aspect, **the black hole acts as a central computer**, Christ, the third eye that moves across the wall or the white screen serving as general surface of reference. Regardless of the content one gives it, the machine constitutes a facial unit, an elementary face in biunivocal relation with another: it is a man or a woman, a rich person or a poor one, an adult or a child, a leader or a subject, "an x or a y." **The movement of the black hole across the screen, the trajectory of the third eye over the surface of reference,** constitutes so many dichotomies or arborescences, like four-eye machines made of elementary faces linked together two by two. The face of a teacher and a student, father and son, worker and boss, cop and citizen, accused and judge ("the judge had a stern expression, his eyes were horizonless..."): concrete individualized faces are produced and transformed on the basis of these units, these combinations of units—like the face of a rich child in which a military calling is already discernible, that West Point chin. You don't so much have a face as slide into one. (emphasis mine)

Phew! And that is just one paragraph of this incredible and intense book. We can already see some themes and media-magic (let’s call it) in the text as we are reading: notice how, particularly during the second bolded sentence, the text seems almost as if it is talking about your experience of reading the text as you are reading it—and now watching how *this* sentence itself begins to create a loop of self-reference and bring you and the text into a more present experience of each other. (One of my favorite meditation mantras is “What am I doing right now?” It quickly spirals into the meta.)

What we are looking at here is how a text can become about itself and the reader. *Anything* can be thought of as a text, including the room you are in right now, and any text can be read using a variety of interpretive approaches. Using the Black Mirror means being able to alter your interpretive approach in order to tune your perception into an interpretative approach which you desire to have access to or utilize for magical purposes.

So, let’s start thinking of any screen or screen-like surfaces as interfaces, and start to think of all interfaces as a face that we are facing, and see what that approach does for us. My research strongly suggests that this is the way our minds and bodies respond *already* to screens, art surfaces, and reality in general—our perception is set up much like a cell phone or videogame interface—except that when we deny or forget this low-level (meaning detailed, fundamental, close to the biology) fact of perception, we end up losing access to an enormous amount of fine-grained experience and information which allows us to navigate a malleable reality.

# Once Upon a Time

In my essay, When Worlds Collide: Multiple Reality and Education (available in [this collection](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17E9_Z7xT_-zRZveR-4xqfwJOfOjxs5fCR9ux98Wjxvw/edit?usp=sharing)), I talk about the TV show “Once Upon a Time” and my experience watching it with two muggles:

For example, I was watching the TV series “Once Upon a Time” with two friends. The premise of the show is that the evil Queen from Snow White has laid a terrible curse upon all of the storybook characters in her fantasy kingdom. The curse is that they are banished to our modern world and forget their storybook identities, thereby becoming trapped in an unmagical, mundane town where the Queen rules as mayor and Rumpelstiltskin uses contract law to extort citizens. The main characters of the series must help the people in the town to discover and remember their storybook identities so that they can break the curse.

As I have described it, the mythic content of this story should be obvious, and it is also relevant to the theme of this essay. As I watched the show, I enjoyed decoding this myth, seeing parallels between the Queen and our rulers, Rumpelstiltskin and our money system, and the plight of the townspeople and the plight of our world. These themes were so blatant in the show, and the mythic content so intricately planned-out, that I cannot believe they were unintentional. However, several episodes into the show I asked my friends (who are both staunch atheists) what they thought of these parallels and was met with confused looks. My friends had been consuming this story as a purely fanciful tale with no bearing upon reality—and ironically, the mythic content they were missing was about their ignorance of the mythic! I was flabbergasted.

In that excerpt, I talk about the skill of “mythic decoding”, that is, reading allegory. If we take a story and interpret it via analogy with a set of concrete referents, this decodes the story and makes it relevant to us in some way. These “concrete referents” can be myself and my life situation, politicians or celebrities, the people of Earth and their attempts to fly into space, me sitting in this room right now watching TV, my friends who are far away but who sometimes make cameos in my TV shows, another story from a book or movie I am comparing this TV show to, etc. By making a mapping between one story and another story, we form an analogy, and this analogy acts as a lever to produce a magical effect in our perception.

# The Mythic Frequency—Paranoia and Pronoia

I was originally calling this phenomenon “the paranoid frequency” but I switched to calling it “the mythic frequency” because it was a more neutral and expansive term. See also Castaneda’s term, which is beautifully discussed in the book *The Shaman’s Body*:

Shamans must pay attention to unusual events in themselves, their clients, and the environment. Since a shaman must be able to lead a normal everyday life, she also develops attention to everyday reality, a focus that don Juan calls the “first attention.” But a shaman must develop the attention for unusual processes—namely, the “second attention,” which perceives the dreaming process.

I use don Juan’s terms in a special manner. When you focus on someone with your first attention, you perceive the meaning of what they are saying. With the second attention, however, you notice aspects of their living dreaming, which I shall describe in the next section.

As the receiver of attention, you may know what it is like to be listened to or understood through someone’s first attention. But it can be even more fulfilling to be seen by someone giving you the second attention.

The many kinds of shamans and apprentices seem to divide up mostly into medicine and warrior, or spiritual, shamans and seekers. Medicine shamans develop their second attention for healing and helping others; most use their abilities for their clients without requiring the same awareness from the clients. This is perhaps why shamanism is so widely applicable; like modern medicine, it does not always require special consciousness from the recipient.

Warrior shamans develop their skills for self-knowledge, while medicine shamans focus mainly on therapeutic effects. In contrast to shamanism in general, the processworker shares responsibility for perceiving special states of consciousness with clients and tries to encourage them to develop their own second attention whenever possible.

…

Thus, the first attention is the awareness needed to accomplish goals, to do your daily work, to appear the way you want to appear. The second attention focuses upon things you normally neglect, upon external and internal, subjective, irrational experiences. The second attention is the key to the world of dreaming, the unconscious and dreamlike movements, the accidents and slips of the tongue that happen all day long.

These selections from the book make clear the distinction between “first attention” and “second attention”. I typed more of the page in because it also bears some relevance to our teaching situation here: Since I am a teacher of sapience, I see healing and teaching as two sides of the same coin, and I see teaching as a path to self-knowledge as well, which would make me a hybrid “Medicine-Warrior Shaman” in the classification above. Whether you seek healing, wisdom, or a skillset which will you allow you to heal or teach others, I hope I can be of help to you.

Now, we could call this “mythic frequency” that second attention perceives “paranoia” but that would only get at the experience when it is like a nightmare—negative and traumatizing. Dream is much broader than a nightmare—it is the entire Other World, and it pervades the waking world much more than most people think.

I wrote a lot about paranoia in [this reddit post](http://www.reddit.com/r/sorceryofthespectacle/comments/2r1piw/my_response_to_a_pm_from_someone_describing_ideas/), and I’d recommend reading it here before continuing (pay extra attention to my mention of “the realm of the jealous gods” in the comments). It contains a lot of useful language which can be applied to reading the screens in your life as Black Mirrors.

If you are having problems with paranoia, I’d recommend the book [Pronoia Is the Antidote for Paranoia](http://smile.amazon.com/Pronoia-Antidote-Paranoia-Revised-Expanded/dp/1556438184?sa-no-redirect=1).

What I am getting at here, is that the experience that so-called “schizophrenic” people commonly report: “My TV is talking to me, the radio is playing Satanic music, the news on TV is about me, and my friends are conspiring against me—the Men in Black are following me too!”—these experiences are experiences of **dreaming while awake**. And, despite all of my research, I am unable to determine whether they are completely real or ‘merely imagined’, that is, added to an experience as a form of illusion. My research has shown that during authentic magical experiences, these distinctions disappear and it becomes impossible to tell the difference between dreaming and waking realities—this is a place where sorcery happens—and watching TV with a Reader’s eye can help you to navigate there!

# Dreamtime

This is the place we want to get to, the meta-dimensional location we are trying to navigate to. When you reach dreamtime, reality gets… weird. And fun! And malleable. Interacting with screens—and remember that *anything* can be a screen, including your reality right now (as if you were already in a virtual reality suit)—as if they are magical interfaces allows us to begin receiving “quest” feedback which can lead us further into or out of dream.

There is a TV show called *Black Mirror* which inspired the title of this magical tool I am trying to describe. This is a British sci-fi/horror show where in each episode, a world is imagined where a near-future communication technology makes life a living hell. In one episode, a girl wakes up in front of a TV that is just showing static. She walks outside and is frightened to see that nobody will talk with her—they only stand still and take pictures of her with their cell phones, like some kind of zombie. It seems as if some kind of “signal” has gone out over the cell phones which caused everyone to become a cell phone zombie: they only look at her through their camera phones, taking pictures to upload to the Internet. The only other people she finds are hunters dressed as mad clowns, who kill the cell phone zombies for sport. This is a terrifying allegory of the way screens affect us as humans—the way they suck our attention and keep our bodies still and docile. The way they put us into a dream that is only visible to other cell-phone users. [This Hulu commercial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnDr18Q79Ek) shamelessly cashes in on this fear that is pervasive in our society: that screens are doing something fundamentally disturbing to your reality and our humanity.

Imagine what the world of adults must look like now to an infant: Mama suddenly freezes, stands still, stares at her black mirror, ignores me. I don’t know how long it’s been. She is still staring. Where did Mommy go? I can’t see her face. Her face is in her hand. Why am I alone? How long have I been here? Where did Mommy go and why is this body standing here ignoring me? Infants might experience the world of screens as a sort of unintelligible black box: they are either pulled in and fascinated, hyperstimulated by the light show and the too-bright children’s imagery that parents expose them to—or they see adults staring unintelligibly into little black boxes. I know my cat often got bored when I was on my computer—animals don’t see Image, so he would poke me and roll around to get my attention back out of the screen.

From a magical perspective, it’s possible that *all screens are black mirrors*. That is, how do we know that all screens are not actually black, not showing any light at all? Maybe all the light that we see from screens is dreamt-on, plastered over on top of a sleeping computer by our electricity and wifi-addled minds. Maybe all screens are simply direct windows onto Dreamtime, direct windows into the other world.

Life and Death, Dream and Wake, have been “broken up” for millennia—probably since the dawn of human history. With the dreamlike digital realm taking off at an ever-accelerating pace, are they finally getting back together? If the common person gets a technology that allows him to walk between dream and wake without leaving his living room, will the nature of life and death itself change? What will the world outside look like when he gets back?

# Conclusion & Activity Ideas

These are some incredibly broad and complex topics I have touched on in this meandering lesson, and I hope it makes some sense, what I am trying to get at. Your perception, especially your perception of *the meaning of screens* and their content, is a type of overlay onto the world around you. However, that overlay itself might be the original! (This is “as above, so below”.) By working with your interpretation of screens and stories, you can pivot your *perception* of the meaning and signification of those stories into radically new territories. This process allows you to navigate yourself into different locations within a higher-dimensional coordinate system.

Here are some ideas of activities you could do to starting applying the concepts in this lesson and seeing how they make sense in practice:

* Try to remember a TV show where you had a paranoid, “meta”, or allegorical viewing experience. Make a free choice (a random choice) of an episode from that series, or skip randomly through it if it is a movie. Watch at least a few minutes and see if anything in the video seems relevant to you or your life. Can you try to recall the experience you had before, where the video seemed to be talking to you or somehow personally meaningful?
* Turn on the radio in your car and begin speaking or singing with it. Can you make a conversation appear? **Turn the dial whenever it gets “stale” to keep the magic alive.**
* Remember one of your favorite childhood texts, and then try to interpret it as a political statement about the world today or a religious text about the nature of your soul. What parts of you or the world do the characters represent? What types of moral or political statements or plans of action does the narrative equip you with? (For example, A Series of Unfortunate Events is very clear and methodical in the way it equips both the characters and the reader with moral, narrative, ethical, and intellectual tools.)
* Replay a favorite videogame and take it either as a political narrative or a statement upon your life right now. What messages can you read into the text? (Character’s speech, action, etc.) If there is a villain, who would that villain be in real life? (Usually the answer is ‘capitalism’.)
* Take a look at the sequence [The Dawn of Man](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ML1OZCHixR0) from 2001: A Space Odyssey. Notice how it involves the viewer: as the visual analogy is made between sun, moon, and obelisk, and the ape learns this, the viewer is also being taught how the sequencing of the film forms analogies, so it gets meta. An [extensive essay series](http://www.collativelearning.com/2001%20chapter%205.html) explores how the obelisk may itself represent the cinema screen (it also looks like my cell phone, eerily).
* **Video:** My friend [Aminov Marvin](http://www.reddit.com/user/Monima_Merlin) made [Special Blend 4](https://vimeo.com/129280982), a hyperstitious video which allows you to both learn about and practice your *reading* of allegory.

Can you feel that dreamy, trancy haze from reading this text? That is itself the esoteric substance of decentered subjectivity or trance which I generated as I wrote this text. The trace of it has become embedded in the text and produced a lovely spacey effect, it seems—maybe it will help you to get into mood for *reading* videos and watching narratives for their additional *implications.* Enjoy!

# Warning

Inducing paranoid states can be dangerous because they can be hard to get out of. If you ever need assistance, please don’t hesitate to contact me, and I will talk you out of it, okay? Without a contact who can “speak myth”, that is, use both first and second attention simultaneously, it can be very difficult to leave paranoid states without special shamanic training or heavy tranquilizers. Most psychiatrists are not trained in speaking myth and will refuse to do so with patients (Jungian therapists and shamanic-influenced types being a glorious exception). This is why a religious practitioner such as myself can be helpful: I will listen to you and respect your state of mind, no matter what it is. And, in most cases, I will not only listen but I will be able to *hear* you, as well.

Additionally, I promise **I will never purposely embed secret or paranoid messages in my speech.** If you are ever experiencing these things from me, please simply let me know and I will clarify what I said and meant in order to help you become more grounded. (In psychiatry they call this “reality-checking”.) Perfect articulation and clarity in spoken language can help to keep things concrete and prevent extra messages—which can be disturbing—from sneaking in.

# Further reading

* If you haven’t already, check out [this reddit post](http://www.reddit.com/r/sorceryofthespectacle/comments/2r1piw/my_response_to_a_pm_from_someone_describing_ideas/) I wrote about paranoia. There is more in this [second reddit post](http://www.reddit.com/r/sorceryofthespectacle/comments/2xtixa/the_pleasurable_aspect_of_paranoia/) (I am raisondecalcul in the comments)
* My church, the Church of the SubGenius, calls the phenomenon discussed in this class ‘bulldada’. It is a central tenet and activity of the church and an introduction can be found [here](http://www.subgenius.com/pam1/pamphlet_p8.html).
* The books mentioned above, *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze & Guattari, and *The Shaman’s Body* by Arnold Mindell, are both excellent. *A Thousand Plateaus* is worth mulling over for years. Pdfs of many books can be found at libgen.org—here is a link to the search results for [*A Thousand Plateaus*](http://libgen.org/search?req=a+thousand+plateaus&nametype=orig&column%5B%5D=title&column%5B%5D=author&column%5B%5D=series&column%5B%5D=periodical&column%5B%5D=publisher&column%5B%5D=year)*.*
* My essay [Dear Google, Are You Listening?](http://ideaplay.org/dear-google-are-you-listening/) outlines a method of Google divination which can serve as an example of applying the idea in this lesson.
* The movie *Frequencies* (2013) is about language and the subliminal control it may exert on us—the film functions as a kind of mathematical proof of ultimate liberation and equivalence (the 3).

# Future Topics

This is already a lot to read, and the following topics are each a can of worms, so I will leave them for a later class. You can take them as tips for applying the concepts from this week.

* Allegory and strange loops—treading the staircase
* The HUD and questing—anything can be an interface
* Assumption and divination—the strength of your assumption determines the quality of the result
* Stillness and divination—the very next thing you see is always perfectly accurate

Comments? You can highlight text and press Control-Alt-M to leave a comment.

1. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=face [↑](#footnote-ref-0)