

## The imaginary screen.

### Gestures and dispositives in filmic representations of hypnosis (1915-1922)

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#### 1. Hypnosis as a metaphor of the filmic dispositive in early cinema

Between the 1910s and 1920s, the filmic iconography of the hypnotic induction is changing. Indeed, the hypnotist is no longer represented as pointing his fingers to the subject in order to hit him with a shot of magnetic fluid; rather, subjects fall into hypnosis as a consequence of the gesture of the hypnotist's hand slowly and repeatedly passing in front of their eyes. In fact, other hypnotical procedures are represented in the films (the gaze of the hypnotist, shining objects, etc.); however, the gesture of the hypnotist's hand is particularly interesting since, although it remains marginal among the extra-cinematographic hypnotical practices, it is widely staged in many movies of the period.

I argue that this transformation is connected with a more complex background. Indeed, within this period of time, films stage the setting of hypnosis as a clear metaphor for the cinematic dispositive; accordingly, through the representation of hypnosis these movies both mirror and shape in imaginary terms the film viewer experience and its conditions<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> On the relationship between cinema and hypnosis, especially in reference to the early cinema, see Stefan Andriopoulos, *Besessene Körper. Hypnose, Körperschaften und die Erfindung des Kinos*, München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2000, English translation: *Possessed. Hypnotic Crimes, Corporate Fiction, and the Invention of Cinema*, Chicago – London, University of Chicago Press, 2008; Id. "Suggestion, "Hypnosis, and Crime. Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)", in William Noah Isemberg (ed.), *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 13-32; Rae Beth Gordon, "Hypnotism, Sonnambulism, and Early

this “film work” is not isolated, since a number of journalistic and theoretical contributions in the same period seek to make sense of the film experience through the use of the hypnotic metaphor<sup>2</sup>.

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Cinema”, in Ead., *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis. From Cabaret to Early Cinema*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 127 – 166; Ruggero Eugeni, *La relazione di incanto. Studi su cinema e ipnosi*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2002; Id., “The Phantom of the Relationship, the Poverty of Cinema and the Excesses of Hypnosis”, in Leonardo Quaresima (ed.), “Dead Ends/Impasses”, *Cinema & Cie, International Film Studies Journal*, n. 2, spring 2003, pp. 47-53; Raymond Bellour, *Le Corps du cinéma. Hypnoses, émotions, animalités*, Paris, POL Traffic, 2009. See also Jörg Schweinitz, «Immersion as Hypnosis The Evolution of a Theoretical and Cinematic Stereotype in Silent Cinema», in Leonardo Quaresima, Valentina Re (a cura di), *In The Very Beginning, At The Very End: On the History of Film Theories*, Udine, Forum, 2010, pp. 39-44; Pasi Väliäho, *Mapping the Moving Image: Gesture, Thought and Cinema Circa 1900*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2010; Mireille Berton, “Cinéma et hypnose”, in *1895. Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze. Revue de l'association française de recherche sur l'histoire du cinéma*, n. 58, 2009, pp. 154-168; Id., “Hypnose” in Antoine de Baeque e Philippe Chevallier (Dir.), *Dictionnaire de la pensée du cinéma*, Paris, P.U.F., 2012, pp. 364-366.

<sup>2</sup> See, by way of example, two well-known passages, situated at the beginning and end of the period we consider. On the one hand we find Alfred Döblin, (“Das Theater der kleinen Leute” (1908), reprinted in Anton Kaes (ed.), *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909-1929*, Tübingen – Munich, Niemeyer, 1978, pp. 37-38. cit. and translated in Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After Germany's Historical Imaginary*, London – New York, 2000):

Squeezed in the corner, but carried away by what they see, their unchaste fingers stop pawing each others' bodies. Consumptive children breathe flat gasps of air, and shiver quietly through every bout of fever. The men, exuding unpleasant smells, stare until their eyes are ready to pop out of their sockets. The women, in stale-smelling clothes; the painted street whores are bent forward on the edge of their seats, oblivious to the fact that their headscarves have loosened and are sliding down their necks.

On the other side we can consider the equally well-known essay by Jean Epstein “Grossissement”, in Id., *Bonjour Cinéma*, Paris, Editions de la Sirène, 1921, pp. 93-108 (“Magnification,” trans. by Stuart Liebman, in Richard Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907-1939. Vol. 1: 1907-1929*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 235-236); cfr. anche Stuart Liebman, «Novelty and Poiesis in the Early Writings of Jean Epstein», in Sarah Keller, Jason N. Paul (eds.), *Jean Epstein Critical Essays and New Translations*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2012, pp.73-92 :

I will never find the way to say how much I love American close-ups! Point blank. A head suddenly appears on screen and drama, now face to face, seems to address me personally and swells with an extraordinary intensity. I am hypnotized. Now the tragedy is anatomical. The decor of the fifth act is this corner of a cheek torn by a smile. Waiting for the moment when 1,000 meters of intrigue converge in a muscular denouement satisfies me more than the rest of the film. Muscular preambles ripple beneath the skin. Shadows shift, tremble, hesitate. Something is being decided. A breeze of emotion underlines the mouth with clouds. The orography of the face vacillates. Seismic shocks begin. Capillary wrinkles try to split the fault. A wave carries them away. Crescendo. A muscle bristles. The lip is laced with tics like a theater curtain. Everything is movement, imbalance, crisis. Crack. The mouth gives way, like a ripe fruit splitting

If we assume this point of view, we can interpret the aforementioned gesture of the hypnotist as a *specific reference to the movie screen*: indeed, the hand slowly passed in front of subject's eyes raises the issues of the presence of the screen within the cinematic dispositive; of its relationship with the images of the film on the one hand, and with the viewer on the other one; of its limits, its potential and its excesses<sup>3</sup>.

I will proceed by examining first the transformation of the procedures of hypnotic induction in early cinema and their relationships with the history of extra cinematographic practices of hypnotism. Then, I will analyze a group of movies representing the hand gesture of

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open. As if slit by a scalpel, a keyboard-like smile cuts laterally into the corner of the lips. The close-up is the soul of the cinema.

Undeniably, the framework of theoretical references to the relationship between cinema and hypnosis (or suggestion) in this span of years is very large. I just mention Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1916, now in Id., *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, edited by Allan Langdale, New York – London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 45-162, and the various journalistic and theoretical contributions referred by Beth Gordon's and Andriopoulos' works cited in the previous note; see also references in Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon. Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1991, and Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse. Writing About Cinema in the Modernist Period*, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> My hypothesis is therefore connected to media archeology speculations on cinema screens, yet from a particular point of view: I do not consider the technical aspects, but purely imaginary and physical features of screens and dispositives. For some analysis on screens in media archeology see Lev Manovich, *An Archeology of a Computer Screen*, Moscow, Soros Center for the Contemporary Art, 1995; Id., Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge (Mass.), The MIT Press, 2001; Huhtamo, "Elements of Screenology: Toward an Archaeology of the Screen", in *ICONICS: International Studies of Modern Image*, Tokyo, The Japan Society of Image Arts and Sciences, vol. VII (2004): 31-82; Id. "Messages on the Wall- An Archaeology of Public Media Displays", in Scott McQuire, Meredith Martin, Sabine Niederer (eds.), *The Urban Screen Reader*, Amsterdam, Institute of Network Cultures, 2009, pp. 15-28; Erkki Huhtamo, Jussi Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology. Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press, 2011; Mauro Carbone, Anna Caterina Dalmaso (a cura di), *Schermi / Screens in Rivista di estetica*, LIV, 55 (1/2014), pp. 21-182. Many recent phenomenological analysis of screens are: Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic 'Presence'" in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer. (Eds.), *Materialities of Communication*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, pp. 83-106, now in Andrew Utterson (ed.), *Technology and Culture, the Film Reader*, Abingdon - New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 127-142; Lucas D. Introna, Fernando M. Ilharco, "On the Meaning of Screens: Towards a Phenomenological Account of Screenness", in *Human Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Jan., 2006), pp. 57-76; Robert Pepperell, Michael Punt (ed.), *Screen Consciousness: Cinema, Mind and World*, New York, Rodopi, 2006; Giuliana Bruno, *Surface. Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*, Chicago – London, University of Chicago Press, 2014; Seung-hoon Jeong, "The Body Interface", in Id., *Cinematic Interfaces. Film Theory after New Media*, New York – London, 2013, pp. 61-103; Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015.

the hypnotist and I will try to consider what kind of “screen theory” emerges from them. Finally, I will shortly consider how such an iconographical construction constitutes a “symbolic” heritage (in the sense Aby Warburg gives to these terms in his theoretical conception of cultural transmission), capable of surviving well beyond its origins throughout the subsequent history of cinema.

## 2. The hypnotist’s hand

The history of mesmerism first and then of hypnosis, presents different methods of trance induction. Between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the first season of mesmerism insists on "passes", that is a complex system of touches exercised by the mesmerist on the body of the patient. The purpose of this procedure is a transmission (a "projection") of magnetic fluid from the fingertips of the mesmerist to the painful areas of the patient’s body; accordingly, the widespread iconography shows the mesmerist pointing his hands upon the subject's face to transmit magnetic fluid.

The transition from mesmerism to hypnosis taking place in the second half of the nineteenth century officially bans fluidic theories from scientific considerations; curiously enough, however, the gesture of the hand pointing to the patient is still frequently used. Thus, the same gesture is found in the «Iconographie [graphique et] photographique de la Salpêtrière» (Graphic and photographic iconography of Salpêtrière), documenting Jean-Martin Charcot’s and his students’ practices with hypnosis and hysteria within the Paris insane asylum. At the same time, new methods arise, such as the concentration of the gaze on a bright object (or, alternatively, on the eyes of the doctor)<sup>4</sup> and the induction of sudden aural or visual shocks<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> This method is first introduced by James Braid, in the book that gives hypnosis this very name and re-launches its scientific glamour: James Braid, *Neurypnology, or Rationale of Nervous Sleep Considered in Relation with Animal Magnetism*, London - Edinburgh, John Churchill - Adam & Charles Black, 1843.

<sup>5</sup> Bourneville et P. Regnard, *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière, service de M. Charcot, vol. 3*, Paris, Bureaux du Progrès Médical – Delahaye & Lecrosnier, 1879-1880, pp. 149 et seq. In particular, according to the “Paris School”, the shock or the fixation of the eyes produce a *cataleptic* state (potentially both passive and active), from which the patient would pass through the closing of his or her eyelids in a state of *lethargy* (basically passive) and then by a hand pressure on certain parts of the body to a *somnambulistic* state (basically active).

In this context, the “alternative” gesture of the doctor’s hand passed before the eyes of the patient is not entirely absent, but it is undoubtedly much less used (see fig. 1)<sup>6</sup>; nonetheless, it is extremely interesting to analyze the two cases in which it emerges. The first one is the work of a heretic mesmerist such as the Abbé de Faria. The abbot, operating in Paris in the early nineteenth century, anticipated the idea of “suggestion”, typical of the end of the century; thus, according to him, the state of trance is not due to an exchange of magnetic fluid, but it rather depends on a self-suggestion of sleep walkers (the “époptes” or seers, in Faria’s terms), who plunge themselves in a state of deep and abnormal concentration. Consequently, also the methods of trance induction are different:

Je m'assure d'avance, d'après les signes externes qui seront indiqués en temps et lieu, de ceux qui ont des dispositions requises à la concentration occasionnelle, et en les plaçant commodément sur un siège, [...] je leur montre à quelque distance ma main ouverte, en leur recommandant de la regarder fixement, sans en détourner les yeux et sans entraver la liberté de leur clignotement. [...] Si je m'aperçois qu'ils ne clignent pas des yeux, je rapproche graduellement ma main ouverte, à quelques doigts de distance [...].<sup>7</sup>

The second case is the Nancy school, which directly competes with the Paris school in theorizing and practicing hypnotism at the end of the nineteenth century. According to Hyppolite Bernheim, the school’s founder, hypnosis is not linked to hysteria and other inherited mental diseases (like in Charcot’s conception): rather, hypnosis is nothing but a case of

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<sup>6</sup> The use of the hand before the eyes is mentioned among the means used by the Marquis of Puységur (the main discoverer of the “magnetic sleep” phenomenon at the end of the eighteenth century), but it is considered perfectly interchangeable with other methods: “M. de Puységur ne paraît mettre aucune importance au choix des procédés; il pense qu’il suffit de toucher un malade ou de présenter sa main devant lui pour produire les effets les plus salutaires, et qu’on porte naturellement la main sur la partie qui souffre” Joseph Philippe François Deleuze, *Histoire critique du magnétisme animal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 tomes, Paris, Chez Belin – Leprieur Librairie, 1819, p. 103 ; see also Joseph Philippe François Deleuze, *Instruction pratique sur le magnétisme animal*, Nouvelle édition, Paris, Germer Baillière, 1850 (ed. or. 1825; 2<sup>ème</sup> éd. 1846), pp. 20 et seq.

<sup>7</sup> Abbé de Faria, *De la cause du sommeil lucide, ou Étude de la nature de l’homme*, Réimpression de l’édition de 1819, Préface et introduction par Dr. D. G. Dalgado, Paris, Henri Jouve, 1906, p. 152, emphasis added. Richer and La Tourette in their survey of the different processes of induction, emphasize the closeness between Braid’s method of the brilliant object and Faria’s use of the hand, since both tend to focus subject’s attention « En résumé, la fixation du regard et de l’attention du sujet, jointe à l’idée qu’on lui suggère qu’il peut et va dormir, forme la base de toutes les méthodes de l’hypnotisation que nous appellerons *volontaires* » Paul Richer, Gilles de la Tourette, “Hypnotisme”, in Amédée Dechambre, Léon Lereboullet (directeurs), *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des Sciences Médicales*, quatrième série, Tome XV, Paris, Masson - Asselin et Houzeau, 1889, pp 67-132, cit. at p. 77.

heightened *suggestion*, which is in turn a commonly widespread psychic condition in social situations. Within this theoretical context, the method of the hand passed before the patient's eyes appears once again:

I proceed to hypnotize in the following manner. [...] I say, "Look at me and think of nothing but sleep. Your eyelids begin to feel heavy, your eyes tired. They begin to wink, they are getting moist, you cannot see distinctly. They are closed." Some patients close their eyes and are asleep immediately. With others, I have to repeat, lay more stress on what I say, and even make gestures. *It makes little difference what sort of gesture is made.* I hold two fingers of my right hand before the patient's eyes and ask him to look at them, or *pass both hands several times before his eyes*, or persuade him to fix his eyes upon mine, endeavoring, at the same time, to concentrate his attention upon the idea of sleep. I say, "Your lids are closing, you cannot open them again. Your arms feel heavy, so do your legs. You cannot feel anything. Your hands are motionless. You see nothing, you are going to sleep." And I add in a commanding tone. "Sleep." This word often turns the balance. The eyes close and the patient sleeps or is at least influenced<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Hippolyte Bernheim, *De la suggestion dans l'état hypnotique et dans l'état de veille*, Paris, Octave Doin, 1884 (nouvelle éditions, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004), p. 5 ed. or. (*Suggestive Therapeutics: A Treatise on the Nature and Use of Hypnotism*, Translated from the second and revised French edition by Christian A. Herter, New York - London G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889, reprinted in 2014, pp. 1-2, emphasis added. On the contrary, and against expectations, there is no evidence of the use of this gesture within stage hypnotists practices, during the great season that sees them protagonists in the second half of the nineteenth century; indeed, in these cases the use of the hypnotist-showman's gaze prevails (a witness speaks of the "régard fascinateur, presque phosphorescent" by Donato: see M. Strohl, in *Val-de-Ruz*, 30 octobre 1880, cited in Joseph-Rémi-Léopold Delboeuf, *Magnétiseurs et médecins*, Paris, Alcan, 1890, p. 96), or the return of more traditional magnetic "passes", even for the strong survival in this area of the ancient fluidic theories (see for example the testimony of L. F. Lafontaine de la Couronne, *L'Art de Magnétiser*, Auxerre, Imprimerie Albert Lanier, 1905, pp. 87 ss.).



**Fig. 1: Da Jean Filiatre, *L'enseignement facile et rapide de l'hypnotisme par l'image* (Cent vingt-huit gravures hors texte). Tous les procédés pratiques des Magnétiseurs et Hypnotiseurs anciens et modernes du monde entier mis immédiatement à la portée de tous, Librairie Fischbacher, Paris 1910**

In summary, the gesture of the hands passed before the patient's eyes is relatively little practiced in procedures for induction of the hypnotic state<sup>9</sup>; moreover, when used, it is linked to

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<sup>9</sup> See also the later evidence provided by Freud: "Let us consider how hypnosis is induced. The hypnotist asserts that he is in possession of a mysterious power that robs the subject of his own will; or, which is the same thing, the subject believe it of him. [...] And how does he manifest it? By telling the subject to look him in the eyes; his most typical method of hypnotizing is by his look. [...] It is true that hypnosis can also be evoked in other ways, for instance by fixing the eyes upon a bright object or by listening to a monotonous sound. This is misleading and has given occasion to inadequate physiological theories. In point of fact these procedures merely serve to divert conscious attention and to hold it riveted. The situation is the same as if the hypnotist had said to the subject: 'Now concern yourself exclusively with my person; the rest of the world is quite uninteresting.'" Sigmund Freud *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, Leipzig - Vienna - Zurich, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1921, transl. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 voll., London, Hogarth Press, 1956-1984, pp. 3817-3818.

A widely popular handbook summarizing a huge number of methods with a large appendix of photographic images is Jean Filiatre, *L'enseignement facile et rapide de l'hypnotisme par l'image* (Cent vingt-huit gravures hors texte). Tous les procédés pratiques des Magnétiseurs et Hypnotiseurs anciens et modernes du monde entier mis immédiatement à la portée de tous, Paris, Librairie Fischbacher, 1910 ca., pp. 75 ss.

a “materialistic” and positivistic conception of hypnotism as a *practice of engineering of attention and suggestion* of the social subject.

### 3. Pictures and shadows

The cinema of the early times displays different representations of hypnosis. When the process of trance induction is staged, the “classical” gesture of the hands pointed to the body of the hypnotized subject is prevailing - see for instance *Chez le magnetiste* (Alice Guy Blaché, Fr., 1897) or *L'antre des esprits* (George Méliès, Fr., 1901)<sup>10</sup>.

Towards the middle of the second decade of twentieth century, the filmic iconography of hypnosis begins to expand and complicate. An important example is *Trilby* (Maurice Tourneur, USA, 1915), one of the first film translations of the eponymous bestseller novel by George du Maurier published in 1894. The plot is centered on the magnetic couple of Svengali, an ambiguous and haunting musician and hypnotist, and Trilby, a humble and docile girl who under Svengali’s hypnotic spell turns into a great and famous opera singer. I will focus on the first scene of hypnotic induction.

Trilby is posing as a model for her boyfriend, the painter Little Billee, when she is troubled by a sudden headache – very similar indeed to a hysterical attack -. Svengali, called to help the girl, hypnotizes her. Once Trilby is seated in front of him, the man directs the hand from his own eyes to those of the girl, with one or two fingers pointed; then, he moves repeatedly and alternately the two hands with open palms in front of the girls’ face; hereby, the girl first composes her body in a *cataleptic* state, then she is moved by a sudden animation, as if staring at a series of invisible images. Conversely, at the end of the sequence, after the violent backlash of Little Billee and the group of other painters living with him, Svengali brings Trilby back to reality by passing twice his hands in front of his face, as to dissolve an invisible curtain.

In this case, the gesture of Svengali’s hands seems to compose and to decompose before Trilby’s eyes a sort of invisible surface, that is a kind of veil or curtain able both to isolate the subject from the social environment, and to receive a series of images projected on it by the subject’s mind (see fig. 2). Moreover, this suggestion is accentuated by the presence in the same sequence of two surfaces capable of collecting and reviving images: first, the shower curtain

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<sup>10</sup> In addition, see also *Une scène d'hypnotisme I e II* (Cat. Lumière, Fr., 1896), *Mesmerist and country couple* (T. A. Edison, Usa, 1899), 1904; *Le Baquet De Mesmer* (George Méliès, 1904).

behind which one of the painters' silhouette appears in shadow just before the sequence of Trilby's hypnosis; second, the picture that the young painter in love with Trilby is painting in the foreground on the first part of the sequence<sup>11</sup>.



**Fig. 2: Still from *Trilby* (Maurice Tourneur, Usa, 1915)**

A less obvious but not less interesting example can be found in *Les Vampires, Episode 6 Les yeux qui fascinent* (*Hypnotic eyes*, Louis Feuillade, Fr., 1916). In this episode of the popular film serial, criminal Moreno hypnotizes his maid, then kidnaps Irma Vep (a femme fatale in the service of the Grand Vampire), and replaces her with the hypnotized girl. In the sequence of the exchange between the two women, Moreno, after having intoxicated Irma Vep with chloroform, extracts his waitress from a trunk, already immersed in a state of hypnotic *lethargy*. As the waitress stands before him, the man passes twice his open hand in front of her face; consequently, the

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<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, the gesture of Svengali also reminds the film projector's shutter, since it alternates light and shadow on the woman's face. For the importance of the visual and pictorial aspects of Tourneur's film see Kaveh Askari, "Trilby's Community of Sensation", in Vanessa Toulmine, Simon Popple (eds.), *Visual delights. Two. Exhibitions and receptions*, John Libbey Publishing, Eastleigh 2005, pp. 60-72; for a more general discussion see Ruggero Eugeni "Voce, scena, suggestione in 'Trilby'. La donna ipnotizzata dal romanzo di George du Maurier ai film di Maurice Tourneur e Archie Mayo (1894-1931)", in Roberta Carpani, Laura Peja, Laura Aimò (eds.), *Scena madre. Donne personaggi e interpreti della realtà. Studi per Annamaria Cascetta*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2014, pp. 417-426.

woman moves from the *lethargic* to a *catatonic* state (according to Charcot's terms): indeed, she becomes an automaton manipulated by Moreno's imperious gestures (see fig. 3)<sup>12</sup>.

In this case, the gesture of the hand passed before the woman's eyes does not induce hypnosis, but rather *reactivates* a state of control exercised by the (male) hypnotist on the (female) hypnotized. More exactly, it turns a still body into a moving (and controlled) one. Moreover, we should not forget a series of not-too-implicit meta-cinematographic references within this sequence: both the figures of the shadows (the masked silhouettes of Irma Vep and the waitress) and these of the doubles (the two equal and exchangeable women, the mirrors, etc.) allude in various ways to the status of cinematic images. Within this context of references, the gesture of Moreno's hands alludes to a twofold power of cinematic dispositive: on the one side, the power to turn still shadows into moving and living images (the waitress as a figure of the cinematic image); on the other one, the power to control, through the appearing of these images on the screen, the "automated" viewer's body and its reactions (the waitress as a figure of the viewer's body, in front of the screen). To sum up, the hypnotist appears as a *grand imagier*, able to activate, deactivate, reactivate, and regulate movements and actions of both images and bodies.

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<sup>12</sup> As Richer and Tourette write about the hypnotized subject in catatonic state (an intermediate stage between lethargy and somnambulism: the "awakening" of the waitress is a very shift from lethargy to catatonia, in the terms of Paris School): "le mouvement chez un sujet hypnotisé peut être provoqué directement, par le simple commandement, sans perdre son caractère réflexe et automatique. L'hypnotisé devient alors véritablement *la chose de l'expérimentateur*. Un mot suffit, et il s'assied, se lève, marche, écrit, etc. Il peut accomplir des actes beaucoup plus compliqués, dont l'un de nous a fait récemment ressortir toute l'importance au point de vue médico-légal», Richer, de la Tourette, "Hypnotisme", cit., p. 106.



Fig. 3: Still from *Les Vampires*, Episode 6 *Les yeux qui fascinent* (Louis Feuillade, Fr., 1916).

### 3. Visionary audiences

“C’est avec le double *Mabuse* de Fritz Lang [*Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler*, *Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler* Ger., 1922] que l’évaluation couplée des deux dispositifs du cinéma et de l’hypnose semble couvrir pour la première fois l’éventail des ses possibles”<sup>13</sup>. What is most relevant, in this case Lang explicitly overlaps theatrical and hypnotic dispositives: in fact, in the well-known sequence of the Philharmonic, Mabuse, disguised as the stage hypnotist Sandor Weltmann, causes a collective hallucination in the audience by showing a caravan of Bedouins proceeding from the stage down to the stalls of the hall. I’ll focus my attention on Mabuse - Weltmann gestures<sup>14</sup>.

Having delivered a brief introductory speech, Mabuse - Weltmann moves to the left edge of the stage (that is the right, for the viewers) and brings his left hand to his face with the palm facing the audience; then, with a flourish, he slowly lowers his open hand over the audience. This mimicry is amplified by two factors: first, Mabuse in disguise pretends to be deprived of the right

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<sup>13</sup> R. Bellour, *Le corps di cinéma*, cit., p. 391

<sup>14</sup> According to Tom Gunning (*The Films of Fritz Lang. Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, London, BFI, 2001, pp. 87-116) we could say that Mabuse appear here as a “grand enunciator”. Gunning focus on the *gaze* of Mabuse, while my analysis will rather emphasize the role of his hand, and in general of his mimicry.

hand; second, because of an "imperfection" of the editing, the gesture of the lowering open hand is displayed twice. Hence, during the hallucinatory caravan appearance, Mabuse-Weltmann always keeps his hand open, addressed first to the audience then to the images of the moving caravan. Eventually, the man lifts his hand slowly, then he closes it and suddenly pulls back his arm as if to tear apart an invisible veil: in the hall, images suddenly disappear see fig. 4 and 5).

Therefore, in this case hypnosis works within a theatrical dispositive, and turns it into a cinematographic one; thus, if the example from *The Vampires* (see above) displayed a shift from photography to moving images, here we can similarly find a move from theatre to cinema. In this sense, the role of Mabuse – Weltmann's hand is crucial, since it symbolically replaces the two elements of the cinematic dispositive that are physically absent from the hall - but that are nonetheless necessary to operate the cinematic machine: first, the movie *screen* (Mabuse – Weltmann's hand facing the audience), then the *projector* machine (Mabuse – Weltmann's hand directed toward the hallucinatory images of the moving caravan)<sup>15</sup>.



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<sup>15</sup> A case close to the Mabuse hallucinatory caravan appearance is referred (perhaps not surprisingly) by Hyppolite Bernheim, as a case of post-hypnotic hallucination: "In Mme. G--, whose case I shall mention later, an intelligent, impressionable, but not at all hysterical woman, I induced the most complex post-hypnotic hallucinations, in which all the senses took part. I made her hear military music in the court-yard or the hospital. The soldiers came up-stairs and into the room. She saw a drum-major making pirouette before her bed. A musician came up and spoke to her. He was intoxicated, and made unbecoming proposals to her. He wished to embrace her. She slapped him in the face twice, and called the sister and nurse, who ran up and put the drunken man out. This entire scene, suggested during sleep, developed itself before her, both spectator and actress, as vividly as reality." (H. Bernheim, *Suggestive Therapeutics*, cit., p. 42)



**Fig. 4 - 5: Stills from Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler. Zweiter Teil: INFERNO. Ein Spiel von Menschen unserer Zeit (Fritz Lang, Ger., 1922)**

*Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler* is not the only film of the Weimar period to openly overlap paracinematic and hypnotic dispositives. Another good example is *Schatten. Eine nächtliche Halluzination* (*Warning Shadows*, Arthur Robinson, Ger. 1923). A mysterious figure breaks into a luxurious party and, after having transformed the living room of the palace into a makeshift screening room, he first tells a dramatic story with his theater of Chinese shadows, and then causes a collective hallucination that brings the party hosts and guests to experience for themselves and from within that same story. Thus, we can find here the successive deployment of two dispositives: that of the Chinese shadows projection, and that of the hypnotic hallucination; moreover, both dispositives allude to the cinematic one: in fact, there is a clear spatial overlap between the projection screen and the space in which the collective hallucination takes place.

I argue that *Warning Shadows* can be considered a sort of countercheck to my central thesis, according to which the hypnotist's hand gesture stands for an imaginary and absent screen. Indeed, in this case, we don't find the open hand gesture, since we can see an actual screen within the paracinematic dispositive. However, there is a moment in which the gesture of the hand passed before the eyes comes back. While the latest pictures of the hallucinatory movie-in-the-movie fade out, the hypnotist-projectionist materializes alongside the shocked viewers, he looks into the camera and passes his hand before his eyes, as to clean up the field of view of image – a gesture immediately echoed by the countess who hosts the party – (fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Still from *Schatten. Eine nächtliche Halluzination* (Arthur Robinson, Ger. 1923)

#### 4. Isolation, hallucination, technology, power

How hypnotic dispositives allude to the cinematic ones? More specifically, in what terms the gesture of the hypnotist's hand passed before the eyes of the hypnotized subject refers to cinema screen? In short, what kind of “screen theory” emerges from the metaphorical allusions we analyzed? We can identify three key elements that are present, yet with different emphases, in the examples analyzed above.

First (in continuity with the extra cinematographic uses) the gesture of the hand passed before the patient's eyes is intended to build a situation of isolation and concentration of the subject's attention. Indeed, the hand – screen appears here as a device of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of the subject (Deleuze); or, more properly, as a means of *de-socialization* and *re-socialization*: thanks to the screen, subjects are eradicated from their everyday social environment and transferred to a private, “heterotopic” space (Foucault), a private sphere with a private regime of perception and relationships (see particularly *Trilby* and *The Vampires*)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> On hypnosis as “technology of attention”, between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Cambridge (Mass.) – London, The MIT Press, 1999, particularly pp. 65-72 e 230-247.

Secondly, the imaginary screen drawn by the hypnotist's hand is a surface that allows the "resurfacing" of hallucinatory images. It's worth noting that in this regard we find an ambiguity, since the hand - screen surface can function both as a "catoptric" and a "dioptric" surface - that is both a (usually private and intimate) "image machine" that passively receives and refracts moving images produced elsewhere and projected from a distance (*Trilby, Les Vampires*); and a (usually public and collective) "visual / sight machine" that actively produces and externalize moving images (*Mabuse, Schatten*). In the first case a screen needs a (yet imaginary) projector (for instance, the subject's or the hypnotist's mind), while in the second case the screen *is* the projector<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, the hand drawing, the imaginary screen appears as a means for "handling" both the moving images and the bodies of the viewers. Thus, the "managing"<sup>18</sup> hand is not just part of a dispositive, but rather the matrix of a "dispositivization" of the world; in other words, the hand - screen produces the world as a "Ge-stell" (a term used by Heidegger to indicate "the essence of modern technology", translated in English as "en-framing")<sup>19</sup>, that is an automation and a control of the living world (including human bodies) with the aim to exploit its energy supplies.

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<sup>17</sup> On this point, I recover and reinterpret some suggestions from Siegfried Zielinski, "Designing and Revealing: Some Aspects of a Genealogy of Projection", in Martha Blassnigg, Gustav Deutsch, Hanna Schimek (eds.), *Light, Image, Imagination*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2013, pp. 151-179. See also Id., *Deep Time of the Media. Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, Cambridge (Mass.) – London, The MIT Press, 2006

<sup>18</sup> It is worth reminding that the word "manage" derives from the Italian "mano", "hand": "Manage, tr. and intr. v. — It. maneggiare, 'to control a horse' (whence also F. manège, 'horsemanship, riding'), lit. 'to handle', fr. mono, 'hand', fr. L. *manus*", Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Unabridged, One-Volume Edition, Amsterdam – New York, Elsevier, 1971, p. 442.

<sup>19</sup> "[According to modern technology view] everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*]. [...] Enframing [*ge-stellen*] means the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve", Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (1954) transl. e introd. By William Lovitt, New York – London, Garland, 1977, pp. 17 and 20. According to Agamben, "[The later Heidegger term] *Gestell* is similar from an etymological point of view to *dis-positio, dis-ponere* (and then to "dispositive"), just as the German *stellen* corresponds to the Latin *ponere*. When Heidegger [...] writes that *Ge-stell* means in ordinary usage an apparatus (*Gerät*), but that he intends by this term 'the gathering together of the (in)stallation (*Stellen*) that (in)stalls man, this is to say, challenges him to expose the real in the mode of ordering [*Bestellen*],' the proximity of this term to the theological *dispositio*, as well as to Foucault's *apparatuses*, is evident. What is common to all these terms is that they refer back to this *oikonomia*, that is, to a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient – in a way that purports to be useful -the

## 5. Conclusion: the after-life of images

The staging of hypnosis as a metaphor for the cinema experience within many movies of the 1910s and the 1920s has a historical reason. Indeed, at this time, cinema is establishing itself as a well-defined and recognizable dispositive, able to incorporate previous spectacular machines and institutions (circus, vaudeville, peep show, etc.), and to reconfigure them into a single and identifiable framework. Accordingly, the dispositive of hypnosis is staged within the movies in order to reflexively provide a powerful imaginary model for the film viewer's experience. Moreover, within this context, the "screen specificity" of cinema emerges as a key issue<sup>20</sup>; as a consequence, the setting of hypnosis strives to give a sense to the effective presence of the screen within the cinematic dispositive, and then to formulate a "screen theory" – which mainly happens through the recovery and highlighting of the semi forgotten gesture of the hypnotist's hand passed in front of the patient's eyes -.

However, this system of figures and metaphors, even though developed in this specific period, does not disappear in the succeeding phases of film history; on the contrary, they constitute a set of surviving and resurfacing images that - according to the model of Aby Warburg's "Nachleben" or "posthumous life" of images within the history of visual culture - continues to operate throughout film history – at least until the eighties of the twentieth century -

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behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings." Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, Stanford (Cal.), Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> "During the second half of the [nineteenth] century the success of the professional magic lantern show established a model for screen practice that early film culture could utilize on its way to becoming a cinema-centered industrial entertainment. With this process, the word "screen" became firmly associated with film projection, reflecting the victory of projected moving images against other alternatives, such as the idea of viewing films in peep show machines, Kinetoscopes and Mutoscopes. *By 1910 the word had come to be used metonymically, meaning the film culture itself, and often written with capital letters: The Screen.* That year the Moving Picture World wrote that "people like to see on the screen what they read about", referring to their filmic preferences. When a certain Mrs. P. Campbell stated in 1920 that she felt 'much too aged for Eliza on the Screen', she referred to acting in the movies, working for the film industry", Erkki Huhtamo, "Elements of Screenology: Toward an Archaeology of the Screen", cit.

<sup>21</sup> "From [Warburg's] perspective, [...] culture is always seen as a process of *Nachleben*, that is, transmission, reception, and polarization. [...] The symbol and the image are [for Warburg] the crystallization of an energetic charge and an emotional experience that survive as an inheritance transmitted by social memory and that, like electricity condensed in a Leydan jar, become effective only through contact with the "selective will" of a particular

Accordingly, I will close my presentation with an example that takes place thirty-four after *Schatten*. In 1957, interest in hypnosis is very much alive in American cinema, following the success of such films as *The Search for Bridey Murphy* (Noel Langley, USA, 1956), *I've Lived Before* (Richard Bartlett, USA, 1956), and *The Three Faces of Eve* (Nunnally Johnson, USA, 1957). Roger Corman exploits this trend by producing the film *The Undead*; at the beginning of the movie, the physician Richard Garland induces deep hypnosis in prostitute Pamela Duncan by placing his open hand before her eyes and pronouncing a long and articulated discourse about hallucinatory imaging surfacing on it (fig. 7). In fact, the distance in time has not weakened, but rather enriched the range of references and suggestions related to this gesture, that is the creation of a sphere of isolation and intimacy; the production of visionary experiences; the control and the power of the hypnotist on the subject. Clearly, the hand-screen is still, after many years, an excessive surface - that is the “unheimlich” or “uncanny” site on which not only the resurfacing of images is being negotiated, but also the emergence of the Imaginary itself<sup>22</sup>.

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period.” Giorgio Agamben, “Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science”, in Id., *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. \*\*.

<sup>22</sup> “ [...] Among its different shades of meaning the word ‘heimlich’ exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, ‘unheimlich’. What is heimlich thus comes to be unheimlich. [...] In general we are reminded that the word ‘heimlich’ is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. ‘Unheimlich’ is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of heimlich’, and not of the second. On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the Unheimlich, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is unheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light. [...] From the psychoanalytic point of view ] uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling’s definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light”. Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919) in *The Standard Edition*, cit., pp. 3679 and 3691. “Let us recall that hypnosis has something positively uncanny about it; but the characteristic of uncanniness suggests something old and familiar that has undergone repression” (S. Freud, *Group Psychology...*, cit., p. 3818)



**Fig. 7:** Still from *The Undead* (Roger Corman, Usa 1957)