

ISI MIDSEM ASSIGNMENT

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1. In our discussions of the four scenarios involving the mirror, is the mirror, in its reflective function, the screen (in the sense that we have been developing the concept in class)? Why or why not? Produce a clear argument drawing on the four scenarios in Melchior-Bonnet. (6 marks)

Ans-

Mirrors **reflect reality and** function as **screens that structure perception**, shaping how individuals experience **self-awareness, power, desire, and transformation**. In class, we explored **four key mirror types**, each reflecting different psychological and philosophical conditions. These mirror types can also be mapped onto the philosophical frameworks of **Freud, Rousseau, Stendhal, and Goethe**, providing deeper insight into how shame and pleasure emerge in self-perception.

1) **The Mirror We See Ourselves In** (Freud – The Unconscious and the Ideal Self)

- This mirror acts as a **screen between reality and fantasy**, reflecting a person's physical appearance and a mediated version of their self-image.
- Key Psychological Condition: The "other self" seen in the mirror does not exist in reality it is a projection of how one perceives oneself.
- Connection to Shame & Pleasure:
 - Shame arises when the mirror exposes a gap between one's ideal self and real self (Freudian concept).
 - Pleasure is derived from seeing a controlled, refined version of oneself, similar to social media filters today.

2) **The Mirror Through Which Women on the Window See Footpath Walkers**

(Rousseau – Power, Surveillance, and the Corruption of Natural Self)

This mirror functions as **a screen of power and surveillance**, allowing one to observe another without being seen. This shows the interaction between madam basil and Rousseau

Key Condition: It creates a one-way perception dynamic, where the observer has control while the subject is unaware.

Connection to Shame & Pleasure:

- Pleasure comes from the **power of seeing without being seen**, reinforcing a sense of control.
- **Shame could arise if the observer realizes they are also being watched**, revealing the illusion of control.

3) The Mirror and the Lovers

- a) This type of mirror is linked to **desire and ambition**. Where both the people share the same identity along with common shame and reality

This mirror reflects a shared fantasy, where the couple sees themselves together in the near future, forming a unified imagined reality.

Key Condition: The reflection in the mirror **symbolizes an imagined reality**, not the actual present. (Narcissism, Romance, and the Trap of Self-Creation)

b) **Connection to Shame & Pleasure:**

- i) **Pleasure arises** from seeing an idealized, romantic future.
 - ii) **Shame emerges** if reality contradicts the fantasy, breaking the illusion.
 - iii) **Both individuals share the same fantasy**, visualizing their future together as one constructed reality.
- 2) **Pleasure** comes from mutual imagination, reinforcing emotional connection.
- 3) **Shame** exists in the potential **fragility of the dream** what if the fantasy does not become real?
- 4) **Scopophilia** (pleasure in looking) is **shared**, as both see a unified vision in the mirror.

4) The Mirror as device of visual pleasure and

- a) Unlike Scenario 3, where both share a single fantasy, here **each individual sees a different reality** in the same mirror. They sit together but perceive **separate versions of themselves and their relationship**.

Connection to Shame & Pleasure:

***Each individual sees a different fantasy**, they are together but perceive separate realities.

- i) **Pleasure** is isolated within **individual imaginations**, rather than being mutually reinforced.
- ii) **Shame** emerges from the **recognition of their separate visions**, which may indicate emotional or psychological disconnection.
- iii) **Scopophilia remains constant**, but here it **highlights divergence rather than unity**

Q2a)

<https://snapshot.canon-asia.com/article/eng/part-2-composition-basics-main-theme-038-sub-the-Me-and-triangular-composition>

Read the article with specific reference to the different modes of triangular composition. Given our discussions on the photographic image and the screen, how does triangular composition produce the effect of 'stability'? (5 marks)

Ans)

Mastering **composition basics like subject hierarchy and triangular composition** is essential for creating visually engaging and professional-looking photos.

Main & Secondary Subjects: The Gaze and Scopophilia

One of the key discussions in class was about scopophilia the pleasure derived from looking, and how it manifests in different ways:

Fetishistic Scopophilia → Focuses the viewer's intent onto the screen

Narcissistic Scopophilia → Throws the mirror back at you

In photography, the relationship between the main subject and the secondary subject is very similar to the dynamics of the gaze in cinema and screens.

When an image has a **clear, dominant subject, the viewer's gaze** is directed with intention, this is something similar to **fetishistic scopophilia**, where the object is deliberately framed for visual pleasure.

When an image has competing subjects or ambiguous hierarchy, the viewer becomes self-aware, constantly shifting their gaze this is closer to **narcissistic scopophilia**, where the image reflects at the viewer and forces engagement.

The Handle as a Mediator: How Composition Bridges Art & Reality: Triangular composition can be understood as a visual handle, it helps to anchor the image while also guiding the eye through the frame.

The composition of elements plays a crucial role in shaping the interpretation of a scene, as observed in class. If we aim to ensure the presence of specific elements while selectively highlighting certain aspects, we must carefully manage their visual emphasis. This concept was evident in the animated movie we discussed, where some details tend to fade from memory over time. Similarly, in the *Ambassadors* painting, the artist deliberately depicted the skull at an inclined angle once noticed, it becomes impossible to unsee.

Additionally, the use of a triangular composition in an image creates a sense of depth, allowing viewers to interpret the subject in a more dynamic and subjective manner.

The Role of Interaction in Composition

What is the difference between a classroom and a cinema hall?

What distinguishes a classroom from a cinema hall? This was a topic of discussion in our class.

A cinema hall promotes passive engagement, where the audience remains focused on a single screen in an immersive environment.

And composition play a very crucial role in this, this give people to draw a perspective, a reason to have a conversation on it and much more

To introduce stability and instability composition as used as follows-

Triangular composition is a technique in photography where subjects or elements within a frame are arranged to form a triangle, guiding the viewer's eye through the image. This arrangement not only adds visual interest but also imparts a sense of stability and balance to the photograph.

One common approach is the upright triangle, where the base is at the bottom, and the apex points upward. This orientation mirrors natural structures, like mountains or trees, giving more solid and strengthening feel on the contrary inverted triangles, with the apex at the bottom, can introduce tension or a sense of instability.

Composition plays a crucial role not just for Studium but also help in the punctumisation and understand the deep meaning of the photograph.

The concepts of **scopophilia, the handle, the imaginary screen, and mediated reality** are deeply connected to **photographic composition**. Just as **screens and mirrors alter perception, composition techniques shape how viewers engage with an image** whether through **triangular structures, subject hierarchy, or reflection-based illusions**.

2B. Article link (Read this to answer the question):

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/life-style/selfie-with-slipper-by-five-smiling-children-is-melting-hearts-online-724330/>

Consider the image in the article above (2B). One response that seems to capture a range of reactions to the image is the following: "This pics gone viral on the net. Cannot get the smile off my face, or the lump out of my throat". Drawing on the ideas we have developed so far, how would you explain the image's virality and the polarity of response (smile vs lump)? (8 marks)

Answer)

The image of five children joyfully posing for a selfie with a slipper instead of a smartphone became viral because it evokes a dual emotional response, simultaneously causing a smile and a lump in the throat. This polarity of reaction, joy vs. sadness, admiration vs. discomfort, can be explained using the concepts of mediation, scopophilia, image interference, and the imaginary screen we have discussed so far in the lecture.

1)Connection to Scopophilia:

This image **plays with scopophilic pleasure**, the act of looking at a joyful scene is pleasurable.

Scopophilic Pleasure:

•**Fetishistic scopophilia** (Object-focus): The image is aesthetically engaging, bright smiles, natural composition, a **beautiful moment of childhood joy**.

2) As an Imaginary Screen

We explored how **mirrors and screens function** differently in **Question 1** itself

A mirror gives a direct reflection of reality, making us self-aware, whereas A screen frames, mediates, and manipulates what we see, shaping perception.

In this image, the slipper acts as a 'screen', an imaginary gateway into digital culture,

The children are not **looking at an actual phone**, but they **perform the ritual of a selfie**.

Their **imagination fills the gap**, the slipper is more than an object, it is a **symbolic screen** that projects their digital aspirations.

Connection to the Imaginary Screen (Childhood Play)

In class, we have discussed

"For a child, a toy is not just a bunch of wood and cloth, it is a gateway to an imaginary screen."

Similarly,

The slipper is **not just a piece of footwear**, it **becomes an imagined phone**, just as a **stick becomes a sword for a child**.

The slipper, then, is not just an object, it is a **symbolic portal into digital culture**, much like a **screen**.

3) The Handle as a Mediator: The Slipper as a Symbolic Bridge

We discussed **Simmel's idea of the handle**, which acts as a **connection between art and the real world**.

The slipper in this image is a 'handle' because it mediates between two worlds:

1) The **real world of material lack** (the children don't have an actual phone).

2) The **symbolic world of digital culture** (they participate in the 'selfie' ritual despite this absence).

The slipper functions similarly, it **immerses the children in the fantasy of a selfie**, but to the viewer, it **reminds us of the reality of their socio-economic condition**.

4) The Uncanny concept in Freud's writing.

The uncanny happens when something familiar appears strange or unsettling.

The Holbein Effect reveals hidden layers within an image, shifting perception.

The children's joy feels universal, yet something is 'off', the absence of a phone disrupts our perception. This makes the image delightful and unsettling, a perfect example of an uncanny moment.

Compare this to **Holbein's painting "The Ambassadors"**, where a **hidden skull becomes visible at an angle**.

In this viral image, the **slipper is the skull**, once noticed, it **changes our perception of the entire image**.

5. The Smile vs. The Lump in the Throat: Emotional Contradiction Explained

The viewer experiences both joy and sadness, creating a viral paradox:

One can feel the feeling of joy as The children's happiness is infectious, showcasing innocence, creativity, and resilience.

On the other hand if we can observe the **Lump in the throat**

The slipper-as-phone reminds the viewer of socio-economic disparity and digital inequality.

This made us realise and help in **Self-Reflection** on that how privilege we are and forces viewer to confront there situation.

Studium and Punctum in the Viral Image of the "Slipper Selfie"

- **Studium:** The general, structured meaning of the image is its **depiction of joy, childhood creativity, and resilience**. The viewer intellectually understands the **socio-economic context**, appreciating the children's ability to find happiness despite material lack. It reflects a broader commentary on **digital culture, aspiration, and play**.
- **Punctum:** The **slipper-as-phone** acts as an emotional trigger, it disrupts expectations and **"pierces" the viewer's perception**. At first, the image **brings a smile**, but once the absence of a real phone is noticed, it creates **a lump in the throat**. This sudden shift in awareness where joy turns into reflection on inequality is the image's **punctum**, making it unforgettable.

3a.

When I googled “Why do you binge-watch,” I got the following response:
 “People binge-watch because it triggers the release of dopamine in the brain, creating a pleasurable feeling that encourages continued engagement with the activity”

Given what we have learned in this course so far, how would you critically probe this response? Do you have a different explanation for binge-watching, drawing on ideas we have discussed in class? (6 marks)

Ans)

The **dopamine explanation** assumes that **Binge-watching is purely an evolutionary biological reaction** (like eating sugar).

While it is true that pleasurable activities **trigger dopamine release**, this explanation **ignores the structural, psychological, and technological factors** that shape binge-watching behavior. Rather than treating it as a **simple brain reaction**, we must understand it as a **mediated experience influenced by the platform’s design, the screen’s role in perception, and our engagement with narrative structures**.

From the perspective of **scopophilia**-

As discussed in class, binge-watching aligns closely with **passive visual pleasure**. Traditional **cinema structures scopophilia through a fixed narrative and a defined viewing time**, whereas Netflix and other streaming platforms **manipulate scopophilic pleasure by eliminating barriers between episodes**, keeping viewers in a **continuous cycle of watching**. Unlike watching a single movie in a theater, binge-watching does not require **conscious re-engagement** the next episode starts automatically, creating an environment where **viewers remain trapped in scopophilic pleasure without the active decision to continue**

Additionally, we can analyze binge-watching using **Simmel’s concept of the handle**, where an interface **bridges real-world action with aesthetic experience**. In older media formats such as **DVDs or downloaded content**, the viewer had to actively select the next episode, **creating natural stopping points**. Netflix, however, **removes these handles**, replacing them with an interface that makes binge-watching almost **effortless**, autoplay, personalized recommendations, and infinite scrolling function as **invisible mechanisms that sustain engagement**.

Moreover, binge-watching also relates to **the uncanny and image interference**, as it disrupts **perception of time**. Many binge-watchers **report losing track of time**, realizing only after hours that they have been continuously watching. This moment, when a person becomes **aware of how long they have been engaged**, resembles the **uncanny realization Freud describes**.

Thus, rather than seeing binge-watching as **purely a dopamine-driven activity**, it is more accurate to view it as a **mediated, structured, engineered well directed and intentional**

physiological experience. The interface is designed in such a manner that it will dictate engagement, the screen alters perception, and the viewer's agency is subtly controlled through invisible technological structures.

3B. What is the role of the netflix interface in binge-watching, compared to earlier ways of consuming media (cinema theater, home dvd rental and downloaded content watched on computers)? Keep in mind our discussions on the push button interface. (5 marks)

Ans) The Netflix interface **fundamentally alters the experience of media consumption** by removing **barriers to engagement** and automating the process of watching. Unlike earlier ways of consuming media, such as **cinema theaters, home DVD rentals, and downloaded content on computers**, Netflix creates an **environment where stopping becomes unnatural**, and the interface itself **shapes user behavior**. This transformation can be understood through the **concept of the "push button" moment**,

A **"push button moment"** is an instant trigger that activates an unconscious response, whether it be **pleasure, shame, fear, or self-recognition**. In Freud's case, seeing his reflection **pushed the button of uncanny fear**, making him momentarily believe an intruder was in his train compartment. Similarly, **a mirror can press the button of self-awareness**, making someone suddenly **confront their own appearance with pleasure or shame**. Netflix's interface operates in a similar way, it acts as a **technological push button that triggers binge-watching by eliminating conscious decision-making**, creating a **frictionless loop of engagement that users may only recognize after the fact**.

Earlier forms of media consumption were **structured around natural stopping points**. **Cinema theaters required active effort. Home DVD rentals required a physical exchange**, and even downloaded computer content demanded **manual selection and organization**. In each case, the user had **greater control** over their engagement because the **platform did not dictate consumption**. Netflix, however, functions differently it is designed to **remove stopping cues and activate binge-watching through push-button triggers**.

One of the most significant push-button mechanisms on Netflix is **autoplay**. The moment an episode ends, the next one **automatically starts** before the viewer can make a conscious decision to stop. This **pushes the button of passive engagement**, much like Freud's uncanny mirror moment it **activates a response before awareness catches up**. Similarly, **Netflix's recommendation algorithms act as another push-button trigger**, curating content in a way that **makes stopping feel unnatural**. Unlike earlier media, where users had to actively search for content,

Netflix **pushes content toward the user**, triggering engagement **before they even realize it**.