**Lancaster University Management School
Working Paper
2003/092**

**The Face and the Interface:Thinking with Levinas on ethics
and justice in an electronically mediated world**

Lucas Introna

The Department of Organisation, Work and Technology
Lancaster University Management School
Lancaster LA1 4YX
UK

The Face and the Interface:Thinking with Levinas on ethics and justice in an electronically mediated world

Lucas D. Introna

Centre for the Study of Technology and Organisation
Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster, LA1 4YX, UK,
l.introna@lancaster.ac.uk

Draft working paper. Comments welcome…

Introduction

Screens are increasingly pervasive in our society. We do more in front of screens and through screens than ever before—"we" in the wired society, that is. In fact this session was arranged almost entirely through e-mail exchanges. In facing screens, our world, our possibilities for being are more and more connected to what is being presented on screens. Certainly we have come a long way since November 1937, when the BBC made its first outside broadcast - the coronation of King George VI from Hyde Park Corner - which was seen by several thousand viewers, to the landing on the Moon in 1969, carried by satellite to an estimated audience of more than 100 million viewers (E.B. 1999), to the "Live Aid" music festival, in London and Philadelphia, in 1985, which raised US$120 million, while attracting an estimated television audience of 1.5 billion (R.M. 2002), or to the funeral of Princess Diana in August 1997, followed by an estimated television audience of 2,500 million, representing more than 40 per cent of the world's population (ABCnews 1999). More recently, the majority of the world's population watched, with intense involvement, the terror attacks on New York and Washington, as an array of images on television screens and on the Internet. It is not only television screens that are silently colonising our being-together. There are global financial markets that are almost exclusively conducted through the trading of fluctuations of numbers on screens. In these markets millions are made and lost on the interpretations of numbers and images on screens—creating booms and crashes that have a rather tenuous connection to day-to-day economic activity. Likewise in organisations the screen has become the new desktop—the office. Like many others I am finding myself working in front of screens more often than not. My interaction with colleagues and students, with those in my own university, and even my colleague next door, seems to be progressively mediated through screens. I have interacted with many individuals on projects such as journal issues, edited volumes and research proposals where I have no idea what they look like or what their voices sound like. I know them only in and through their messages on the screen.

So what, you may ask. Is this not the necessary outcome of an increasingly global and integrate economy? This is perhaps so, however, it seems to me we still need to consider more carefully the social and moral implication of the increasing colonisation of our lifeworld by computers. I want to argue that the silent invasion of the screen is busy transforming the social, an

in particular the ethical, in a subtle but very fundamental way. This is the ultimate aim of this paper and my research.

For some time now I have become quiet uneasy with screens. In facing screens I have become uneasy with the way they seemed to 'distance' me from those I already knew and from those trying to appeal to me for my resources. It just seemed easier to type 'no, sorry I can not help' than to do so while facing the other—not in an explicit obvious manner but in a very subtle and fundamental way.[1] Moreover, as screen multiplied so the volume of appeals, both explicit and implicit, pouring into my space has multiplied many times over. I get many e-mails from students, journalists, colleagues whom I have never met asking for me to make some of my resources available to them. On a daily basis I am confronted with human tragedies unfolding thousands of miles away, griping me as I watch the news on television. How should I respond? I could set up a list to receive mail only from those that I have already agreed to—as a colleague I know does—or even limit exposure of the news on television—it is mostly bad news anyway. I could justify such a decision with very eloquent utilitarian and consequentialist arguments. But this does not seem to me to be an appropriate response. It seems to me to be a care-less way to deal with appeals of my neighbour. Thus, it seems to me that screens are, in some way, 'distancing' me from the other while simultaneously rapidly multiplying the claims being made on me—in this way making morality, already very difficult, even more difficult[2]. In this paper I want to attempt to use the work of Levinas—and some ideas of Derrida—to try and make sense of this moral ambiguity of electronic mediation. I want to argue that we need to consider, more carefully than we have up to now, the moral implications of screens—which we often turn to for reason of economy or convenience.

Levinas on Ethics and Justice: an impossible morality

Ethics: Facing the Other

For Levinas ethics starts with the impossibility of being indifferent to the *Other* [*Autrui*]. In being exposed to the other *as Other* the ego becomes unsettled, shaken, fundamentally and irrevocably interrupted. In facing the *Other* we live in an ongoing fear for the life of the *Other*. We find ourselves desiring above all that no harm shall come to them—that they shall be protected and sheltered from the violence that bear upon everyday life. We will give whatever we have to keep them safe. Indeed, we will not think twice to give our lives as ransom for theirs—to be their substitute, in 'their shoes', when harm threatens. Our response-ibility—our willingness to respond and be responsible—to and for them, is infinite and without an expectation of reciprocity. It is not

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[1] The Heidegger in me almost wants to say, not in an ontic way but in an ontological way.

an economic relation at all. It is a radical asymmetry in which the 'I', the self, the ego, does not even come up as a valid currency—our debt to the *Other* is simply without measure, in a word *infinite*.

This profound encounter with the Other—being its hostage—is very difficult to make sense of. Clearly the radical diachrony of the Other and the self makes it impossible to encounter the other as Other (rather than as merely some theme of the ego)?[3] Yet, in the flow of everyday life we do become disturbed. Somehow we do encounter, as a profound disturbance—the trace of the Other—as the self is emptied of itself. We could for example point, very hesitantly I must add, to our inner circle of love— my child, my lover, my parent or my friend. Whatever the relationship, to me those I love or care for are irreducible to anything, always and already *Other*. They are profoundly singular, so irreducible and irreplaceable—more infinitely *Other* than any other whatsoever. It seems to me that in these close, very proximate, very intimate, relations we encounter, in a concrete and very real sense, what Levinas calls 'trace' of the *Other*. Although it may be difficult to account for it, its actuality is not doubted. Like the caress it 'touches' us without touching: "But what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking. … The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This 'not knowing', this fundamental disorder, it the essential [signification of the caress]" (Reader, p.51).

We may have been caressed by the intimacy of love, maybe not. However, the encounter of the other as Other is not limited to the intimate circle of love. Yes, the experience of being a hostage to the Other may seem evident in the intimacy of love but this is not mostly where the Other faces us; it may even be the place where the excess of the ego finds its most vivid expression. How then do we encounter the other as Other when it is not in the intimacy of the circle of love? What about all those faces we encounter in the flow of everyday life? How do they disturb the self-certain ego? We must be careful here not to suggest that the self exist prior to, or separate from, the encounter with the Other. For Levinas the Other is already before the beginning, in an immemorial time, 'older' than the self and the world.[4] When I declared that 'I am', I was already a 'for-the-other'. Thus, the trace of the Other is already woven into every attempt to assert the self-certain identity of the I. The Other already obsess me because I am always already it (a for-the-other). As Wall (1999, p.35) so beautifully expresses it: "I am 'its' [the Others'] echo". However, it seems to me that as I am confronted with the complexities of getting through everyday life the immemorial source of me fade. I 'forget' that I am for-the-other and become a for-me; the trace becomes lost, the forgetting becomes forgotten. How then is the other encountered again?

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[2] The issue of dealing with claims on your resources in mediated environments becomes even more complex when it is not possible distinguish whether another human being or an autonomous programme made the claim. Does it matter? Does a machine have a face? I will not pursue this matter here but clearly this is a moral issue in need of careful reflection. For example Floridi argues for a post human morality…

[3] This seems to me to be the issue that Derrida takes up in his critique/commentary on Levinas in his essay *Metaphysics and Violence* published in *Writing and Difference* (REF)

The face solicits me through its expression (CPP, 65). However, in its expression the face does not become present to me, rather the face is present in its refusal to be contained. It is a solicitation, an invitation, and more precisely for Levinas a visitation. Nevertheless, it is not an invitation to know but to encounter. It is an encounter that shatters the system: "in this beggar's solicitation, expression no longer participates in the order from which it tears itself, but thus faces and confronts in a face, approaches and disturbs absolutely" (CPP, 65). How does the face express in the world? The face solicits me in speaking—the epiphany of a face is wholly language. The event proper to expression consists in "bearing witness to oneself, and guaranteeing this witness. This attestation of oneself is possible only as a face, that is, as speech." (TaI, 201). In 'saying' or speaking there is always excess, a surplus, that overflows the content of the saying and expresses the Other as *Other*. Also in speaking the horizon for (re)consideration is always and already open, and opening. This showing in speech functions as a *trace* in as much as it refers to what has never been presented in speech as such, alterity itself. "The trace is the presence of that which properly speaking has never been there, of what is always past" (BPW, 105). The trace is the disturbing presence that recalls the proximity of the face. Although the trace may function as a sign it never signify in a way that can become absorbed in a theme. It is a sense of being burdened that pervades without place or time. The doorbell rings to disturb my work, my thoughts, but when I open the door, there is nobody there. Was there nobody there? Did I imagine it? I have no memory, I cannot recall. The trace concerns me without entering into a conjunction. This is the enigma of the trace. "The infinite then cannot be tracked down like game by a hunter. The trace left by the infinite is not a residue of a presence; its very glow is ambiguous" (BPW, 119). Thus, in the speaking of the Other facing me, in the surplus of the tone, the gesture, eye contact and words, the other solicits me without becoming a theme. Have not already taken her place in the sun? But what about all other Others not facing me?

Justice: Third (le tiers)

> Justice remains justice only, in a society where there is no distinction between those close
> and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest.

Levinas (OBBE, p.158) argues that we cannot encounter the Other without immediately and simultaneously being exposed to the claims of all other Others—'the third' in his language. "The third party looks at me in the eyes of the other—language is justice. (TaI, p. 213). Thus, the face of the Other obsesses me both in its refusal to be contained (rendered equal) and its recalling of the always already equal claim of all other Others weighing down on me in this particular face before me. The weight of the asymmetrical and infinite responsibility for the Other is 'corrected'—if we may say this—by the immediate and simultaneous relation with the third party (OBBE, 158). But

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[4]   The book by Thomas Wall (1999) is very helpful in giving an account of this aspect of Levinas' thought.

does this not negate my infinite responsibility to the Other? No, morality has a 'double structure'. In the words of Critchly (1999, p.226-7): "[M]y ethical relation to the Other is an unequal, asymmetrical relation to a height that cannot be comprehended, but which, at the same time, opens onto a relation to the third and to humanity as a whole – that is, to a symmetrical communities of equals. This simultaneity of ethics and politics gives a doubling quality to all discourse…the community has a double structure; it is a community of equals which is *at the same time* based on the inegalitarian moment of the ethical relation" (my emphasis). It is exactly this simultaneous presence of the Other and all other Others that gives birth to the question of justice. The urgency of justice is an urgency born out of the radical asymmetry of every ethical relation. Without such a radical asymmetry the claim of the other can always in principle become determined and codified into a calculation, justice as a calculation. Thus, justice has its standard, its force, in proximity of the face of the Other. Levinas (OBBE,159) asserts: "justice remains justice only, in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest. The equality of all is born by my inequality, the surplus of my duties over my rights. The forgetting of self moves justice" (my emphasis). It is this simultaneous knot of that face and the third, the singular and the category, ethics and politics that is the most powerful of Levinas' thought. It is also impossible.

The Aporia of an Impossible Morality

An impossible morality: comparing the incomparable

> The inevitable question of justice. The necessity of comparing the incomparable, of knowing men; hence their appearances as plastic forms of faces that are visible and, one might say, 'de-faced'…the source of my obligation toward other men (Alt&Trans, p.170)

In ethics (responsibility) the Other is an an-archic event that (always already) obsesses me. The self is responsibility incarnate (Wall, 38). Every self-certain synthesis of the ego is marred by the tacit awareness that I have taken some Other's place in the sun—my freedom is already paid for in the blood of the Other. Every attempt to confirm the egological bears with it an already there trace of the Other that disrupts every foundational attempt of the ego. All my inwardness is already invested with a despite-me and for-the-other. Thus, for Levinas, the ego can only anchor itself by precisely not-being. I can only 'be' as a being-for-the-Other, her substitute, responsible for her, absolutely and unconditionally—in no egological terms whatsoever. In short merely her echo.

However, in the passivity of my infinite responsibility I cannot take up my responsibility to the Third. I cannot speak for all other Others in the courts of justice. In the institutions the third does not have a voice, an advocate. Thus, I must, somehow and with great trepidation, find myself as an Other of other's, equally relevant. I must reason, argue and treat every other, already there, as an Other. They all need justice, advocates to plead for their equal status, to argue for their equal rights.

Let me summarise Levinas' impossible morality.[5] The ground or source of ethics is the asymmetry of the face (immediately and absolutely Other to every other). The disruptive force of ethics, that which renders it always already in doubt, is the obsession of the 'third' (are we also not Other?). Without the disruption of the 'third' the face facing me will become an intolerable burden and the problem of justice will simply not come up. The ground of justice is the equality or symmetry of the third (every other is equally Other). The disruptive force of justice is the obsession of the face (the radical singularity of every Other). Without the disruption of the face justice will become mere calculation—legal maybe but not just. They incessantly impose on, and interpenetrate each other in a way that turns morality into an ongoing existential burden, it needs to be 'worked out', or rather faced, again and again, as if it has never happened before. *Every moral event is radically singular*. Let me give an example to make it a bit clearer. Let us imagine that we are in the room of our local doctor with our partner to hear the outcome of some tests done on tissue taken from a suspicious growth. The doctor informs us that the tests were unfortunately positive. It is a cancerous growth that is potentially life threatening. Furthermore, although it is operable, he cannot perform the operation because the rules [justice] for allocating resources makes it a lower priority than other conditions (such as AIDS treatment, and neo-natal care) and these have already drained the available resources. At this moment, here and now, sitting before this doctor, these rules seem like a caricature devoid of reality and relevance. "Doctor, are you saying that my partner might die because the 'rules' for resource allocation does not favour her condition? This is certainly perverse, absolutely irrelevant. It is my partner, "this person sitting before you, that we are talking about; not some general instance in the logic of the rules." Yet, as the initial rage subsides, we realise that every other Other, simultaneously present in this moment of disappointment, is also a singular—a 'wife', 'baby', 'brother', a face—with an equally legitimate claim—"what about my son, my daughter, my partner?" We are thrown back onto the third that confronts me in justice. Morality, as the simultaneity of ethics and justice, is impossible![6] As Levinas argues (on reflection of the massacre of Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Chantila):

> Unfortunately, contradictions like those at play between morals [ethics] and politics [justice] are not only resolved in the reflections of philosophers. It takes events, that is, human lived experience… the people 'engaged' (engage) in this 'contradiction' and for whom, despite the war, it is an everyday thought…it is there that 'in and for itself' … it is being defined; alas, it's a dangerous game that's afoot. [Reader, 293].

I take 'dangerous, here to mean an enormous risk of getting it wrong by giving *undue authority* either to the face or the third. Levinasian morality is impossible. However, this is not its limit but it is exactly what gives it force. To understand its impossibility we may draw on the work of Derrida. Caputo (1997) explains that when Derrida uses the term 'impossible' he uses it as a term of art. It is

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5   I use the term morality here as a term encapsulates the simultaneity of ethics and justice. This is not a very usual way to take the term morality.

6   We seen this tension very vividly in the live of Vincent van Gogh.

not the logical opposite of 'possible'. The 'possible' is for Derrida the "future present"—a possibility that can become possible with hard work and maybe a bit of luck. On the other hand, the 'impossible' is that which overflows all future possibilities, always already reaching to a 'beyond' that will never be a present, a 'not yet' that will never come—yet calls us with the utmost of urgency. To "desire the impossible is to strain against the constraints of the foreseeable and possible, to open the horizon of possibility to what it cannot [and never will] fore-see or fore-tell." (Caputo, 1997, p.133). According to Derrida (1992) we simultaneously experience three aporia as we find ourselves in the impossible possibility of justice [morality as I have termed it]—the suspension of the law (justice), the ghost of undecidability (the face) and urgency (morality is always needed now). I will not explore them further here I have done this elsewhere (Introna, 1999). What is important is that they demonstrate that being engaged with morality is extremely difficult, impossible. What I want to propose is that this profound and radically singular nature of engaging in morality is made even more difficult when we face screens.

The Face and the Interface

The phenomenology of the screen

In thinking about information technology there are many things that can come to mind such as data and data storage, signals and communication, calculating and processing, and presenting and displaying on screens. However, the image that is most defining, and that one could argue is most fundamental about information technology is screens. When we interact with the computer it is via screens, if we think of a television or of a departure display in the airport terminal we first and foremostly think of screens. The image used to convey the pervasiveness of information technology is exactly the screen. Thus, it seems that it is to the phenomenology of the screen that we must turn if we want to understand the significance of information technology. What do screens do when they 'screen'? What is it that makes screens so powerful, seductive and elusive?

Screens present, show, exhibit, what is supposed to be the *relevant data* in that context, be it a spreadsheet while working at office, or a schedule while walking in the airport, or a programme while watching television. Screens exhibit what was previously chosen, captured, processed, organised, structured, and finally re-presented on the screen. The screen, in screening, finds itself at the centre of the activity: in showing it attracts our attention, often also our physical presence, as it locates our activity. It is often the focus of our concerns in that environment, being at office, working, or at home, watching a movie or the news. When we push the 'on' button the screen locates our attention, we sit down, quit—physically or cognitively—other activities we may have been performing, and attend to the screen, as it is the place, the location where what is relevant or supposedly relevant for us at that particular time is happening. We note therefore that a screen, as a screen, gathers the attention of the people that surrounds it.

However, in re-presenting screens also simultaneously hides. Heidegger noted (1977) that the Greek concept of truth, *'aletheia'*, has the meaning of simultaneously revealing and concealing of something. A 'revealing' must in itself include a 'concealing' of that which was not revealed. Likewise a 'concealing' must include a 'revealing' of that which was not hidden. To reveal implies to conceal; they both, mean to filter, that is, to screen. The logic of the screen is thus self-identical in that it reveals the world in its own image—according to its own categories. The revealing and concealing of screen, in screening, implies an already there identity, agreement or form of life, implicitly and fundamentally shared and agreed, on the basis of which events, others, nature, and things in general are revealed as something, that is, already somehow understood as meaningful (Heidegger 1962). The kind of data that is displayed on screens is neither mirror reflections nor random data, but data generated by specific and usually complex and time-consuming criteria or themes conceived by us based on our already there self-evident understanding of meaning in the world. As these criteria become coded in to data structures, processing rules, and screen layouts they slip into the background—a background that presumed but not revealed on the screen as such. As re-presentation the screening of the screen always already assumes a theme, in the way that a jigsaw puzzle, to be a jigsaw puzzle, assumes a whole that will be its ordering criterion. When it comes to the screening of screen 'the medium is [itself already] the message' as observed by Marshall McLuhan (1964).

The meaning of screen qua screen is that it reveals the world as already relevant in terms or themes already agreed upon, the already said in Levinas' terminology. It is exactly this already agreement that calls for our attention, attracts us, makes us look at the screen in its screen-ness, *and simultaneously condemns to forgetfulness that which was agreed upon*, precisely because it is not an agreement but an already agreement. As 'already agreed' it circumvents the very reconsideration of categories presumed in its revealing. One might agree or disagree with the exact content on the screen but the very screening of the screen itself has already slipped from memory—blackboxed in Latour's terminology. What is concealed is not only the possibility of renegotiating the categories of presentation, but more profoundly the re-presentation of the Other as a screen rather than as a face as such. For example I may tell my students "why do you want to see me if you can e-mail me," thereby circumventing a discussion of the appropriateness of the way they are revealed to me through an e-mail message as well as the appropriateness of such a revealing of them in the first place.

What is the meaning of the screen, as screen, for the face and for the 'third'? I would argue that the moral significance of the screen is very ambiguous. The screen can consume the face in its re-presentation, distancing us from the disruption of the Other, yet it could also multiply the 'third' and thereby call us to justice. This is what I now want to consider.

The Screen and the (fading) Face

The screen, in its screening, transforms the Other into a theme thereby shattering proximity. The text and images on the screen, as re-presentations, already suggest their own meaning. They draw upon the 'already agreement' presumed for the screen to screen—for it to locate and hold my attention. As I attend to it I interpret it according to my own categories and prejudices (Gadamer, 1989). The increasing distance between the signifier and the signified, induced by mediation, limits the demands and possibility for (re)consideration of the obvious. Expression is cut off, saying transformed into the already said. Thus, in re-presentation on the screen there is no urgency to expose the self to the disturbing nudity of the face. The appropriating ego remains unchallenged, undisturbed, confirmed in its self-certainty and the self-evidence of its interpretation. As re-presentation on the screen the Other's resistance to the presumed theme dissipates. Images and text on the screen are already ordered according to now subsumed categories (rules, structures and layouts) and consumed according to my choice. For the manager the productivity figures become re-presentations of those who work 'hard' and those who are 'lazy'. For the bank manager the account details become representations of those who 'manage the money well' and those who do not. Through the reports, screens, e-mail messages, and the like, the Other is re-presented and thematic ordered, progressively silenced. The possibility for fundamental (re)consideration are circumvented. The very source of the ethical relation, the trace of the Other, that disturbs, that calls me into question, fades.

The distance, the shattering of proximity, on the screen is not merely the physical distance that the mediation brings. Rather, the mediation provides endless possibilities the categories of screening to be subsumed and expression to be transformed into egological themes. Or as Luce Irigaray states it: "Analysed in images and photographs, a face loses the mobility of its expressions, the perpetual unfolding and becoming of what is alive" (FtF, 236). The disturbing trace of the Other expressed in the profound expression of the face and in the expressive unintentional background of the voice, movement, and so forth, becomes ordered as a re-presentation and consumed as egological interpretive possibilities. Of course, expression can also be taken ad re-presentations and consumed according to my themes in a face-to-face situation when my interested gaze is so strong that the expressions of the Other is drowned in the domestication by my categories. Just think of all the violence committed under the categorical gaze of racism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism. Likewise, images presented on our television screens of suffering and war does often disturb us in spite of their re-presentation. Nevertheless, my central point is that through mediation, and the re-presentation it implies, there is an increased the potential for expressions of the Other to become a victim of our thematic gaze—absorbed into the categories of our interests. Mediation by information technology adds additional layers of re-presentation. To become disturbed by the Other is just so much more difficult—this in a world in which the trace of the Other is already fading under many layers of mediation and re-presentation.

I also want to argue that the expression of speaking is not only in the surplus of meaning of language but it is also already in the surplus of facing—of encountering the face. To speak is to already face. Even if I do not say a word my body already speaks. The expression on the face of the homeless person is already an appeal. We notice this, for example, when we are busy using a resource (such as a public telephone) and others are waiting for me to finish. The moment the other approaches I immediately become aware of the already there claim of the Other. My use of the phone is already denying them access. I am already guilty. The encounter with a body is not like the encounter with a re-presentation. The re-presentation does not subvert my attempts to consume it according to my themes and categories. The encounter with a body is already disturbance. I might want to ignore it (as we often do with those that approach us in the street) but in ignoring I am already disturbed.

Screening and the Interface

> The first question in the interhuman is the question of justice…Comparison is superimposed onto my relation with the unique and the incomparable, and, in view of equity and equality, a weighing, a thinking, a calculation, the comparison of incomparables, and consequently, the neutrality—presence or representation—of being, the thematisation and the visibility of the face in some way de-faced as the simple individuation of an individual… (BPW)

I have argued above that through, or more precisely 'on' the screen the face becomes de-faced—the screen de-faces as it comes 'in between faces', an interface. From the passage above it is clear that Levinas argues that de-facing is a condition necessary for justice to prevail in society. Politics requires the 'third' perspective. The de-faced other (the third) points the way to neutrality, equality, in short symmetry. This is an important conclusion for our thinking about screens. Is it possible that screens, in its de-facing, may be contributing to Levinas' view of justice.   When I apply for my mortgage online I become just another applicant—not 'blank' or 'attractive' or 'somehow doggy'. Clearly, as pointed out above, in the face-to-face the expressions of the other can always be consumed according to the categories of the ego. Yet, in the interface the third could potentially become more anonymous, just another like every other—equally re-presented.   It seems that in some way the interface points me towards the question of justice. There is an community of thirds that has an equal claim on me. In the anonymity of the interface I have to weigh, calculate and decide. As my inbox fills with many e-mails from those I have never faced I have to make decisions and even send replies that say 'sorry I can not help'. Justice demands this of me. However, if I turn justice into pure calculation then the decision may be legal but it may not be just (Derrida, 1992). As Levinas states: "Justice is impossible without the one that renders it finding himself in proximity" Every 'sorry I can not help' message must fill me with ethical trauma. Maybe this was an Other like none other, in desperate need of my resources. Morality is impossible.

Screens and the impossible of an impossible morality

My analysis seems to suggest that screens, in screening may be 'distancing' us from the Other. However, it also suggests that screens as interfaces may 'recall' and remind me of the equal claim of the third, reminding me of the already there force of justice. One may therefore conclude that the mediation of screens is morally ambiguous—and this is true. However, I would suggest, with Levinas, that the consideration of the claims of the third, justice, is only possible when those that render it already find themselves in proximity (OBBE, 159). Without the proximity of the face justice will not happen. I will argue with Derrida that a decision that did not go through the "ordeal of the undecidable" is not a decision—it is a calculation. It may be legal but it would not be just. But more than this. The proximate (those closes to me) incessantly reminds us that undecidability is never resolved, never passed over. It is there before during and after the decision has been made. Undecidability, here the nude face of the Other, "remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost—but an essential ghost—in every decision, in every event of decision. It ghostliness deconstructs from within any assurance of presence, any certitude or any supposed criteriology that would assure us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision." (Derrida, 1992, p.25). Justice happens, if it happens, only in the singular moment of the decision. The "warm glow of justice never settles over the law, the rule, the universal, [as] the 'maxim' that can be drawn from this singular 'event', or still less over the person deciding, who can never say "I am just." (Caputo, 1997, p.138). Justice, like ethics, has to be faced again and again—it is unprecedented. Without proximity there can be no justice. Without the everyday encounter of the Other 'close by', on my doorstep there can be no proximity. With the loss of proximity we may turn to institutions and legal rules as a 'substitute' for morality—a sort of code morality. In the world of screens the legal contract may replace proximity the basis of our social being. We all know the profound disempowerment of a legal but unjust situation.

Of course I must be careful. I must not make my argument more forceful than it is. I am talking about subtle shifts, small distinctions, and fragile conditions—tracing very faint traces. I am probably already forcing Levinas' ideas for my purpose. My argument may already be too violent Yes, there it is always possible to get a counter example to undermine the presumed certainty of an argument. Clearly there are communities on the Internet where some have their only 'face' and face-to-face communities filled with terrible violence. Nor do I want to claim it is only computers that 'screen'. However, I do want to argue that it is the screening of computers that is so easily subsumed and forgotten (it is hidden in integrated circuits, codes and databases that are not open to our inspection). There are also many reasons to believe that the screen will continue to silently colonise our lifeworld. Morality is never easy, however, I would submit that with the computer it is a particularly dangerous game.

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