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## Visual anthropology and the phenomenology of the gaze in cinema

This study is devoted to the interplay between visual anthropology and the phenomenology of the gaze in cinema, emphasizing the viewer's perception as an active participant in the cinematic experience. Contemporary visual technologies enhance the significance of subjective perception, while the phenomenological approach enables a deeper understanding of how cinematic images affect the spectator. The aim of this work is to analyse how cinematic means shape the perception of space, time, and corporeality. The research addresses aspects such as the influence of visual elements on the construction of cultural identities and the analysis of power perception through visual techniques. The methodology integrates phenomenology, visual analysis and anthropological approaches, providing a comprehensive examination of the subject. The originality of the study lies in its interdisciplinary approach to analyzing visual strategies in cinema and their impact on the perception of reality. The findings demonstrate that cinema not only reflects the world but actively participates in the formation of social norms and identities. The camera functions not as a passive instrument but as an active agent in the process of meaning-making. This research is useful for cinema practitioners, media educators and cultural scholars seeking a deeper understanding of visual practices and their influence on audiences.

**Keywords:** visual anthropology, phenomenology, gaze, cinema, perception, corporeality, cinematic space, cultural identity, visual strategies, phenomenology of time.

### Introduction

Scholars emphasise the perception and the viewer's experience as key aspects of understanding the art of film in contemporary cinema. Phenomenology acts as a philosophical approach and helps to reveal the processes of interpreting visual images and layers of meaning that arise in the viewer's consciousness. This approach focuses on subjective experience and allows the exploration of how the film's visual elements, such as light, composition and camera movement, affect emotional and cognitive perception. The interaction between the viewer and the cinematic work ceases to be passive observation and becomes an active process in which cultural, social and individual factors are reflected. Phenomenological analysis reveals the complex mechanisms of this interaction and helps to understand how cinema shapes not only the perception of a specific narrative but also broader cultural and social identities.

Contemporary film studies that draw on the works of philosophers, such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, expand the understanding of the phenomenon of the cinematic gaze but do not always cover the specifics of the modern visual language of cinema. The study of the phenomenology of the gaze in cinema remains relevant, opening new horizons for the comprehension of visual strategies and methods of interaction with the viewer. The analysis of shot composition, lighting, editing and camera movements becomes not merely a technical technique but a way of shaping a particular perception of space, time and corporeality in this context. Cinema conveys complex social and cultural meanings to the viewer through these visual elements, influencing their emotional and intellectual responses. Thus, the cinematic gaze functions not only as an aesthetic device but also as a powerful tool for constructing reality that reflects and creates cultural narratives. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how the visual means of cinema shape the perception of the world and human identity and reveals cinema's potential as a significant cultural and social phenomenon of the present age that can influence the formation of public consciousness and intercultural dialogue.

### Materials and methods

The methodology of this study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines visual analysis, phenomenology of perception and an anthropological approach. This comprehensive approach allows a

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deeper understanding of how cinematic images influence the perception of space, time and corporeality by the viewer. Visual analysis is the main research tool aimed at the examination of cinematic images, their composition, and visual codes. This method investigates how elements of cinematic language such as framing, lighting, colour, camera movement and editing shape the viewer's perception and contribute to the creation of specific meanings and emotions. This analysis reveals the ways in which cinema forms visual representations of reality and creates contexts in which the viewer perceives the events on screen. Particular attention focuses on how visual means in films affect the perception of social norms, cultural identities and corporeality.

The phenomenological approach helps to understand how the viewer experiences cinematic time and space and how the perception of these elements depends on the subjective experience of perception. The most important aspects are the viewer's interaction with the depicted space of the film and the perception of time through editing and shot duration. The phenomenology of perception examines how the camera integrates the viewer into the film's space, forming a sense of presence, involvement and bodily perception of what is happening. The study investigates how different angles, points of views, and camera movements can create the effect of the viewer's immersion in the film and enhance their emotional and physical response to what is depicted.

The anthropological approach analyses how visual elements of cinema contribute to the formation of social and cultural identities. This context studies the ways in which films depict the body, social roles, the culture of the gaze and power structures and how these images influence the viewer's perception of various social norms and ideals. Visual anthropology enables an understanding of how cinema, through its visual practices, can reflect, sustain or change cultural values, power relations and social stereotypes, thereby shaping the overall perception of social structures.

Additionally, the study employs film-theoretical analysis which includes work with film language, theories of visual culture, and the concept of *the power of the gaze*. This approach helps not only to analyse the visual elements of the film but also to understand how they interact with broader cultural and social processes. Through this analysis, cinema is considered not merely as a reflection of reality but as an active agent that shapes the perception of reality by integrating into the context of ideological and cultural shifts.

The research methodology involves the use of a comprehensive approach that combines elements of visual analysis, phenomenology of perception and anthropological theory. This approach allows a deeper understanding of how cinema affects the perception of space, time and corporeality by the viewer and examines how these elements interact with cultural and social contexts. Ultimately, the aim of the methodology is to demonstrate how visual images in cinema not only reflect but also shape representations of reality, influencing identity and the perception of social norms.

### *Results and Discussion*

On 28 December 1895, the world witnessed one of the most significant events that transformed human consciousness and immortalised the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. The first film screening laid the foundation of the mass entertainment industry, which remains such to this day. Becoming accessible to the public, cinema provoked a surge of emotions among viewers. The earliest films lacked sound accompaniment and actors had *to communicate* with the audience through expressive gazes, facial expressions and gestures. The language of cinema has since evolved, especially due to advances in computer technology. In any case, cinema, as a primarily visual art, can leave a lasting impression on its viewers solely through the actor's gaze, which should be regarded as a crucial cinematic tool.

The actor's gaze carries psychological nuance and conveys expressiveness in the performer's acting. Shots are usually edited according to the direction of the gaze, constructing the *mise-en-scène* around it. One of the cinematographer's rules involves maintaining the line of sight between two actors, which must not be broken during the filming of a dialogue; otherwise, the spatial integrity of the shot will be disrupted. Thus, the director and cinematographer face the task of captivating the viewer and preventing them from looking away, making the film penetrate the subconscious, become memorable, suspenseful and subtly perceived. To achieve this, the screenwriter must endow the characters with a penetrating gaze that becomes the main driving force of the film. However, the gaze in cinema should be considered not only from the perspective of its expressive or spatial function but also its narrative and transcendental function, when the character's gaze breaks the boundary between the viewer and the actor, transferring the film's plot into the consciousness of the observer watching the events on screen.

The following important concepts in cinematic optics are *cinema as gaze* and the *intense gaze*. During the film screening, the gazes of the camera, the viewer and the film characters conventionally intersect. Each gaze that has its own vector and its direction depends on the desires guiding it. Different desires generate various biases and prejudices such as sexism and discrimination. Both postmodern philosophical traditions and feminist movement concepts fundamentally adhere to the idea that the gaze is gender-coded and that there are different ways to represent emotions. Regarding the intense gaze, it is asserted that such a gaze is usually directed at an object invisible to the one being looked at intensely and it is this gaze that holds power and authority. This type of gaze includes the panoptic gaze, while the panopticon, as a specific architectural structure that allows one person to observe many without their knowledge, represents a particular form of culture. Thus, cinema extends the philosophical theme of the phenomenology of the gaze, the gaze of the Other. Consequently, the issue of the cinematic gaze arises, which can reflect and reinforce social hierarchies. This frames the research aimed at understanding the complex interaction of perception, representation and corporeality systems in the field of cinema through the phenomenology of the gaze.

A large number of works exist in both foreign and domestic scholarly literature dedicated to fields such as visual sociology and visual anthropology, which address the topic of the phenomenology of the gaze in cinema. The foundational work for this study is Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema*, in which cinema is examined through the principles of post-structuralist philosophy as well as the cultural context of postmodernism. Deleuze, the philosopher of cinema, discussing the connective threads between the actual and the virtual, argued in his work that, '*...he reached the very essence of the ambiguous status of cinema as an industrial art: cinema was neither art nor science*'.

Deleuze believed that 'Great filmmakers, in our view, are comparable not only to painters, architects and musicians but also to thinkers. The basis of their thinking is not the concept, but the image...' [1; 41, 88]. The philosopher focused attention on images and signs while analysing cinema. Theories developed based on structuralism and psychoanalysis, which allow cinema to be critically studied as an ideological apparatus, were examined through feminist film criticism. In particular, the work of British scholar Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, which marks the beginning of feminist film criticism [2], as well as her other works, were studied.

Delving into the analysis of the phenomenology of the gaze in cinema, one must first consider how the concepts of the phenomenology of the body and the philosophy of cinema are interconnected. The human being, as the most advanced creature of terrestrial civilisation, has always fascinated those who sought to immortalise the natural essence of *homo sapiens* on canvases and sculptures, in poetry and literature, as well as in other fields of art. The human body constitutes the material, physical component and its study falls within the domains of medicine, physiology, pedagogy, psychology, psychiatry, and aesthetics. In the context of philosophical view of humans and their physiological characteristics, it should be noted that the human being and their inner world are considered as an integrated whole. Thus, philosophy plays the role of shaping the worldview of a person and defining their position in society and the world. However, philosophy offers various perspectives on the consideration of humans, including their corporeality. B. Markov wrote, 'The experience of culture has created artificially symbolic bodies; consequently, philosophy, on its part, must pay attention to the history of corporeality, which allows us to think that the body is the personal property of the person wishing to embody any desires' [3; 122].

In the postmodernist discourse, the topic of corporeality received attention from Jean-Luc Nancy, followed by Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. In particular, Foucault analyses how the alienation of the body from the person became possible, or how it transforms into an object of influence and no longer fully belongs to the individual [2; 87]. Likewise, film theorists began to focus on corporeality and consider cinema from new phenomenological and psychoanalytic perspectives. Thus, cinema did not avoid the study of the peculiarities of the human body [3; 17]. Moreover, cinema delved deeper into its phenomenology, revealing aspects that had previously gone unnoticed and exposing the essence of many factors hidden from direct perception. The sphere of filmmaking turned to philosophy for assistance, forming its own discipline — the philosophy of cinema — which later enabled an understanding of the features involved in creating successful films, not only as exemplars of the entertainment genre but also as works of art capable of changing the thinking of their viewers. Film actors — people able to convey the screenwriter's intent — embody film characters, forgetting their own feelings and personal attitudes towards events, but they move through the plot so that the viewer understands, through their verbal and non-verbal signs, what emotions the characters' experience at any given moment in response to the behaviour and actions of other characters. A film can touch the viewer's soul, leave an indelible impression or cause indifference, remain in memory for a lifetime

or disappear from recollection within a few days. Everything depends on the depth of the actors' emotional involvement, the convincingness of their spoken lines, gestures and gazes. Cinema became the first art form capable of accurately conveying the full spectrum of human emotions and capturing individual moments experienced by actors or real people in real space and time, as well as allowing the reproduction of these fragments at a later time [4; 45].

Moreover, individual frames of a film can be captured in photographs. Particularly expressive moments become public property and can be copied, repeated and reproduced by viewers, critics and other actors. Alongside movements, gazes are most often copied, since this remarkable aspect of non-verbal communication becomes more eloquent in certain situations than words, as a gaze is not only a distinctive trait of a character that is evaluated by its depth and significance. The viewer's gaze becomes a guide leading them into the depths of the actor's or character's worldview, whose role they perform. The notion of the *human gaze* can be understood both as an expression of one's own opinion and as a physiological process that stimulates the cognitive activity of the brain. In the second meaning, the gaze becomes a synthesising and analysing substance capable of evaluating the gaze of a film character in the first sense and here cinema offers us the opportunity to come as close as possible to the lives of film characters, to look into their eyes and to see and feel joy and pain, happiness and loss, torment, confusion, impulse, passion, love, excitement and much more [5; 7].

However, the gaze is not merely the work of the eyes as optical instruments; it is accompanied by bodily movements and positions, certain poses. Everyone knows what various gestures mean and which gazes should accompany them in combination with conventional phrases. All this forms the phenomenology of the human body, which is detailed in scholarly literature but is perceived by humanity as something natural and self-evident. The human body *behaves* differently depending on the circumstances. When the back and shoulders, as well as other parts of the body, tense, breathing becomes irregular; it pauses during reading or viewing information because the content "captures" attention. The mind and body can become disconnected in cases where the mind is seized by something important and/or interesting. The living, pulsating body "disappears" in a sea of overwhelming emotions and experiences [5; 16]. This theory, developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty based on his own rich experience and observations, evolved into a distinct field — the phenomenology of the body — which placed human embodiment at its centre. Merleau-Ponty, a widely known French philosopher of the previous century, was a representative of existential phenomenology, built upon the philosophical doctrines of Husserl and Heidegger. His philosophical vision also influenced such fields as hermeneutics, then structuralism, and finally poststructuralism, and later the theory of symbols [6; 190].

Maurice Merleau-Ponty considered a film as not solely a sequence of images but as a temporal form. Each film presents a narrative that connects a series of events with its characters. A film conveys drama not only through words, as literature does, but through visual and auditory means captured on screen. This effect supports a specific realism inherent in cinema. The actors perform in a natural manner and the script maintains plausibility, because the power of reality communicated through the screen exposes any stylisation immediately [7; 99]. This means that people understand the significance of cinema through their own perception and thus a film is not conceived but perceived. Therefore, in cinema, the expression of the human face can be so convincing and captivating: it not only conveys the character's thoughts as novels have done for many years but also shows us their actions. Cinema directly presents a unique way of human existence in the world through communication with surrounding objects and other people by means of gestures, gazes and facial expressions — elements that are key to understanding each of us. For cinema, much like modern psychology, dizziness, joy, pain, love and hatred are all different forms of behaviour [7; 100].

If philosophy and cinema converge in their perspectives and move in the same direction, this happens because philosophers and filmmakers share a common mindset and a shared understanding of the world characteristic of a particular generation. This fact further confirms that thought and technique are interconnected and, as Goethe said, what is inside finds its reflection outside. It is important to note that Merleau-Ponty's philosophical views transcend the time of his own generation, especially in his later works. In cinema, the viewer sees real objects with mimetic precision, but the film camera reflects the real life of the film-strip. To grasp the essence of the story told in a film, the mere demonstration of successive images is insufficient. To understand the plot's idea, the camera must show the actors' performance, their gestures, movements, facial expressions and the choices they make. All this evokes in the viewer what is called the *pre-reflective* or *non-reflective* ability to comprehend the director's message. Moreover, the camera can convey the aesthetic value of objects, their form, meaning and idea, which often go unnoticed in everyday life [8].

The same view was held by Gilles Deleuze, a French philosopher of the second half of the twentieth century. His philosophy can be described as diverging from the main philosophical trends of that time. Deleuze placed his aesthetic theory within the framework of *the process of creation*, which encompasses various domains, although previously Kant had regarded aesthetics as a unified and indivisible whole. The philosopher argued that sensation is the driving force of art, generated at the genetic level, sharpening sensitivity or sensuality. Moreover, he classified art as a specific kind of thinking, in contrast to philosophy, which consists of concepts. Art produces signs that stimulate the conditions of creativity; it is free from stereotypical schemes of representing the world. Sensation, preceding representation, is connected to a force acting on the body. Deleuze maintained that artists merely represent the body without its artistic content [9].

The philosophy of cinema was articulated by Deleuze in his eponymous book *Cinema*, which reflects on the influence of cinema on philosophy. Cinema possesses a logic that foregrounds fundamental concepts, such as movement or image, which make it recognisable. For Deleuze, the natural perception is of central importance, as well as the conditions of its existence — its environment and existential coordinates — that is, the point from which invisible threads emanate, connecting various subjects to the world and the degree of accessibility of this point to the world [8; 80]. Deleuze worked on developing a new methodology that would fully capture the essence of cinema, while Merleau-Ponty, in Deleuze's view, had not done so before. Merleau-Ponty's work *Phenomenology of Perception* contains an analysis of the fact that, though opposed, natural perception and cinema differ in their nature, with the former being more significant. The author argued that film projection does not reflect the horizon that influences the continuity of perception and therefore the identification of an object in cinema is lost. In other words, human perception of the world through their gaze and film projection are different phenomena. This was discussed in his works *Cinema and New Psychology*, as well as *The Visible and the Invisible* [1; 231].

At the same time, another philosopher, Henri Bergson, in his study *Creative Evolution*, approaches cinema by describing the cinematographic mechanism of conveying thought processes, calling them *instantaneous snapshots of consciousness*, drawing an analogy with the operation of the camera as an optical device. He believed that both in real life and in cinema, movement is an illusion, that is, a series of images — pictures — successively replacing each other within a time interval. German Expressionist directors used close-ups differently, which Deleuze saw as a driving force generated by light and darkness, drawing an allegory with human falling or rising. According to him, such movement, both physical and metaphorical, at the same time, holds great potential. Light on the face of a character or shadow captured in a close-up conveys their emotions and experiences more expressively than if filmed from a distance. It was from these works that Deleuze derived the concept of *the icon* which became a prototype of the *expressed* and *reflected* model [10; 222].

Both philosophy and art consider the concept of the gaze as an important factor requiring deep analysis. In turn, the theory of the gaze in cinema emphasizes that the gaze is an essential element of any film and is not merely a technical invention but a semiotic means used to convey meaning, including cultural meaning. The gaze in cinema is, first and foremost, a means of physiological reflection. The gaze is generated by a person, or more precisely, by their eyes — two physiological optical instruments given to them not only to determine whether the person is safe, but also so that the brain can derive pleasure from what is seen, granting the person pleasant feelings alongside unpleasant ones, which form into emotions and reactions. The psychophysiology of human thought, generated by what is seen, was meant to be reflected by cinema — *the cine-eye* — a one-eyed mechanical device capable of giving the world the feelings and experiences of film characters allowing to see the world through their gaze [11; 170].

Analyzing the eye and the pupil in cinema including the cine-eye — not a human representation of the universe — it can be said that both are organs that help present the world as it is. Every film reveals the surrounding reality to viewers *visually*; however, in film, the gaze is directed through the camera from a de-subjectivised source. Before examining these configurations in more detail, it is necessary to take a brief excursion into the history of the eye in early cinema and classical avant-garde film. According to Stephen Heath, *'The eye in cinema is the ideal eye, a stable and ubiquitous power over the scene, passing from the director to the spectator via the cinematographic apparatus'* [12; 32].

The eye in cinema received the name *cine-eye* from the early period of film art development. This term refers to the entire film industry today. Dziga Vertov developed the cine-eye as a film technology in the Soviet Union. This name also referred to a movement and a group that used this technique. The cine-eye served as a tool to capture what people considered inaccessible to the human eye. Films using this method did not try to imitate how the human eye sees things. This method created a new type of perception in the emerging

cinematic environment. This environment included not narrative or entertainment-based film forms but skilled acting and seemingly spontaneous moments taken from real life [13; 35].

Researchers should note the works of scholars J. Lacan, M. Foucault, and N. Luhmann when studying this field. These scholars made a breakthrough in recording *cinematic truth* and redirecting it to the recipient. In their view, cinema can convey the spirit of the time and the emotional state of the main characters. The entire cinematic world knows Dziga Vertov. People called him *the Father* of cinematographic documentary. He initiated the study of a new area in film theory known as visual anthropology. He gave many theorists and filmmakers material for further reflection [14; 127]. Researchers aimed to understand Vertov's methodology by approaching the topic from the perspective of perception and the recreation of *a three-dimensional cinematic-anthropological gaze* and its accurate transmission through the camera. Vertov himself said the following, '*I am the cine-eye*' [15; 54].

Vertov skillfully mastered the creation of a hypnotic effect, which became possible precisely due to such repetitions — in shots, editing phrases, intertitles, cuts and rhythm. Through these techniques, he created a multi-screen composition and viewers entered a trance-like state. He seemingly *sorted through* portraits taken in close-up and the cut allowed this to be done quickly producing not an informative message but a psychological emphasis [16; 1393].

Benjamin W. noted that the camera's penetration into the human world became the pinnacle of scientific and technological development of that period, as well as of cinematic art in general. Cinema significantly facilitated access to what he called *the optical unconscious perception*. Many phenomena became easier to explain as a result and Vertov's close-up, as well as the use of slow motion, freeze frames and varied camera angles, made this possible. Frame-by-frame shooting also played an important role [17; 221].

The camera made possible the prolonged observation of the female body, something that in real life was accessible only to a few. The intense male gaze, which undresses and penetrates, became a symbol of the deep, revealing and scrutinising male perspective. Such films indiscreetly exposed a fundamental truth to the public — the accessibility and impunity that classical cinema would later seek to obscure. The male gaze, powerful and all-penetrating into the depth and mystery of the female body, was later labelled as *voyeuristic*, revealing human nature and essence openly rather than narratively or metaphorically, as the camera can hold its gaze on a specific part of the body, showing that it is precisely this part which interests another character at a given moment [11; 177].

Films of German Expressionism often depicted horror alongside pleasure in a similar way and this depiction reflected in the characters' gazes. The films *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *The Street*, *Nosferatu* and others present a voyeuristic gaze, a punishing gaze, a sliding, piercing-undressing sadistic and hypnotic gaze. In most classical cinema, those punishing, direct and explicit *eyes* belong to an imaginary character and therefore remain disembodied, because they are shown through the camera's gaze, which acts as a two-way corridor and changes the nature, concept and roles of the watcher and the watched. Film artists see more than ordinary people. Imagination sometimes creates realistic visions. Vertov sought to present exactly that in his works — what remained inaccessible to the average *human eye* (more precisely, the brain). Vertov's cine-eye was never an abstract technical device; it always had the task of revealing not the artistic truth but the truth of life. Vertov assembled fragments and combined them with reverse sequences to cultivate in the viewer a new type of perception. Vertov believed that art should not only entertain but also educate and develop its audience. The film director sought to develop a semantic field in people. He said, '*From now on and forever I free myself from human immobility, I remain in constant motion, now approaching objects, now moving away from them, now crawling under them, now climbing on them... Now I, the camera, rush along their resultant, manoeuvre in the chaos of movement, record movement beginning with movements composed of the most complex combinations... My path leads to the creation of a new perception of the world. I decipher a world unknown to you in a new way*' [18; 17].

No less compelling for the analysis of gaze theory in cinema are the works of the French psychoanalyst Jacques-Marie-Émile Lacan, whose ideas had a significant influence on philosophy and sociology, psychoanalysis and cultural studies, film theory and art history. Lacan singled out cinema from among other art forms, since, in his view, it uniquely enabled the observation of other people's inner worlds. Numerous studies have been dedicated to exploring Lacan's concept of the cinematic gaze. Of particular interest is the essay entitled *Orthopsychic Object: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan* by D. Copjec. In this work, the author notes that Lacan had his own distinctive views on psychoanalysis and the world of cinema more broadly. Lacan believed that all our private thoughts and actions are constantly monitored and exposed within the public sphere and that the words used by members of society to communicate do not convey the whole truth.

However, the gaze — especially the cinematic gaze — according to film theory, is capable of revealing much more [17; 53].

In the 1970s and 1980s, film theory significantly *processed* Freud's ideas on the gaze. On the one hand, the so-called poststructuralist Jacques Lacan and, on the other hand, Jeremy Bentham's theory of the panopticon, created a new version of the gaze, identifying the eye as the climactically privileged point of convergence of gazes articulated within the frame, framing and editing [11; 172]. The product of the activity of the film camera and those who *operate* it — the cinematographer, director and indirectly the actor whom the camera follows — ultimately becomes the film projected onto the screen, which Lacan saw as a mirror; that is, in Lacan's more radical understanding, the screen is conceived as a mirror reflecting the inner states of the plot's characters. Lacan believed that although the gaze was conceived as a metapsychological concept central to describing the psychic interaction of the subject with the cinematic apparatus, the concept was formulated in such a way that any psychic interaction became redundant. His intervention in the fundamental principles of film theory amounted to a decision to separate everything that existed in earlier film theory and to create new rules, just as he did in his own views on psychoanalysis. D. Copjec argues that it was precisely through the concept of the apparatus — economic, technical, ideological — that the institute of cinema was to realize a rupture between contemporary film theory and its past [19; 55].

This rupture meant that cinematic representation was no longer regarded as an explicit or distorted reflection of a preceding and external reality, but rather as one of many social discourses that help construct reality and the spectator's subjectivity. Through this connection, the subject is compelled to accept and recognize themselves within the representations of the social order as their own. Ultimately, Lacan concluded that the screen functions as a mirror. The representations generated by films, the images presented on the screen, are taken by the subject as their own and the subject's self-image can relate either to the image of the subject itself or to an image belonging to the subject. Lacan argues that it is precisely this aspect that allows the subject to see in any representation not only a reflection of themselves but also a reflection of themselves as the master of all their inquiries. This imaginary relation leads to the subject becoming the master of the image. This understanding reconciled film theory with the characteristic impression of the film's reality [20; 58].

At the same time, the sense of reality arises because the subject perceives the image as a complete and sufficient representation of themselves and their world — that is, the subject is satisfied having found an adequate reflection on the screen. The *effect of reality* and the *subject* denote the same resultant impression: the image helps make the subject fully visible to themselves — the subject reinterprets as their own the concepts that were previously constructed by others [19; 58]. The gaze is always the point at which identification must occur and since the gaze is always conceptualized within the geometric perspective of the depicted, wherein the picture becomes fully and undistortedly visible, the eyes consistently retain the sense that they are the point where meaning and being coincide. The subject emerges by identifying with the image and the brain determines the object [19; 60].

The difference between the orthopsychic relation and the panoptic is defined by the fact that the objective gaze allows thought to become secret — that is, it enables thoughts to remain hidden even under the most scrutinizing attention [19; 60]. Thus, Lacan sketches a picture that sharply contrasts with what is presented in film theory: in his theory, the viewer is capable of independently attributing meaning to things and perceiving even what is, in fact, devoid of any inherent meaning. In reality, according to film theory, the following occurs in any film: the camera shows the viewer what the character sees, compelling the viewer to become part of the character's gaze and prompting the viewer to anticipate the character's subsequent actions. This heightens the plot's tension and anchors the viewer to the screen — a mechanism exploited by the screenwriter and director, but not by the character, who merely performs what the screenwriter devised and what the camera, through the cinematographer, must capture. The film's action unfolds according to the screenwriter's plan, yet a false illusion is created that the character acts independently. The screenwriter, like a puppeteer, *leads* the director; the director *leads* the cinematographer; the cinematographer *leads* the character; the character *leads* the viewer. The viewer sees through their own eyes and builds their own perspective based solely on the character's actions, genuinely believing themselves to be engaged in *the game*. Lacan calls this mechanism a trap, thereby sparking debate among critics and provoking resistance from proponents of classical theory.

Lacan was well-versed in phenomenological issues. He considered the screen to be a mirror [19; 53], having developed his own theory of perceiving the surrounding world. According to him, to have knowledge of what occurs on the screen means attempting to perceive the characters as holding opinions about their mir-

ror-like alter egos. Here the concept *I* is the spectator, while the character is *the Other*, who is seen, perceived and analysed by the eye, as Lacan's theory suggests. Renata Salecl interpreted this concept from Lacan's theory as a symbolic structure in which the subject is constantly involved. She argues that this structure is not purely psychic; it is an external universe of symbolic codes that radically affect our psychic experience. She warns against two errors: the internalization of *the Big Other* as a mere psychological phenomenon and the externalization of *the Big Other* as reducible to social institutions [20; 166]. Thus, it can be asserted that Lacan's conceptualization of *the Big Other* was presented by the scholar to analyse the potential power he associated with *the impenetrable* or *dark gaze* belonging to each spectator — hidden from others, invisible to the rest and analysed internally [11; 207].

While Dziga Vertov's approach was open, accessible, straightforward and clear to everyone, Lacan's perspective was, on the contrary, closed, secretive and concealed. The French philosopher, historian and cultural theorist Michel Foucault introduced a new dimension of the gaze in film production to art criticism. Specifically, Foucault proposed to recognize and analyse the gaze as vigilant and tenacious — the gaze of power, which, as Foucault argued, emerges from nowhere yet becomes all the stronger for it. This gaze acts like an all-seeing eye penetrating and monitoring everything happening both in real and virtual spaces [12; 207].

The vigilant gaze, therefore, is a gaze of scrutiny that operates in a mode of dominance. It is controlling and commanding, all-consuming and penetrating. It is not localized or focused on a single point, nor is it aimed at evaluating a specific individual. Foucault considered it a historical chronicle, while Lacan viewed it as a structuring record maintained by a single *apparatus* with numerous branches extending in various directions towards a target, gathering information and then returning to the origin to create a comprehensive picture — a reflection of the result of analysis. The latter conception is more precise, as it closely resembles the functioning of the film camera as a device that allows the physical gaze to be filtered through the prism of analytical thinking. In this process, the viewer becomes an *écran-retina*, upon which the vigilant gaze paints an image refracted through their own perception.

The concept of *the phantasm* somewhat resonates with this idea, since the cognitive-analytical process in both cases operates solitarily. On such a *retina* the image is already supplemented by the imaginative owner of the gaze, launched as a signal toward its target; consequently, it varies in form and structure for each viewer but remains real to them. Lacan and his followers adhered to a theory of cinema in which reality was paradoxical because, in their view, it was created through a synthesis of the imaginary and the symbolic and therefore both had and did not have boundaries. The philosopher believed that the signal coming from the point of investigation itself became the experiencing gaze for the sender; accordingly, the object under scrutiny *looks back* at its opponent. From the standpoint of relativity theory, this assertion appears scientifically grounded and justified, since in Lacan's theory, the object and subject constantly switch places. Humans, being voyeuristic and scopophilic by nature regardless of their gender, believe they control their gaze. However, Lacan argues otherwise—the gaze controls the people. The materiality of existence, or the Real in his terms, always overcomes and disrupts meaning and significance that arise within the symbolic order.

Foucault presents a completely different point of view. For him, it is crucial to understand the essence of the gaze problem and to analyse how the eye always investigates what it sees owing to the image being transmitted to the brain for analysis. Foucault believes that the picture seen by the eyes itself influences the interpretation of the received information, while the brain, like the eyes and similar to cameras, records a certain established, immutable spectacle — a spectacle framed from predetermined angles and positions [21; 142]. Clearly, it is necessary to explore how Michel Foucault formulates the problem of visualization in his perspective. The year 1971 was marked by his lecture in Tunis, where he discussed the issues and nuances of *Manet's Painting* [22; 17]. Michel Foucault expressed his attachment to painting as follows, '*What I truly like about painting is that it requires careful looking. In that, I find rest. It is one of the few things I could write about for pleasure, without any quarrels or conflicts. I believe I have no tactical or strategic relation to painting*' [23; 13].

Foucault approached painting purely from a philosophical perspective, regarding it as a source of a distinct form of knowledge. According to Foucault, Édouard Manet possessed the ability to convey his *supernatural* vision of objects and subjects within the world through his canvases. His eye acted as a transformative conduit, channeling the depicted imagery into his cerebral processes, thereby rendering it *magical*. Manet stood at the threshold of Impressionism, embodying a unique transitional layer in art history — a singular stratum that bridged tradition and innovation. This was primarily due to his manipulation of material qualities in his works, which engaged with the very foundations of Western painting dating back to the Quattro-



cento, thereby laying the groundwork for the advent of Impressionism [23; 22]. The painting *The Execution of Maximilian* exemplifies Manet's removal of physical spatial distance within the pictorial plane [23; 43].

Simultaneously, in *The Waitress with Beer Glasses*, Foucault discerns a latent interplay between the visible and the invisible, '*...the gazes within the painting are directed towards the invisible, which remains unmentioned on the canvas; they merely gesture in opposite directions—towards that which defies visualization, as it exists beyond the plane of the painting—while other gazes turn conversely. On both sides of the canvas unfold two events observed by the figures, yet the painting itself, instead of revealing what they behold, conceals and obscures it. The surface of the painting, on both its recto and verso, does not serve as a locus for manifest visibility; rather, it accentuates the invisibility of that which captures the attention of the depicted subjects*' [24; 45].

According to Michel Foucault, the work of Édouard Manet restores a sense of freedom to the viewer, encouraging a departure from habitual, idealized modes of perception and prompting exploration from new visual perspectives. When an individual observes a painting as a tangible object, their capacity to perceive the painting itself is diminished. As long as the object remains unseen, it exists within the realm of the imaginary [25; 154]. Foucault advocated for a movement toward equivalence, aspiring to a form of representational scenography and descriptive writing [26; 116]. He placed particular emphasis on the function of the gaze as a mode of deciphering and on the analysis of the act of interpretation, '*The perception of the world by others cannot be compared to my own perception of the world: my experience is unique, for I live it from within and from this internal perspective, it possesses an ontogenetically singular power. It is precisely this faculty that enables me to penetrate to the essence of things and, thereby, to transcend the confines of my own states of consciousness—grounded in inner experience, that is, in my own perception...*' [27; 87].

Thus, Michel Foucault's renowned theoretical conceptualization of the *panopticon* as a model of society and subjectivity both converges with and, in certain respects, diverges from Lacanian theory. According to Foucault, individuals have so deeply internalized and integrated the gaze of the *Other* into their subjective experience that the system no longer requires the actual presence of an overseeing figure. The mere possibility that society may be observed at any moment renders its members' hostages to this regime — even in the absence of a watcher or supervisor. The panoptic gaze emphasizes the sheer *existence* of surveillance rather than the act of observation itself. The flow of power, in this context, is predominantly unidirectional and within cinematic discourse, such an all-pervasive gaze is more commonly associated with discipline or self-surveillance than with voyeurism or the intrusion into private spheres. Foucault captured this notion in his famous assertion, '*Today's society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance. People are no longer positioned in the stands of an amphitheater or on stage, but are embedded within the machinery of the panopticon, subjected to manifestations of power that assert themselves autonomously, as each person becomes a cog in the machine*' [28; 317].

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, a seminal figure in twentieth-century sociology and the creator of an original systems theory of society, developed a particular conception of power that he would later articulate within his theoretical framework on art, which included cinema as one of its expressive forms. Luhmann viewed art not as a novel but rather as an eternal medium of communication. Drawing on the perspective of Enlightenment-era painter Jonathan Richardson, Luhmann formulated his understanding of art as a means of revealing that which was previously unseen. Moreover, he attributed to painting the characteristics of non-verbal communication, devoid of linguistic features — implying that the viewer perceives only what they are inclined to see, regardless of the artist's intended message. Despite this stance, art, in his view, necessarily involves two fundamental stages: observation and reproduction. The artist observes forms or individuals, interpreting their poses as indicative of particular desires and in the act of reproduction transfers these observations onto the canvas with precision, thereby guiding the viewer toward the intended vision. The filmmaker, Luhmann argues, functions in much the same way. In his reflection on contemporary cinema, Luhmann classifies it as a form of *imaginary reality* insofar as it is no longer grounded in raw actuality, as it was in the work of Dziga Vertov, but rather constructed according to a script—first imagined by the screenwriter and shaped by their desires and then interpreted by the director through the mediation of technical instruments, foremost among them the cinematic camera.

Luhmann, for his part, offers a functional analysis of perception, likening each frame of a film to a painter's canvas, without aspiring to formulate a new or as-yet-undeveloped aesthetic theory. Rather, he merely exposes the internal logic of a system that operates independently of external influences, constructing it within the framework of communicative postulates and non-verbal verbalisation. Thus, one may conclude that the concept of the gaze occupies a central position in both philosophy and art, as evidenced by the works

of M. Merleau-Ponty, G. Deleuze, D. Vertov, J. Lacan, M. Foucault, and N. Luhmann, all of whom devoted critical attention to the phenomenology of seeing. This body of thought enables the formulation of a philosophy of the gaze as a foundational element of cinematography—an early twentieth-century technical invention capable of becoming a unique transformer of cultural meaning and a vessel for the eternal dimensions of human existence.

### Conclusion

The research conducted has revealed the multidimensional nature of cinema's visual language as a distinctive form of cultural and philosophical reflection. The cinematic gaze, far from being a mere technical device, emerges as a philosophically charged element of visual narration that exerts a profound influence on sensory perception, image interpretation and the formation of viewer identity. An analysis of cinematic visual tools through the lens of phenomenology of perception and visual anthropology has demonstrated that cinema does not merely reflect reality, but actively participates in its construction. The camera, acting as a mediator between the viewer and the screen space, establishes specific regimes of vision within which hierarchies of meaning, social roles and bodily representations are structured. These visual strategies shape not only the viewer's emotional response but also their normative perception of space, time and corporeality.

The study confirms the hypotheses that cinematic visual techniques—close-ups, camera angles, camera movement and editing strategies—not only shape cognitive and affective perception but also influence processes of symbolic identification, socialization and the reproduction of cultural norms. Cinema thus becomes a space where the visual intersects with the philosophical and the sensory engages with the ideological. The particular value of this research lies in its interdisciplinary methodology, which integrates elements of phenomenology, visual anthropology, film theory, and social philosophy. This framework allows for a more nuanced analysis of visual imagery as a form of cultural articulation and critical interpretation of reality. The findings of this study can be applied in film theory, cultural criticism, media education and in visual storytelling practices aimed at creating meaningful and ethically charged imagery. In this way, the research not only unveils the philosophical potential of cinema but also lays the groundwork for further inquiry into visual representation as a key mechanism in shaping contemporary social experience.

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## Киноөнердегі көрнекі антропология және көзқарастың феноменологиясы

Зерттеу кинематографиялық тәжірибенің белсенді қатысушысы ретінде көрерменді қабылдауға баса назар аударатыны, кино өнеріндегі көрнекі антропология мен көзқарас феноменологиясының өзара әрекеттесуіне арналған. Қазіргі заманғы көрнекі технологиялар субъективті қабылдаудың маңыздылығын арттырады, ал феноменологиялық тәсіл кинообраздардың көрерменге қалай әсер ететінін тереңірек түсінуге мүмкіндік береді. Зерттеудің мақсаты — кинематографиялық құралдардың кеңістікті, уақытты және дүниені қабылдауын қалай қалыптастыратынын талдау. Зерттеу көрнекі элементтердің мәдени сәйкестікті қалыптастыруға әсерін және көрнекі шешімдер арқылы билікті қабылдауды талдау сияқты аспектілерді қамтиды. Әдістеме тақырыпты жан-жақты қарастыруды қамтамасыз ететін феноменологияны, көрнекі талдауды және антропологиялық тәсілді біріктіреді. Зерттеудің жаңалығы киноның көрнекі стратегияларын және олардың шындықты қабылдауға әсерін талдауға пәнаралық көзқараста жатыр. Нәтижесінде кино әлемді тек бейнелеп қана қоймай, әлеуметтік нормалар мен сәйкестіктерді қалыптастыруда белсенді рөл атқаратынын көрсетеді. Камера пассивті құрал ретінде емес, мағынаны қалыптастыру процесінде белсенді қатысушы ретінде әрекет етеді. Зерттеу киноөнер мамандарына, медиа оқытушыларына және мәдениет зерттеушілеріне көрнекі практикаларды және олардың аудиторияға әсерін тереңірек түсінуге көмектеседі.

*Кілт сөздер:* көрнекі антропология, феноменология, көзқарас, киноөнері, қабылдау, дүние, кинематографиялық кеңістік, мәдени сәйкестілік, көрнекі стратегиялар, уақыт феноменологиясы.

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## Визуальная антропология и феноменология взгляда в киноискусстве

Данное исследование посвящено взаимодействию визуальной антропологии и феноменологии взгляда в киноискусстве, акцентируя внимание на восприятии зрителя как активного участника кинематографического опыта. Современные визуальные технологии усиливают значимость субъективного восприятия, а феноменологический подход позволяет глубже осмыслить, каким образом кинообразы воздействуют на зрителя. Целью работы является анализ того, как кинематографические средства формируют восприятие пространства, времени и телесности. Исследование охватывает такие аспекты, как влияние визуальных элементов на конструирование культурных идентичностей и анализ восприятия власти через визуальные решения. Методология объединяет феноменологию, визуальный анализ и антропологический подход, что обеспечивает комплексное рассмотрение темы. Новизна исследования заключается в междисциплинарном подходе к анализу визуальных стратегий кино и их влияния на восприятие реальности. Результаты показывают, что кино не просто отражает мир, а активно участвует в формировании социальных норм и идентичностей. Камера выступает не как пассивный инструмент, а как активный участник в процессе смыслообразования. Исследование может быть полезным

для практиков кино, преподавателей медиа и культурных исследователей, стремящихся к более глубокому пониманию визуальных практик и их воздействия на аудиторию.

**Ключевые слова:** визуальная антропология, феноменология, взгляд, киноискусство, восприятие, телесность, кинематографическое пространство, культурная идентичность, визуальные стратегии, феноменология времени.

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