

The Gaze that Blinds Us: Myth, Technology and Power in Orphée, 2001: A Space Odyssey and Hugo

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Abstract

Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vetruvian Man* is at once Leonardo's self-representation and his conception of Man at the center of the living world. This projection of a radically new era defines the trajectory and the project of modernity as *gravitas*. Yet, the period has yet another layer of representation that sustains it beyond the sense of human self-importance and depth: a gaze, an enigma.

Embodied in a skeletal, mechanical being, *Mona Lisa's* smile reappears in a recent film by Martin Scorsese, *Hugo*. The beguiling possessor is the automaton who is central to the film's narrative: in its silence, is the cosmography of the microcosm as well as its remoteness. This raises a double question: how has this fusion of *gravitas* and lightness taken place, and why is it embodied in a technological object? Furthermore, how has technology integrated humanness so as to inevitably extend and reformulate questions of power in Western contemporary social structures?

In Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), there appears another central but this time, eloquent, technological object: HAL, the onboard sentient computer. In Kubrick's film, there is a flashing warning sign with regards to, and entertaining, human relationships with a determined form of technology: cybernetics. What is still compelling is the nuancing: the creation of self-referential, sentient technology is embedded in humanness as an evolutionary stage. However, is it possible that such artifice be pre-encoded, destined to appear to us as a destructive apparatus?

Dispersed throughout Jean Cocteau's film, *Orphée* (1950), as fragments of modernity superimposed upon the body of Myth, stranded objects such as radios, telephones, cars, motorcycles and trains appear as the communicative transmitters and modifiers of mythological narratives. As if Cocteau's intention was to innervate myth with modernity, so as to show what is still present in technological objects: their mythical roots in and from power narratives and, in the case of this film, primarily the power of language as a fundamental tool of humanness.

These films are entwined by means of a technological communicative process: from a radio to a sentient computer to an automaton. All three films can be analyzed in terms of how such representations bring to light contemporary questions of power – by tweaking some of Foucault's precepts about power – and its embeddedness in modern technological processes that are fundamentally altering the frame of humanness.