It is by now a commonplace to evoke the ubiquity of screens and their impact on every facet of our daily life. They are an essential part of the information system that help us navigate our daily commute in transit systems, a part of the surveillance apparatus that monitors people in public space and screen bodies at airports and train stations. Health professionals depend on them to scrutinize and render visible the flaws and defects of the diseased body, relying on these new imaging technologies to provide a medical diagnostic. We interface with them daily in our consumption of television, cable or streaming shows in our private space, or at work on our computers. We carry them with us, in the form of a miniature screen that adorn all mobile phones. They are tactile tools of communication as well as a complex and ephemeral form of sociability. In short, screens are not only used to hawk goods, elicit desires, disseminate cultural values, they are an integral part of the cinematic apparatus.

One of the aims of the seminar is to interrogate the very notion of screen, by retracing a genealogy of the screen, privileging its relation to the moving picture, without neglecting its treatment by film theorists and philosophers as a window to the real. We will analyze the screen and its multifaceted functions and theoretical extensions, as a limit, an obstacle, a space of projection, a frame, etc. We will be particularly attentive to the ways screens, over time, whether classical or dynamic, transform the relation between image and spectator, the viewing regime mobilized, the subject’s inscription in space and history, and the formation of a community of viewers. From the makeshift screen of early Lumière operators dispatched to all corners of the colonized world to project their “actualités” to the miniature screen of mobile phones used by migrants to map and view their dangerous journey to Western nations, we will focus, as a seminar, on the multiplicity of the screen’s formats and their “mise en espace,” their staging in space, as well as their material and psychic (con)figurations. We will read texts by films and media theorists from André Bazin to Lev Manovich, works by Barthes, Deleuze, Freud, Derrida, and many others. We will screen and study very different movie genres such as the Lumière’s actualités, the war movie like Gillo Pontecorvo’s Battle of Algiers or Pierre Schoendoerffer’s The 317th Section, the political essay films of Chris Marker, Raoul Peck, Harun Farocki, and the multiscreen video art installation of Din Q Lê. For the final paper, seminar participants are encouraged to work on a project that will question old or new practices and uses of the screen in a domain of research congruent with their disciplinary training.