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THE DISTANCE OF THE GAZE, SEEING WITHOUT POSSESSION: VOYEURISM AS A TRANSMEDIAL STRUCTURE OF VISUAL EXPERIENCE. FROM KIEŚLOWSKI TO NEWTON AND MANARA, WITH TITIAN AND RODIN IN BETWEEN

AUTHOR:

Dr. Alejandro Gastón Jantus Lordi de Sobremonte
enrolled in the Master's Degree Program in Media, Digital Communication and Journalism,
Department of Communication and Social Research (CoRiS), Sapienza University of Rome

ADVISOR:

Prof. Guido Vitiello, Advisor *(Relatore)*
Department of Communication and Social Research (CoRiS), Sapienza University of Rome

ABSTRACT: Through a qualitative and comparative analysis, this research investigates five case studies across different media: Kieślowski's Dekalog VI (cinema), Titian's Venus of Urbino (painting), Rodin's The Kiss (sculpture), Helmut Newton's photography, and Milo Manara's comics. The study demonstrates that voyeurism operates as a constant relational structure between observer and observed, while its ethical and cultural implications vary depending on the medium and its dispositif. Drawing on theoretical contributions from visual culture and media studies, particularly the concepts of threshold, immersion/emersion, narrative positioning, spreadability and drillability, the article argues that voyeurism functions as an independent variable shaping the spectator's position within mediated environments. In contemporary digital culture, where images circulate across platforms and audiences actively re-appropriate and redistribute content, voyeuristic asymmetry may transform into participatory symmetry.
KEYWORDS: #Voyeurism #VisualCulture #Transmedia #CulturalSociology #Framing #SociologyOfMedia

INTRODUCTION

VOYEURISM AS A TRANSMEDIAL STRUCTURE OF VISUAL EXPERIENCE

The primary object of this research —voyeurism— is often reduced to a psychological dimension, to an individual scopophilic impulse associated with the pleasure of secretly observing others. Such a definition, however, proves insufficient when applied to the experience of spectatorship within visual media.

Although voyeurism was initially classified as a clinical paraphilia in which sexual arousal derives from observing unsuspecting individuals —often strangers— nude or engaged in intimate acts without their consent, the present study reframes voyeurism not as a deviation, but as a **transmedial structure of vision**. It constitutes a relational condition that traverses languages, dispositifs, and representational practices, consistently positioning the one who looks in relation to the one who is looked at.

In this perspective, voyeurism does not merely concern the object of the gaze; rather, it involves a broader reflection on the interplay between distance (diegetic and extra-diegetic), asymmetry (diegetic and extra-diegetic), and the ethical responsibility of the spectator, immersed in a fabulation of the world, in which on a global stage, we witness the parade of stories, narratives, reports, translations, and self-representations *(in una fabulazione del mondo, in cui "su un palcoscenico globale, vediamo sfilare le storie, i racconti, i resoconti, le traduzioni, le auto-rappresentazioni)".*[1]

The act of looking is therefore not neutral. It establishes a structural relation defined by non-intervention, partial access, and unequal visibility, conditions that shape the very architecture of mediated perception.[2]

DEKALOG VI BY KRZYSZTOF KIEŚLOWSKI AS CENTRAL CASE STUDY

It is the cinema of **Krzysztof Kieślowski** that offers a privileged terrain for analyzing our object of study (voyeurism), more specifically through ***"Dekalog, Szesc"*** (*Dekalog VI*), one of the ten

[1] *Leonzi, Silvia, Lo spettacolo dell'immaginario. I miti, le storie, i media, Latina, Edizioni Tunué, 2010.*

[2] Alejandro Gastón Jantus Lordi de Sobremonte, *L'influenza dei mass media nella genesi dell'ideale estetico*, Roma, Edizioni Logos, 2007.

medium-length films inspired by the Biblical commandments, produced for Polish television between 1988 and 1989, loosely referable to the precept ***"Thou shalt not commit adultery,"*** as indicated in the subtitle appearing on the cover of the edition *Hobby & Work Publishing / San Paolo Multimedia* (2009) that we examined.

The medium-length film stages a radical reflection on the gaze and its effects, articulated around elementary dispositifs such as **the window** (and the other transparent surfaces that appear in the film), **the telescope** (and the binoculars), and **the physical distance** that transforms looking into a progressively problematic act—even for the spectator, who finds himself not only inside but also immersed in the *"cave,"* in the shared fictional space where an "imagnific reproduction of the real" is created, corresponding to what André Bazin defined as the "myth of total cinema," recognizing in the cinematic idea the status of an anthropological need preceding the historical invention of the medium itself *(corrispondente a ciò che André Bazin ha definito «mito del cinema totale», riconoscendo nell'idea cinematografica lo statuto di un'esigenza antropologica precedente alla stessa invenzione storica del medium).*[3]

Here, voyeurism does not take the form of spectacular transgression or simple curiosity, but rather of a painful and **destabilizing experience**, capable of involving both the character and the spectator. For this reason, we have chosen to name this specific configuration ***ethical-reflexive voyeurism***.

The **protagonist**, Tomek (Olaf Lubaszenko), observes the intimacy of others from a **protected and asymmetrical position** —much like that of the spectator— which initially appears to guarantee control and security. Yet this position ultimately proves unsustainable: the gaze exposes the one who looks to **suffering** and **guilt**.

The **spectator**, called upon to share the protagonist's point of view, becomes implicated in the same dynamic, experiencing **voyeurism not as pleasure** but as an *ethical trial of the gaze.* In this sense, *Dekalog VI* does not merely represent voyeurism; it employs it as a reflexive dispositif capable of rendering the spectator's own position visible.

By adopting *Dekalog VI* as the **central case study**, this thesis seeks to investigate voyeurism as a structure of vision that manifests itself differently depending on the medium, yet preserves a common underlying logic: that of **looking without being able to intervene**, seeing without

[3] *Grossi, Giancarlo, La notte dei simulacri. Sogno, cinema, realtà virtuale, Milano, Johan & Levi Editore, 2021.*

possessing, being involved without being present. In order to illuminate the **transmedial** dimension of voyeurism, the analysis will be extended to other domains of visual culture.

OTHER CASE STUDIES: PAINTING, SCULPTURE, PHOTOGRAPHY, COMICS

In particular, the following will be examined: Renaissance painting, through **Titian Vecellio**'s *Venus of Urbino*, in which the spectator's gaze is directly and frontally interpellated by the image; sculpture, through **Auguste Rodin**'s *The Kiss*, which exposes the intimacy of others to public view; the photography of **Helmut Newton**, in which voyeurism is aestheticized and normalized; and the comics of **Milo Manara**, where the author renders the voyeuristic dimension playful.

From this perspective, Alfred Hitchcock's sibylline declaration when presenting *Psycho* to the press as an *"excursion into metaphysical sex"* appears particularly significant. Thus, the spectral Victorian dwelling of the *Bates Motel* becomes *"a musée imaginaire of **mystic eroticism**, through whose rooms three infernal mythological cycles pursue one another: Eros and Psyche, Orpheus and Eurydice, Demeter and Persephone."*[4]

In *Psycho* as well, desire is no longer understood as an explicit act or content, but as an **experience of the gaze**, as a visual tension separated from possession and mediated by dispositifs that regulate distance and asymmetry. It is precisely this **"metaphysical" dimension** of sex, understood as a structure of looking rather than as erotic theme, that constitutes the *fil rouge* linking the case studies analyzed here.

In short, different forms share a common denominator related to eroticism, yet what is at stake is not sex as content, but the **spectator's position** in relation to a desire that **is activated and exhausted within the gaze itself**, revealing different modalities for managing visual desire: *direct interpellation* (Titian), *public exposure of intimacy* (Rodin), *aestheticization* (Newton), *ludicization* (Manara).

REFERENCES TO THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in the contributions of Andrea **Pinotti**, Giancarlo **Grossi**, and Elisabetta **Modena**, whose work enables us to articulate the discussion

[4] *Vitiello, Guido, Una visita al Bates Motel, Milano, Adelphi, 2019.*

around the concepts of ***threshold***, *fourth wall, immersion/emersion, gaze in/toward the camera,* and *"to live the stories" (stare nelle storie).* The latter is understood as the way in which the spectator/ user is positioned in relation to a visual narrative—not only in terms of *what* is seen, but how one *participates* in it and with what degree of involvement, distance, and responsibility *(immersion).*

With regard to the **threshold** as an ***extra-diegetic*** concept defining the physical boundary between the spectator's real world and the fictional universe (to cross such a threshold implies entering or exiting the narrative context), we clarify that, for the purposes of the present study and unless otherwise specified, from this point forward we will use the term "threshold" also in reference to the **intra-diegetic threshold**, which exists within the narrative universe itself. By this we mean both the physical threshold (for example, the window within the narrative) and the psychological one (an inner line of demarcation).

The theoretical framework also draws on the work of Silvia **Leonzi**, who has explored the various hybridizations and articulations of transmedia with the aim of developing critical insights and offering tools for understanding and "inhabiting" a scenario that has become increasingly central within contemporary media ecosystems.

Particular attention will be devoted to social media platforms —especially YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest— where the active participation of spectators/users in relation to the cases examined here has been concretely observed and where related content is widely distributed.

Exactly like offline spaces, social media platforms —at times even freeing themselves from the specific technological features upon which they were originally designed and structured— acquire value and meaning in relation to the ways they are used. They thus assume the more complex, and more plausible, meaning of technologically determined spaces (or networks) and culturally inhabited environments *("esattamente come gli spazi off line, infatti, anche i social, arrivando persino a svincolarsi dalle specifiche peculiarità alla base della loro stessa progettazione e finalizzazione tecnologica, acquisiscono un valore e un significato in relazione al modo in cui vengono utilizzati, assumendo, dunque, il significato più complesso, e verosimile, di spazi (o reti) tecnologicamente determinati e ambienti culturalmente abitati").*[5]

[5] *Ciofalo, Giovanni, "Transmedia e social", pubblicato in Transmedia studies. Logiche e pratiche degli ecosistemi della comunicazione (pag. 48), Roma, Armando Editore, 2022.*

Within this framework, journalism itself cannot remain unaffected by transmediality: "journalism is both a reconstruction of reality and a construction of meanings; it cannot do without a moment in which these meanings are conveyed to audiences — also the relationship with a form of storytelling inspired by the conventional canons of fiction has long been part of journalistic practice *("il giornalismo è ricostruzione della realtà e costruzione di significati, non può prescindere da un momento in cui questi vengano veicolati ai fruitori – anche il rapporto con uno storytelling ispirato agli abituali canoni della fiction appare presente da lungo tempo nel novero delle pratiche giornalistiche").*[6]

OBJECTIVES

In dialogue with these perspectives, we aim to demonstrate that voyeurism is not a marginal residue of vision, but one of its fundamental conditions, capable of traversing media, historical periods, and expressive languages. Through the analysis of five exemplary case studies across five media domains *(cinema, painting, sculpture, photography,* and *comics),* this study seeks to restore to the spectator an awareness of their own position, interrogating the act of looking not as a neutral gesture but as a form of responsibility. The **primary objective** is to demonstrate that **voyeurism** *(independent variable)* operates as a constant element across **media** *(dependent variable),* while assuming different configurations depending on the specific works, media forms, and dispositifs of vision involved.

GAZE, NARRATION, AND THE POSITION OF THE SPECTATOR

One of the fundamental theoretical premises underlying this research is that vision within media products **cannot be separated** from the narrative structure that organizes it. Narration is not merely a sequence of events, but a system for the distribution of information that guides the spectator's attention, shapes expectations, and regulates degrees of access to the represented world. From this perspective, to look always means to occupy a specific position within a narrative construction that determines what may be seen, when, and from which point of view.[7]

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[6] *Ugolini, Lorenzo, "Transmedia journalism", pubblicato in Transmedia studies. Logiche e pratiche degli ecosistemi della comunicazione (pag. 174), Roma, Armando Editore, 2022.*

[7] *Bordwell, David, Narration in the Fiction Film, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.*

Voyeurism, understood as a structure of the gaze, emerges precisely from this asymmetrical management of information. It is not merely a matter of "seeing something forbidden," but of being **positioned in a privileged relation to the characters** —a position that allows one to observe without being observed, to know without intervening, to witness without participating. In Bordwellian terms, voyeurism may be interpreted as a recurrent mode of spectator alignment and allegiance, in which the viewer is encouraged to share the gaze of a character or narrative device while remaining external to the action.

This position, however, is never neutral. As Umberto Eco has argued, every text —and especially every visual text— implicitly constructs its own *Model Reader,* that is, an ideal subject called upon to **cooperate with the work** according to specific competencies, expectations, and interpretive postures. Applied to visual culture, this implies that voyeurism is not a deviation on the part of the spectator, but a function anticipated by the text itself: a mode of reception inscribed within the structure of the work, which guides and orients the viewer's visual behavior.[8]

In this sense, to speak of voyeurism as a transmedial structure of vision means acknowledging that many media products actively construct a spectator who looks without being able to act, who observes without being able to alter what is seen, and who is placed in a position of suspended responsibility. It is precisely this suspension —between knowledge and powerlessness, between involvement and distance— that constitutes the theoretical core of the analysis proposed here.

MEDIA, DISPOSITIFS, AND THE TRANSMEDIAL LOGIC OF THE GAZE

Adopting a transmedial perspective makes it possible to extend this reflection beyond the boundaries of any single medium. As Jenkins observes, media do not operate in isolation, but within communicative ecosystems in which stories, images, and expressive forms circulate, transform, and redefine themselves across different platforms. In this sense, transmediality does not concern narrative distribution alone, but also the persistence of cognitive and perceptual structures that adapt to different technological contexts.[9]

Voyeurism can be read as one of these persistent structures. Cinema, painting, sculpture, photography, and comics, despite their formal heterogeneity, share the capacity to position the

[8] *Eco, Umberto, Lector in Fabula, Milano, Bompiani, 1979.*

[9] *Jenkins Henry, Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide, New York, New York University Press, 2007.*

viewer in an **asymmetrical relation** to what is represented. What changes is not the underlying structure, but the way each medium renders it visible, makes it problematic, or, on the contrary, neutralizes it.

McLuhan demonstrated how every medium reorganizes the subject's sensory and cognitive relations, producing **effects that extend far beyond the explicit content of messages**. If *"the medium is the message,"* then voyeurism cannot be reduced to an erotic or transgressive theme; rather, it must be understood as a **systemic effect** of the ways in which media extend and restructure the gaze.[10]

The physical distance of the spectator from the screen, the closer proximity to a painting, the bodily nearness to a sculpture, the photographic framing, or the sequential structure of comics are not merely technical features, but conditions that **shape the posture of looking**.

Within this framework, voyeurism emerges as a mode of vision that traverses media precisely because it is functional to their operation: it allows one to see without exposing oneself, to desire without intervening, to access represented intimacy without assuming its consequences. The transmediality of voyeurism thus does not lie in the repetition of a theme, but in the recurrence of a *spectatorial position* that each medium articulates according to its own specificities and to which each medium adds its own distinct *"portion"* in addition.[11]

The asymmetrical relationship that initially characterizes the connection between the media product and the spectator/user, however, tends to transform into a form of ***dynamic symmetry*** at the moment in which the latter actively re-appropriates the content. Such re-appropriation takes place through practices of in-depth exploration, analysis, and reinterpretation that Jenkins defines as ***drillability***: the audience no longer limits itself to a superficial or linear consumption, but instead probes the work deeply, decoding its narrative, visual, and symbolic structures, interrogating its thematic and ethical implications, and contributing to the production of meanings that exceed those immediately offered by the text.

At the same time, this process of appropriation extends into the dimension of ***spreadability***, that is, the capacity of content to circulate, be shared, and redistributed across multiple platforms and

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[10] *McLuhan, Marshall, The Medium is the Massage, Londra, Random House, 1967 (tr. it. Il medium è il messaggio, Milano, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1968).*

[11] *Scolari, Carlos Alberto, Narrativas Transmedia. Cuando todos los medios cuentan, Barcelona, Ediciones Deusto, 2013.*

communicative contexts. The media product is thus discussed, commented upon, and re-launched in film clubs, in specialized and generalist press, in television programs, in academic environments, as well as within the digital spaces of social media, where the audience —understood also as community— acts no longer as a passive recipient but as an **active node** within an interpretive and discursive network.

In this transition, the spectator's position changes radically: he or she is no longer merely the one who watches, but becomes a **co-producer of meaning**, participating in the life of the work beyond the moment of viewing. The original asymmetry —grounded in the separation between those who produce and those who consume— thus rebalances into a more complex relationship, in which the media content continues to exert a structuring power over the gaze, yet is simultaneously re-mediated and re-signified, extended and transformed through participatory practices that broaden its cultural and symbolic scope.

IMAGES, DESIRE, AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GAZE

A further decisive theoretical contribution to the framework of this study comes from Mitchell's reflection on the nature of images. The founding figure of visual studies proposes that images be understood not as passive objects, but as **entities that seem to "ask"** something of the spectator: attention, desire, identification, recognition.[12]

The "sealed" matter thus exits passivity and recovers its meaning at the very moment in which the spectator/user decides to **interpret it**. It is precisely within this space that human choice takes place: the human being is always free to choosem indeed **condemned to choose,** insofar as even non-choice is itself a choice.[13]

Freedom, in this sense, becomes a tension between **action** (*praxis*) and the resistance of the matter ***(practico-inert),*** an apparently oxymoronic expression composed of two intrinsically opposed terms: on the one hand, doing (organic matter) that expresses a subject; on the other, the inertness of matter (inorganic matter). Yet these two elements do not remain separate. Rather, they reveal the existence of a field in which prior material conditions accumulate, a starting point for the ***dépasser***,

[12] *Mitchell, William John Thomas, What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2005.*

[13] *Tognonato, Claudio, Teoria sociale dell'agire inerte. L'individuo nella morsa delle costruzioni sociali, Napoli, Liguori Editore, 2018.*

the dialectical overcoming of constituted materiality. It is the space where human agency confronts the inert imposition of matter that weighs upon the moment of choice and that, in turn, induces the repetition of further *praxis.*[14]

This perspective allows the analysis to shift from the mere act of looking to the relational dynamic that is established between image and observer. Applied to voyeurism, such an approach makes it possible to understand that **the gaze is never a unidirectional act.**[15]

Even when the image does not explicitly return the gaze, it nonetheless organizes a relationship that involves the spectator on affective, cognitive, and ethical levels. To look means to respond —or to withdraw— from the **image's call**, thereby assuming a position that may be problematized, neutralized, or rendered invisible.

It is precisely on this level that the fundamental difference among the case studies analyzed in this work becomes evident. In certain works, such as *Dekalog VI*, the voyeuristic structure is destabilized and pushed to the breaking point, compelling the spectator to question their own position. In others, such as Helmut Newton's photography or Milo Manara's comics, the same structure is normalized and rendered functional to the pleasure of consumption, shielding the gaze from any potential crisis.

Following Eco, we might say that these works propose profoundly different *model readers:* either a spectator called upon to recognize the weight of their own act of looking, or a user reassured, authorized, and relieved of responsibility. Voyeurism thus becomes a privileged theoretical testing ground through which not only images, but also the ways in which visual culture constructs its subjects, can be interrogated.

In light of these considerations, the present analysis does not seek to morally judge voyeurism, nor to denounce it as a deviation, but rather to assume it as a fundamental structure through which media organize vision. To interrogate voyeurism, therefore, is to interrogate **the way images look at us** while we look at them, and the kind of relationship we are willing to accept with them.

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[14] *Sartre, Jean-Paul, Critica della ragione dialettica. Teoria degli insiemi pratici, Milano, Casa Editrice Il Saggiatore, 2025.*

[15] *Didi-Huberman, Georges, Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde, Parigi, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992.*

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

DEFINITIONS

By *voyeurism* we do not mean a paraphilia in the clinical sense, but rather a **structure of the gaze** grounded in distance, asymmetry, and non-intervention, which characterizes the spectator's position within mediated products.

By *media products* we refer to works belonging to different domains of culture, more specifically visual culture, such as cinema, painting, sculpture, photography, and comics, understood not only as artistic forms but also as dispositifs of vision.

We adopt the definition of *transmedia* as **a process of construction and evolution of narrative universes that unfolds through participatory practices involving social actors within a hybrid media ecosystem** (*"processo di costruzione ed evoluzione di universi narrativi che si sviluppa attraverso **pratiche** partecipative che coinvolgono gli **attori sociali** presenti all'interno dell'ecosistema mediale ibrido").*[16]

By *transmedial* we mean the capacity to generate shared imaginaries within the social sphere, transcending the narrative universes and media products from which they originate (fictional contexts), and considering them as social processes in which spectators/users are able to interact with content by activating practices grounded in those imaginaries.

SPATIO-TEMPORAL SCOPE

This research is situated within a **trans-historical** and **trans-medial** framework, spanning from the Renaissance (Titian) to contemporary culture (Newton and Manara), and traversing different European cultural contexts. It is not confined to a specific geographical area, but concerns Western visual culture as a broader symbolic and historical field.

STATISTICAL POPULATION

The reference population consists of the potentially infinite **set of media products** that establish a voyeuristic relationship between spectator and image.

[16] *Leonzi, Silvia, Transmedia studies. Logiche e pratiche degli ecosistemi della comunicazione, Roma, Armando Editore, 2022.*

SAMPLE

The sample is intentional and qualitative, and includes the following media products: i) ***Dekalog VI*** by Krzysztof Kieślowski; ii) ***Venus of Urbino*** by Titian; iii) ***The Kiss*** by Auguste Rodin; iv) *photographic works* by Helmut Newton; v) *comics* by Milo Manara. For these media products, a **contemporary transmedial dimension** has been identified, based on the verified active participation of spectators/users (on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest) and on the **multiplicity of media platforms** through which related content (cinema, television, print editions, the Internet, and social media) circulates.

Transmediality is thus amplified by users' participation in the communicative project, and particularly by fans who are more clearly involved in the process and who display and almost exhibit their involvement across all available platforms —such as social networks— whose global diffusion has brought user communities formed around specific media aspects to dimensions that would have been simply inconceivable in the pre-digital era *("la transmedialità è quindi amplificata dalla partecipazione degli utenti al progetto comunicativo, e in particolare dai fan che più chiaramente sono coinvolti nel processo e ne condividono e ostentano quasi il loro coinvolgimento attraverso tutte le piattaforme disponibili, come per esempio i social network, la cui diffusione globale porta le comunità di utenti che si generano a tale scopo concentrandosi su un particolare aspetto mediatico a dimensioni semplicemente inconcepibili nell'epoca pre-digitale").*[17]

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR THE UNITS OF ANALYSIS

We **included** works that met the following conditions: i) centrality of the gaze; ii) presence of an asymmetrical relationship between the one who looks and the one who is looked at; iii) relevance to the theme of voyeurism.

We **excluded**: i) works already extensively discussed in the reference texts; ii) media products in which the gaze does not play a structural function.

[17] *Sigismondi, Paolo, "Transmedia e Hollywood", pubblicato in Transmedia studies. Logiche e pratiche degli ecosistemi della comunicazione (pag. 119), Roma, Armando Editore, 2022.*

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials include audiovisual, artistic, and narrative works. The method is **qualitative, comparative, and interpretive**, based on: i) visual analysis; ii) textual analysis; iii) iconographic analysis; iv) transmedial comparison. This methodological triangulation allows for a multi-layered examination of the gaze as both a formal dispositif and a socio-cultural structure embedded in historically situated media practices.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem is formulated as follows: ***can voyeurism be understood as a structural condition of mediated vision?***

More specifically, the study investigates whether voyeurism operates not as an episodic theme but as a constitutive mechanism organizing the spectator's positionality within visual regimes.

OBJECTIVE

The objective is to demonstrate that voyeurism, understood as a **transmedial structure of the gaze** *(independent variable),* constitutes a **constant across media products** *(dependent variable),* while assuming different configurations according to specific languages and visual dispositifs.

The objective therefore entails identifying both structural continuities and medium-specific inflections in order to clarify how different dispositifs modulate the ethical and perceptual implications of looking.

HYPOTHESIS

Voyeurism is not a marginal or merely thematic element, but a **recurring condition of spectatorial experience** that traverses media and historical periods, systematically calling into question the ethical responsibility of the one who looks.

Accordingly, the hypothesis assumes that voyeuristic asymmetry is embedded in the architecture of representation itself rather than emerging solely from explicitly erotic or transgressive content.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The study aims to show that: i) voyeurism is present in all analyzed cases; ii) it assumes different forms (seductive, painful, aestheticized, problematic); iii) the spectator's position is always structurally implicated. It is further expected that these variations will reveal how specific media either problematize, stabilize, or neutralize the ethical tension inherent in the act of looking.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a systematic **qualitative methodology** grounded in the close analysis of visual and narrative structures recurring across the selected sample. Rather than isolating isolated motifs, the research examines patterns of spectatorial positioning, dispositifs of mediation, and configurations of asymmetry that emerge across different media environments. Through comparative cross-media reading, each case is analyzed both in its specificity and in relation to the others, allowing structural continuities and medium-specific variations to become analytically visible.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework draws on the contributions of: i) Andrea Pinotti *(threshold, fourth wall);* ii) Giancarlo Grossi *(immersion and emersion);* iii) Elisabetta Modena *(spectatorial positioning and "being within stories").*

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The "data" consist of film sequences, images, visual compositions, and narrative dispositifs. The analysis aims to interpret how these elements construct a voyeuristic relationship both diegetically and in relation to the spectator (extra-diegetically).

DEMONSTRATION

The demonstration is **argumentative-comparative**: the recurrence of voyeurism in the analyzed cases constitutes evidence of its structural function within visual culture.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

DEKALOG SZESC, ETHICAL-REFLEXIVE VOYEURISM

In *Dekalog VI*, the gaze is not merely a narrative theme but an operative structure: the film organizes time and space around a voyeuristic dispositif that simultaneously involves the **protagonist** (Tomek, who looks), the **co-protagonist** (Magda, who is looked at, often without knowing it), and the **spectator** (who sees through Tomek). This triple articulation makes Kieślowski's medium-length film an ideal model for voyeurism understood as a **transmedial structure** of vision and for a spectatorial posture (identified with the protagonist) founded on **distance, asymmetry,** and **non-intervention**—one that, throughout the film, gradually turns into an **ethical problem.**

If the window establishes the threshold, **the telescope (and the binoculars) radicalizes its logic**: it is a technology that brings things closer while simultaneously increasing ethical distance. In other words, the more the instrument allows one to "see," the more problematic vision becomes. The telescope does not merely produce "more vision," but **selective and focused vision**: it cuts the world **into fragments**. Voyeurism no longer concerns the overall scene but the detail; the object of desire becomes a capturable fragment. Paradoxically, **magnification does not lead to proximity**; it produces a fictitious closeness, which may deceive the subject into believing to be *"near"* without being so. The telescope becomes the emblem of *"seeing without possessing"*: it generates visual contact that does not translate into relationship. Looking becomes repeated, ordered, ritualized practice, marked by seriality (a *"disjointed whole,"* as Sartre might say). Voyeurism ceases to be episodic and becomes habit, a stable structure of perception.

When the image adopts the logic of *looking through an instrument,* **the spectator** is pushed into the **same posture**: one does not merely watch Tomek watching, but **shares the voyeuristic act** *(immersion).* This is the point at which the medium-length film becomes overtly reflexive: it places us in the position of the spy. As long as the window and the telescope remain in place, voyeurism appears "manageable." Yet the film demonstrates that this situation is fragile: the threshold, initially a line of safety, becomes a point of crisis.

Distance is not merely spatial; it is an implicit rule of voyeurism in which looking also means **not intervening** *(the threshold as a line of non-intervention).* This rule sustains the dispositif: as long as Tomek looks without entering the scene, vision remains "safe."

The film further shows that vision tends to transform into relationship ***(the desire to cross the threshold),*** and here voyeurism reveals its contradiction: it seeks proximity, yet is founded upon distance.

The most destabilizing moment occurs when vision ceases to be unilateral ***(the reversal of the gaze, being seen).*** When the one who is looked at becomes aware and returns the gaze, the voyeur loses his advantage; distance no longer protects him; asymmetry cracks.

The film leads the spectator toward a decisive shift ***(from vision to responsibility),*** in which voyeurism is not condemned but transformed. The problem is not merely "to look," but **to look without recognizing**. When recognition occurs (even painfully), the threshold changes nature: it is no longer a comfortable barrier, but a site of moral choice.

Turning now to specific sequences, we observe that the film **opens with a close-up of Magda** —the woman with whom Tomek falls in love— and **closes in the same manner**, in the same place where everything began: the post office where he works. The first image we have of her is that of a **strong woman**, struggling against the world; the second, at the end of the film, presents a **fragile figure**, profoundly altered, as the balance of power between the two protagonists has reversed.

At the beginning, Magda does not yet know that Tomek is placing false payment notices in her mailbox, and neither do we, the spectators. Yet certain clues emerge through **shot/reverse-shot** sequences juxtaposing the protagonists' **close-ups**: Tomek's fixed **gaze**, as Magda looks into her purse, is unequivocal. Between them stands glass—an element that recurs throughout the film as a dramatic device conveying that we cannot step outside ourselves. We are hostages to our own lives, not those of others, beyond possible points of contact. In this scene, the use of **reflected image** briefly allows us to see Tomek's face clearly on one side and Magda's reflected on the transparent surface: both faces share the screen, yet glass always remains between them—a barrier transparent, yet tangible, material, insurmountable.

In the following scene, **glass** once again becomes central. We, the spectators, leave the post office; Magda exits; a sharp cut. We hear the crash of breaking glass and see a floor covered with

fragments: Tomek is stealing the telescope he will use to spy on Magda, becoming a shameless peeping Tom with an instrument similar to the one used by Jeff (James Stewart) in ***Rear Window*** by Alfred Hitchcock, where the immobilized photographer discovers a murderer by looking through his window. Here, despite the visual similarities of framed windows, there is no murderer to uncover, "only" a woman to focus on and "enlarge" through an invasive gesture prefigured by the **breaking glass**.

Tomek now not only spies but grows jealous and begins interfering with Magda's life. He calls her, gets hired as a milk delivery boy to encounter her, calls the gas technicians to invent a leak and interrupt her while she is with another man.

A turning point occurs with the next false payment notice. After Magda argues with the post office director, Tomek feels guilty and confesses responsibility. She pushes him away and walks off; he tells her he saw her **crying** the previous evening. Touched deeply, she returns. This is a form of **pornography that does not concern the body**, nor nudity, but the exposure of what we perceive as most intimately ours: we may not be disturbed by being seen naked as much as by being seen while crying.

Games then begin, that recall Brian De Palma's ***Body Double***: knowing that Tomek watches her every evening, Magda gestures to him with the telephone, inviting him to look, positioning her bed to be clearly visible when she meets other men. Then another turning point: the joy of the first date, Tomek running in circles and encountering the *"man of destiny,"* who appears in every episode of the *Dekalog* whenever something decisive is about to happen (in this case, Tomek will later cut his veins).

Unaware, Tomek runs at a crossroads in a square-garden reminiscent of ***El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*** (*The Garden of Forking Paths*) by **Jorge Luis Borges**. He turns in circles, yet stands at the center of countless roads extending in every direction: **a moment in which everything is possible**, as at the beginning of a relationship. Yet, as in Borges' story, among infinite possibilities only one will become real.

An essential scene for our analysis is the final sequence. In near-total silence, interrupted only by the sound of Magda's footsteps, the gaze becomes the sole *locus of action.* The glass of the post office, already recurring as a transparent threshold between watcher and watched, becomes the

space of a definitive reversal of power relations: whereas at the beginning Tomek observed Magda from a protected, asymmetrical position, now she approaches him, while he appears distant, closed off, emotionally inaccessible.

The succession of silent shot/reverse-shot sequences intensifies the tension of reciprocal gazes, culminating in the breaking of silence with the line, ***"I have stopped watching you,"*** which marks **the end of voyeurism** as practice and, simultaneously, its transformation into ethical responsibility. The final close-up of Magda, accompanied by a bitter smile before the fade to black, renders visible the impossibility of returning to an innocent gaze: what has changed is not only the relationship between the characters, but the spectator's own position—now aware of the ethical weight of looking.

VENUS OF URBINO, INTERPELLATED VOYEURISM

From the ***distanced voyeurism*** of Kieślowski we move to an ***interpellated voyeurism****:* a gaze that does not spy but is directly summoned. Here it is the object of the gaze itself that looks back at the viewer, establishing a relationship that is no longer concealed but becomes reciprocal and problematic. Titian's ***Venus of Urbino*** thus introduces a radically different configuration of the voyeuristic gaze, in which we are no longer confronted with a clandestine act of looking protected by anonymity, but with a gaze **explicitly convened** by the image itself. In this sense, the *Venus of Urbino*constitutes a decisive moment in the genealogy of voyeurism: it does not deny the erotic dimension of the gaze, but renders it structural and visible, transforming looking into a **relational condition**.

A central element of the work is the **direct gaze** of the female figure (the equivalent of ***a look into the camera),*** which unambiguously meets that of the viewer, profoundly altering the logic of voyeurism. The spectator **does not spy**, does not benefit from anonymity, no longer occupies a hidden or protected position but, on the contrary, **is seen while looking**. The asymmetry typical of classical voyeurism (the one who looks must not be seen) is here suspended and problematized; yet the pleasure of looking does not disappear—it becomes **conscious** and exposed. If in *Dekalog VI* the problem arises when the onlooker risks being discovered, here such discovery is immediate and constitutive. There is no "before" of protected vision; voyeurism is not an accident but an **original condition of reception**. Although a frame exists, **there is no threshold** separating the viewer's

space from that of the image. Nothing signals a transgression or a clandestine act. The absence of a threshold produces the paradoxical effect whereby the spectator is **admitted** into the space of intimacy: one no longer violates a boundary but accepts a ***"summons"***. Voyeurism here is grounded not in intrusion, but in **interpellation**.

THE KISS, SPATIAL VOYEURISM

With ***The Kiss*** by Auguste Rodin, the discourse on voyeurism shifts to a different plane from the previous cases. If in *Dekalog VI* voyeurism is mediated by optical devices (window, telescope), and in the *Venus of Urbino* it is inscribed in the frontal logic of the painted gaze, in Rodin's sculpture it becomes a s**patial condition of reception**. Here the spectator does not look "through" an image, nor is interpellated by a returning gaze: rather, the spectator **shares the space** of the work.

The Kiss stages an act of absolute intimacy: two nude bodies entwined in a contact that leaves no room for narrative mediation. There is no context, no story, no diegetic alibi. Intimacy is offered to public view as **pure form**. What is by definition private is rendered **public**, and the spectator, by definition external, becomes a **necessary witness**. Voyeurism here is neither clandestine nor transgressive; it is **structural**. Looking is not a choice but a consequence of the work's very existence within exhibition space.

Unlike cinema and painting, sculpture offers neither a threshold nor a frame that clearly separates the image from the real world. There is no "inside" and "outside" of the image: the work shares physical space with the spectator, who looks while moving, approaching, circling around it. Voyeurism thus becomes not only optical but **corporeal**: it implies a position in space, a physical distance, a choice of proximity in which there is no single privileged or "correct" point of view.

A particularly significant element of *The Kiss* is the absence of a **returned gaze** from the sculpted figures. The two lovers are completely absorbed in one another; they do not look at the spectator, do not acknowledge, do not interpellate. This absence produces a specific effect: **the spectator sees without being seen** and is therefore not destabilized by a return of the gaze.

The Kiss demonstrates that voyeurism is not exclusively linked to distance, clandestinity, or technology; it can also emerge from **proximity**, exposure, and shared space. From this perspective, Rodin's sculpture expands the field of a transmedial analysis of voyeurism: if in *Dekalog VI* the

spectator looks without intervening, and in the *Venus of Urbino* is directly interpellated, here the spectator is compelled to **co-exist** with the image of intimacy. Voyeurism is thus confirmed not as an exception, but as a **structural condition of reception**.

HELMUT NEWTON, AESTHETICIZED VOYEURISM

With the photography of **Helmut Newton**, voyeurism assumes a configuration markedly different from the cases analyzed so far. If in *Dekalog VI* the gaze is progressively destabilized, in *Venus of Urbino* it is explicitly rendered responsible, and in Rodin's work it becomes an unavoidable spatial condition, in Newton it is **absorbed into aesthetics** and transformed into a recognizable, coherent, and desirable visual language. Here voyeurism is neither denied nor problematized: it is adopted as a **naturalized posture of the gaze**, stabilized and made legible through recurring visual codes.

A constant feature of Newton's photography is the placement of female figures within **private interiors**: hotel rooms, apartments, staircases, corridors—spaces that **evoke intimacy**. Yet, unlike *Dekalog VI*, these interiors do not function as spaces withdrawn from vision, but rather as deliberately staged sets **offered to the viewer**. The sensation of *"looking at something that should not be seen"* is present, but it is neutralized by the formal construction of the image: controlled framing, carefully designed lighting, and self-conscious posing. Voyeurism is **staged** rather than discovered; it does not arise from violation but from a deliberate **choreography**.

The voyeuristic asymmetry is not unmasked but **consolidated**. The spectator occupies a stable position of power: seeing without being seen, neither interpellated nor required to reflect on the ethical consequences of looking. The female body appears exposed yet **not fragile**; it is strong, dominant, and self-possessed, without dissolving the voyeuristic structure of the image. The power of the gaze is not called into crisis but rendered elegant, secure, and free of ethical friction. In this sense, Newton's voyeurism differs profoundly from Kieślowski's: where *Dekalog VI* leads the gaze toward discomfort and guilt, Newton guides it toward the **normalization of desire**.

A key element is the absence of a problematic threshold. Aside from the monocle Newton once asked Paloma Picasso to wear (an accessory linked to a youthful infatuation and to the monocle he inherited from his father) there are no telescopes mediating vision, no windows separating observer and observed, no doors that withhold access. The threshold has already been crossed, intimacy is fully available to sight.

A crucial aspect of Newton's relevance to this study concerns the **ethical neutralization of voyeurism**. Through the strength of his stylistic consistency, the act of looking is removed from moral questioning. The photograph does not compel the spectator to interrogate their position; on the contrary, it reassures. Voyeurism becomes **predictable, repeatable, consumable**. It ceases to be destabilizing and becomes instead a **codified mode of reception**, finding privileged circulation within editorial and advertising markets.

Four works exemplify these dynamics:

- ***Rue Aubriot* (Paris, 1975): frontal nudity.** A nude woman and a dressed woman stand in a nocturnal urban setting, directly exposed to the viewer's gaze. There is no visual threshold—no window, no door, no filter. Access to the image is immediate. Voyeurism does not stem from intrusion but from the **explicit offering of visibility.**

- ***Sie kommen (Naked and Dressed)* (Paris, 1981): serialization and control of desire.** Four women advancing toward the camera, naked and dressed, in identical poses. Nudity is not revelation but **structural variation**; voyeurism is fully normalized. The body is not discovered but compared; desire is not disturbed but organized. The gaze risks nothing; it exercises formal control. Serialization removes from nudity any element of surprise or guilt.

- ***Hotel Room, Place de la République* (Paris, 1976): private interior and invisible witness.** A **nude woman** is depicted from behind within an austere domestic interior. She kneels and bends forward while a **leash**, stretched and attached to a cart, introduces a relation of control and subordination explicitly evoking **sadomasochistic** imagery. The absence of the face—and thus of identity—transforms the subject into **a body offered to be seen** more than a person encountered. A **mirror** in the background creates a **secondary zone** of vision, multiplying the layers of looking without restoring reciprocity.

- ***Diving Tower,* Old Beach Hotel, Monte Carlo (1981): distance, verticality, domination.** A nude woman stands atop a diving board in a composition that emphasizes height and spatial separation, positioning the spectator in a place of **absolute visual control**. The body appears removed from any reciprocal relationship. Voyeurism here does not pass through intimacy but through **pure distanced observation**. The gaze is invited to exercise vision without reciprocity, stabilized within a regime of aestheticized detachment.

MILO MANARA, VOYEURISMO LUDICO-FUNZIONALE

At this point, the transmedial trajectory of voyeurism reaches a decisive comparative moment. Unlike Guido Crepax, who uses the comics medium to problematize the position of the reader, Manara foregrounds the **spectacular and erotic** potential of voyeurism, stabilizing it as a fully legitimized mode of reception. The comparison is significant precisely because it takes place within the **same medium**: it is not the language of comics per se that determines the ethical outcome of the gaze, but rather the specific use that is made of it.

Central to Manara's work is the **legibility of the female body**, which is rarely fragmented in a problematic way. Figures are represented in their entirety, with fluid lines, recognizable poses, and compositions that facilitate visual access. The gaze encounters no obstacles; desire is not frustrated; **the body appears available to vision**. Voyeurism here does not arise from distance, but from the explicit offering of the image. The reader is not required to reassemble fragments or to question their own role: vision is immediate and gratifying, reassured by the playful and erotic tone of the narrative.

A recurring element in Manara's works is the **absence of a problematic threshold**. There are no devices that restrain the gaze, nor elements that signal a limit to be respected. Access to intimacy is direct, accompanied by a narrative that justifies the act of looking. This absence of threshold produces an effect similar to that observed in **Newton**: in both cases **voyeurism is aestheticized**, the **gaze** is rendered powerful and stable, and the spectator's position is not subjected to critical interrogation. However, while Newton operates through formal elegance and visual control, Manara works through **erotic storytelling**, integrating voyeurism into the very pleasure of narrative consumption.

If in **Kieślowski** voyeurism is constructed in order to fail and to transform into an ethical problem, in **Manara** it is made entirely **functional** and frictionless. Within the corpus analyzed, his comics represent the most explicit case of **spectacularized voyeurism**, where the gaze is not questioned but encouraged, not destabilized but stabilized, not burdened with responsibility but lightened through visual pleasure. For this very reason, Manara plays a crucial role in the structure of this research, illustrating a possible—and widely diffused—outcome within contemporary visual culture: a form of voyeurism that renounces interrogating itself. The analysis thus further confirms

the research hypothesis: voyeurism is a **transmedial structure of vision**, yet its ethical meaning depends on how each medium and each author **position the spectator.**

More specifically, four covers have been examined as exemplary syntheses of this posture:

- ***HP e Giuseppe Bergman* (1978): voyeurism becomes self-aware.** Eroticism is present, though not dominant. Voyeurism becomes conscious but not critical: **looking** is configured as a fully legitimized act, integrated into the spectacle of the image and **devoid of ethical consequences**. Voyeurism is not the ultimate aim, but a component of the narrative. It is not inherently critical or problematic; rather, it becomes so—or ceases to be—depending on how the **reader/spectator** is positioned.

- ***Dies Irae – Le avventure africane di Giuseppe Bergman* (1982): narrative complicity.** Placed within an adventurous and exotic framework, eroticism intensifies. The female body is exposed, yet such exposure is **normalized by the narrative context**. Voyeurism is not the primary objective but a component of a story in which the reader is invited into **playful complicity**: to look is to participate in the adventure.

- ***Click!* (1982): imperative frontalization.** The cover of *Click!* represents one of the most radical examples of **spectacularized voyeurism**. The low-angle framing places the spectator in an intrusive and dominant position, eliminating any possible distance or visual threshold. There is no filter: the female body is offered frontally, occupying the entire visual field. The very title (*Click!*) functions as a **metamedial command**: a minimal gesture that **activates desire and authorizes the gaze**. Here voyeurism is not clandestine but **imposed**; not transgressive but normative.

- ***Il gioco – Edizione integrale* (2024): the body as available surface.** On the cover of *Il gioco*, the female body is isolated, central, **fully nude**, and completely accessible to sight. The relaxed pose and the absence of disruptive elements construct an image **no- resistance**. Voyeurism does not arise from the violation of intimacy but from its **programmed availability**. The body is not something to conquer or discover; it is already there, ready to be seen. In this sense, the cover anticipates the logic of the entire work: desire is narratively justified, and the reader's gaze is **fully legitimized**. There is no distance, no waiting, no incompleteness, elements that, by contrast, are central to Kieślowski.

DISCUSSION

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The comparative analysis developed in the previous chapters now allows for a systematic discussion of the results, placing the initial hypothesis in dialogue with the different configurations that voyeurism assumes across the media examined. The aim of this discussion is not to establish a hierarchy among the works analyzed, but rather to clarify the **concrete conditions** under which voyeurism becomes problematic, neutralized, or, conversely, rendered functional to reception.

What emerges is not a linear progression but a **spectrum of configurations**: from ethically destabilizing forms to fully aestheticized and normalized ones. Voyeurism appears as a relational structure whose ethical valence depends less on the explicit content of the work than on the position assigned to the spectator. The decisive question is not whether the image contains erotic elements, but how it organizes the gaze, how it distributes knowledge and power, and whether it introduces a threshold capable of generating tension, delay, or self-awareness.

CONFIRMATION OF THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

An examination of the selected media products highlights, first and foremost, their capacity to generate narratives that lend themselves to **transmedial reception**. These works systematically circulate across multiple platforms, expanding their narrative themes into complementary contexts, exploring new territories, and *"spreading"* content across different media environments. At the center of this process stands a participatory audience that does not limit itself to suspending disbelief as a passive consumer, but actively engages in decoding, discussing, and redistributing the content, thereby contributing additional layers of meaning.

Across all the analyzed cases, voyeurism manifests itself as a constant structural condition of vision, regardless of medium. Cinema, painting, sculpture, photography, and comics produce distinct configurations of the same fundamental relation: ***a gaze that sees without intervening*** and occupies an **asymmetrical position** with respect to what is seen. This recurrence supports the claim that voyeurism is not tied exclusively to explicitly erotic or transgressive content, but to **spectatorial**

positioning as such. Even when eroticism is absent or attenuated (as in many sequences of *Dekalog VI*), the voyeuristic structure remains operative, demonstrating that it **precedes and grounds content rather than deriving from it**.

The hypothesis is therefore confirmed: voyeurism functions as an independent variable shaping mediated vision, while each medium and each author modulate its ethical and aesthetic implications.

QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCES: WHEN VOYEURISM BECOMES A PROBLEM

In *Dekalog VI*, all the structural premises outlined above are progressively activated. The film constructs a dispositif that **initially protects the gaze** (window, telescope), only **to expose its fragility**. Voyeurism fails precisely because it is carried to its extreme consequences: **asymmetry cracks**, the intra-diegetic threshold becomes traversable, and the gaze can no longer remain neutral. The concrete problem that emerges is that of **responsibility**. The spectator is compelled to recognize the implicit violence embedded in *"looking without acknowledging."*

By contrast, in the cases of Newton and Manara, potential tensions are systematically neutralized. The threshold disappears or becomes inert; the return of the gaze does not generate crisis; distance is never experienced as lack. Voyeurism, though structurally present, **ceases to be a problem** and instead becomes a **stabilized mode of reception**. The spectator's position remains secure, legitimized, and free from ethical disturbance.

The comparison among the analyzed cases demonstrates that voyeurism becomes problematic only when at least one of the following conditions is present: i) the existence of an **intra-diegetic threshold** that separates and restrains the gaze; ii) the possibility of a **return of the gaze** (being seen); iii) a **tension** between distance and the desire for proximity. Where these elements are absent, voyeurism functions smoothly as a consumable aesthetic posture. Where they are activated, voyeurism becomes a site of ethical interrogation, transforming the act of seeing into a question of responsibility.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIUM

A second crucial issue concerns the specific role of **medial dispositifs**. Media do not in themselves determine the ethical outcome of voyeurism, yet they decisively orient its configuration and

experiential texture.Each medium structures perception differently, redistributing distance, proximity, duration, and reciprocity.

- **Cinema**, through editing, point of view, framing, and temporal duration, can construct a progressive and **reflexive voyeuristic experience**, as in the case of Kieślowski. The cinematic apparatus allows the spectator to share a character's gaze while simultaneously maintaining a critical distance, thereby staging the instability of asymmetry over time.

- **Painting**, as exemplified by Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, demonstrates how the gaze can be **directly interpellated**, eliminating clandestinity without dissolving ethical tension. The frontal look of the painted figure collapses anonymity and compels the spectator to confront the fact of being seen while seeing.

- **Sculpture**, as in Rodin's *The Kiss*, introduces the problem of **spatial co-presence**, where voyeurism arises not from distance but from proximity. The spectator shares the same physical environment as the work, and the absence of framing devices intensifies the embodied dimension of looking.

- **Photography**, in Newton's work, deploys the force of style to neutralize the problem, transforming voyeurism into a recognizable visual language and into a **codified mode of reception** that — as previously noted— finds one of its privileged contexts within editorial and advertising markets. Here the aesthetic regime stabilizes asymmetry, converting it into a predictable and consumable form.

- **Comics**, in Manara's case, render voyeurism narratively functional, lightening it through **play** and the pleasure of storytelling, likewise finding a market within editorial and promotional circuits. The sequential logic of the comic medium integrates voyeurism into narrative flow, minimizing ethical friction through stylistic continuity and erotic legibility.

Between dispositifs that interrogate and those that reassure, the analysis demonstrates that the central issue **is not how much is shown**, but how the medium positions the one who looks. The ethical dimension of voyeurism depends less on the quantity of exposure than on the structural organization of **spectatorial agency**.

CONCRETE PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE

From the analysis emerges a broader issue concerning contemporary visual culture as a whole: the **normalization of voyeurism**. In many current media products, the gaze is **constantly invited to see everything**, immediately, without distance and without consequence. The threshold tends to disappear, and with it the possibility of reflecting upon one's own position as spectator.

In digital environments characterized by **continuous** image circulation, **algorithmic** recommendation systems, and accelerated modes of **consumption**, voyeuristic asymmetry becomes **embedded in everyday practices** of scrolling, streaming, and sharing. The structural condition of *"seeing without intervening"* risks becoming **invisible** precisely because it is **ubiquitous**.

Within this context, works such as *Dekalog VI* acquire a specific critical value: not because they condemn voyeurism, but because they destabilize it. They reveal that looking is never innocent and that the act of seeing entails an ethical dimension that cannot be entirely neutralized. The concrete problem, therefore, is not voyeurism *per se,* but its invisibilization as a structural condition of mediated experience.

To interrogate voyeurism today means to question the broader **cultural mechanisms** that naturalize asymmetry and transform spectatorship into a frictionless, consequence-free activity.

LIMITS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

A final point of discussion concerns the limits of the present study. As previously specified, the analyzed sample is **intentional and qualitative**; it does not claim to exhaust the multiplicity of voyeuristic forms within visual culture. The selected cases function as exemplary configurations rather than statistically representative data.

Nevertheless, this very selectivity allows the identification of a structural pattern: voyeurism traverses media and historical periods because it coincides with one of the fundamental conditions of visual experience itself. The recurrence observed across heterogeneous media strengthens the theoretical argument concerning its transmedial character.

Future research could extend the analysis to **interactive media** such as video games and **immersive virtual reality**, particularly in the context of *6DoF VR environments* referenced in contemporary

scientific literature, where the **boundary between looking and intervening becomes increasingly ambiguous**. In such contexts, the spectator may acquire a greater degree of agency, yet the structural asymmetry between subject and mediated environment persists in new forms.

Such an extension would further confirm the centrality of voyeurism as a theoretical and cultural problem of our time, highlighting its transformation rather than its disappearance in technologically advanced mediated settings.

Expanding the research horizon would enable a deeper understanding of how voyeuristic structures intersect with contemporary **platform capitalism**, data extraction, and surveillance logics. In digital ecologies where users are simultaneously observers and observed — consumers and data-producers— the classical asymmetry of the gaze becomes entangled with new regimes of visibility and control. The spectator is no longer only positioned in front of images, but also within networks that monitor, predict, and monetize patterns of attention. In this sense, the study of voyeurism could contribute to a broader sociological reflection on mediated subjectivity in late modernity.

Furthermore, future investigations could benefit from comparative cross-cultural analyses, examining whether the ethical problematization or normalization of voyeuristic structures varies across media systems, regulatory traditions, and cultural imaginaries. Such an approach would clarify to what extent voyeurism operates as a **universal structural condition of visuality**, and to what extent its meanings are shaped by historically specific configurations of power, gender, and spectatorship.

Interrogating voyeurism today means confronting the evolving relationship between visibility, desire, and responsibility in a world saturated by images. Rather than disappearing, voyeurism is continuously rearticulated within new dispositifs that redefine what it means to look, to be looked at, and to participate in mediated environments.

Recognizing this persistence does not imply moral condemnation; rather, it invites critical awareness. By tracing its **transmedial continuity** and its t**echnological transformations**, this research underscores that voyeurism remains one of the privileged sites through which visual culture reflects upon itself and through which contemporary societies negotiate the ethical stakes of seeing.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research here developed has made it possible to verify the initial hypothesis according to which voyeurism does not constitute a marginal or merely thematic element of visual culture, but rather a **transmedial structure of vision,** capable of traversing historical periods, languages, and dispositifs, each time redefining the position of the spectator.

By adopting ***Dekalog VI*** as the central case study, the analysis demonstrates how voyeurism can function as an **ethical-reflexive** dispositif: the gaze, initially protected by distance and asymmetry, is progressively destabilized until it becomes a site of responsibility.

The window and the telescope do not open access to the image; rather, they expose its limit, configuring vision as a relation without possession. In this sense, **Kieślowski**'s film embodies —albeit in an *intra-diegetic form*— what **Andrea Pinotti** defines as an experience of the *threshold:* not a simple boundary to be crossed, but an intermediate space that holds the gaze in suspension and makes its position visible.[18]

The comparison with other domains of visual culture has made it possible to observe how the same structural condition assumes profoundly different configurations.

In **Titian**'s ***Venus of Urbino***, voyeurism manifests itself as **direct interpellation**: the spectator does not spy, but is called into question by the frontal gaze of the represented figure.

With **Rodin**'s ***The Kiss***, voyeurism shifts to a spatial and corporeal plane: in line with **Giancarlo Grossi**'s reflections on the *immersion/emersion* axis, sculpture shows that visual experience does not necessarily coincide with immersive intensification, but may instead emerge as **co-presence**.

Helmut Newton's photography represents a paradigmatic case of **neutralization** of the asymmetry of the gaze, aestheticized and stabilized, subtracting the act of looking from any ethical problematization: immersion is simulated and controlled, and the spectator is reassured rather than destabilized.

[18] *Pinotti, Andrea, Alla soglia dell'immagine. Da Narciso alla realtà virtuale, Torino, Einaudi, 2021.*

In **Milo Manara**'s comics, voyeurism takes on a ludic-functional form fully integrated into narrative pleasure: as **Elisabetta Modena**'s reflections on *"living the stories" (stare nelle storie)* suggest, the reader's position is never placed in crisis; he or she is invited to participate without questioning, to look without hesitation and without consequence.[19]

Taken together, the five analyzed cases demonstrate that voyeurism operates as an **independent variable** structuring the spectator–image relationship across media, while specific media and dispositifs determine its particular configurations, degrees of problematization, and ethical implications. To look without intervening, to see without possessing, to be involved without being present—these are not anomalies of vision, but **recurring conditions of aesthetic experience**.

The main conclusion that emerges from this work is therefore that voyeurism cannot be reduced to a guilty pleasure, much less to a psychological deviation, but constitutes one of the **privileged sites through which visual culture reflects upon itself**.

With regard to the media products examined, their aptitude to generate narratives susceptible to transmedial reception proves central. These contents are not merely distributed across multiple platforms; rather, they articulate their **narrative universes** through coordinated circulation, integrating, expanding, and differentiating information according to the medium employed.

Narrative thus develops in a networked manner, progressively exploring new thematic and symbolic territories through the dissemination of content across diverse media environments. In this process, the public is not conceived as a passive recipient called only to suspend disbelief, but as an actor involved in practices of interpretation, re-elaboration, and dissemination, actively contributing to the production of further meanings.

In *Dekalog Szesc*, the window (and, more generally, the transparent surface) functions as the primary operator of voyeurism. Functionally, it produces:

- **Clear spatial separation.** The window divides two contiguous yet non-communicating worlds: the observed domestic interior and the protected vantage point. It is a **threshold** without passage but with a barrier: it enables vision while preventing contact.

[19] *Modena, Elisabetta, Nelle storie. Arte, cinema e media immersivi, Roma, Carocci Editore, 2025.*

- **Asymmetry of power.** The one who looks is sheltered (anonymous, invisible), while the one who is looked at is exposed (visible, unaware). Voyeurism here is not mere curiosity but a position of advantage.

- **Naturalization of looking.** As an everyday device, the window renders voyeurism apparently harmless: it is not a deviant technology but an ordinary object, making voyeurism appear as a **latent possibility of everyday life**.

- **Moral ambiguity.** The window **does not distinguish between observation and intrusion**; it allows a form of seeing that does not declare itself as seeing. It is the perfect site for the ethical question that traverses the episode: *when does looking become violation?*

Paradoxically, **magnification does not produce proximity**; it creates a fictitious proximity that may deceive the subject into believing he is "close" without being so. The telescope thus becomes the emblem of "seeing without possessing": it produces visual contact without relational reciprocity. In *Dekalog VI*, looking never coincides with understanding or mastery; on the contrary, **the act of seeing exposes the viewer to suffering**, guilt, and the necessity of recognizing the other.

The **reversal of the gaze** —the moment of being seen— constitutes the most destabilizing point of voyeurism. When the one who is looked at becomes aware and returns the gaze, the voyeur loses his advantage; distance no longer protects him, and asymmetry fractures. Voyeurism reveals itself here as an unstable condition, **destined to fail** in the moment it attempts **to cross the threshold** that makes it possible. In Pinotti's terms, the image functions more as a *membrane* than as a passage, and the spectator is likewise forced to confront the impossibility of fully "entering" the scene.

The glass, a recurring element in the film, functions as a transparent threshold that permits vision while preventing contact, structurally reinforcing asymmetry between the one who looks and the one who is looked at. It **dramatizes** the impossibility of stepping outside oneself, marking the boundary between observation and participation.

Titian's *Venus of Urbino* shows instead that voyeurism does not arise solely from distance but may be inscribed within the very structure of the image, as an inevitable relation between the

one who looks and the one who is looked at. This makes the work a fundamental historical and theoretical antecedent for understanding voyeurism as a **transmedial structure of vision**, destined to re-emerge in different forms across subsequent media. Here voyeurism is grounded not in intrusion but in interpellation: the image seems to say to the spectator, *"I know you are looking at me."*

In Rodin's *The Kiss*, the two lovers are entirely **absorbed in each other**; they do not look at the spectator, do not recognize him, do not interpellate him. Voyeurism arises not from distance but from **unavoidable proximity**. Each **angle** produces a **different exposure** of intimacy, making voyeurism reiterable without being exhausted in a single view. Exposed in public space, the sculpture does not allow the spectator to declare himself external or neutral; even indifference becomes a form of relation.

In Newton's *Rue Aubriot*, voyeurism does not originate in intrusion but in explicit visual offering. The female figure appears not vulnerable but dominant within the pictorial space. Asymmetry remains intact but is ethically neutralized: the spectator is not invited to question his own looking. Similarly, in *Sie kommen (Naked and Dressed)*, nudity is not revelation but **structural variation**, while in *Hotel Room, Place de la République* the **mirror** introduces a **secondary visual zone**, multiplying gazes without restoring reciprocity: the woman, nude and seen from behind, kneels forward while a leash tied to a cart evokes sadomasochistic imagery while the absence of the face accentuates the transformation of the subject into a body offered to the gaze. Furthermore, the furnishing constructs a **theatrical scene** in which intimacy is both exposed and regulated: as in *Diving Tower*, voyeurism operates through **pure distanced observation** rather than intimacy. Verticality and spatial elevation put the spectator in a condition of **absolute visual control**, reinforcing a gaze without reciprocity.

Turning finally to Milo Manara and ludic-functional voyeurism, in *HP e Giuseppe Bergman* voyeurism becomes self-aware yet remains uncritical: **looking is fully legitimized** and integrated into the spectacle of the image, devoid of ethical consequences. In *Dies Irae*, exposure is normalized within adventurous narrative framing, encouraging playful complicity. In *Click!*, the low-angle composition imposes an intrusive and dominant position; voyeurism becomes imperative rather than clandestine. In *Il gioco – Edizione integrale*, the body appears as a fully available surface; voyeurism is programmed rather than transgressive, and the gaze is narratively justified from the outset.

Through these differentiated configurations, the research confirms that voyeurism is a transmedial structure of vision whose ethical meaning depends on how each medium and each author positions the spectator. The decisive issue is not the presence of erotic content, but the structural organization of the gaze and the degree to which it is rendered visible, destabilized, or normalized.

The transmedial persistence of voyeuristic structures suggests that what is at stake is not simply a recurrent visual pattern, but a **broader configuration of power embedded within visual culture**. To look without intervening is not only an aesthetic posture; it can become a **social habit**. The normalization of this posture risks generating forms of disengagement, where witnessing replaces responsibility and exposure substitutes for encounter.

Yet precisely because voyeurism is structural, it also remains available for critique. When the threshold becomes visible —when the gaze is returned, interrupted, or rendered reflexive— the spectator is reminded of his or her implication within systems of representation. The ethical potential of visual culture lies not in abolishing voyeurism, which would be impossible, but in making its mechanisms perceptible and its asymmetries intelligible.

In this sense, the study of voyeurism ultimately becomes a study of **mediated subjectivity**. It asks how we are positioned by images, how asymmetry is internalized as a mode of relation, and how our relationship to visibility might be reconfigured within increasingly saturated visual environments. To interrogate voyeurism, therefore, is to interrogate the **cultural conditions** under which seeing becomes a form of relation, one capable of reinforcing distance, but also of opening the possibility of recognition.

Last but not least, voyeurism is not merely a structural condition of mediated vision: its relevance extends well beyond aesthetics into the domain of social organization. To analyze voyeurism therefore means to examine **how contemporary societies distribute visibility**, regulate access to intimacy, and structure regimes of exposure.

In a culture increasingly oriented toward **performative self-display** and continuous mutual observation, the asymmetry of the gaze no longer operates solely between spectator and image, but circulates among subjects who are simultaneously observers and observed.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Alejandro Gastón Jantus Lordi de Sobremonte is a researcher and the current President of the *International Center for Social Research*. He is also the Chief Executive Officer of *NETMEDIACOM SRL*, an innovative startup publishing company. In addition, he serves as Editor-in-Chief of several publications, including the daily news agency *Sharing Media*, the online newspapers *AJCOM* and *Netmediacom*, and the monthly magazines *Kairos*, *L'Idealista*, and *L'Idealista Web.*

He graduated *summa cum laude* from the **Universidad del Salvador** (USAL) in Buenos Aires, earning a ***Bachelor of Arts in Sociology.*** He also holds a ***Bachelor's Degree in Communication Sciences*** from the **University of Cassino** *(summa cum laude),* a ***Postgraduate Diploma in Scientific Communication*** *(Master CoSe)* from the **University of Parma** - Department of Medicine and Surgery *(summa cum laude),* and a ***Doctor of Philosophy Equivalent Degree in International Relations*** from the **Universidad del Salvador** (USAL) in Buenos Aires. He is currently completing a ***Master's Degree in Media, Digital Communication and Journalism*** at the **University of Rome «La Sapienza».**

Since February 2014, Dr. Jantus Lordi de Sobremonte has served as Delegate for Communication of the ***World Organization for International Relations (WOIR),*** where he also held the positions of Assistant to the President for Media Affairs and Senior Advisor to the Secretary-General for Energy and Climate Change. In 2015, he was elected President of the WOIR.

As a journalist, Dr. Jantus Lordi de Sobremonte has worked for more than thirty-five years and has served as Editor-in-Chief of numerous international publications, including *World and Pleasure Magazine*, *Notiziario CNN*, *Wanted in Buenos Aires*, *Scaccomatto*, and *The EEC Calendar*.

He has participated in a wide range of **academic seminars and workshops,** including the *Winter School on Environmental Crimes*, *Cyber Threats Workshop*, and *CBRN Risk Communication Program* at **UNICRI – United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute;** the *International Congress of Protocol* at the **International Ceremonial and Protocol Organisation;** the *Seminar on International Contracts and Arbitration* at the **University of Bologna;** and the *Seminar on Peacekeeping* at **CARI – Argentine Council for International Relations.**

Among his published works are ***The Influence of the Mass Media in Moulding the Aesthetic Ideal*** (2007), ***War and Peace: Conflicts Over the Last Decade*** (2001), ***Venus Lounges*** (1998), ***Natural Resources Management in International Law: A Legal Framework*** (1994), ***Elements of Political Economy*** (1992), ***Elements for a General Theory of Law*** (1992), ***The Unsustainable Spell of Becoming*** (1991), and ***The Jacobin Club*** (1990).

His research interests span international relations, communication, media and social psychology, environmental and energy policy, and cyber threats. He has published **thousands of articles** on international affairs, sustainable development, demography, and CBRN risks in leading academic and professional journals.

Throughout his distinguished career, **Dr. Alejandro Gastón Jantus Lordi de Sobremonte** has been the recipient of numerous honors, titles, and decorations from academic, civil, and international institutions, recognizing both his professional achievements and his lifelong commitment to education, diplomacy, and social development.

Among his distinctions are the ***Crowned Belgium Bronze Medal* (2023)** and the ***Officer of the Order of the Belgian Cross* (2022)**, acknowledging his contribution to European cultural and academic collaboration. In 2020, he was appointed ***Kentucky Colonel*** by the Commonwealth of Kentucky and named a ***Paul Harris Fellow*** by Rotary International, also receiving the *Rotary Plaque of Appreciation* for his outstanding service and contribution to the success of the *Third Alzheimer's Conference* organized by the **Rotary Club Roma Capitale.**

In 2019, Dr. Jantus Lordi de Sobremonte was formally received as a ***Professed Confrere of the Royal Confraternity of the Holy Constable*** *(Real Confraria do Santo Condestável São Frei Dom Nuno de Santa Maria)* under the Royal Patronage of H.R.H. Dom Duarte Pio de Bragança. That same year, he was appointed ***Commander of the Order of Saint Maurice and Lazarus,*** and ***Knight of the Royal Order of the Crown of the Kingdom of Georgia.*** His earlier honors include the ***Knight of the Order of the Belgian Cross*** (2018), ***Officer of the Order of Merit of Savoy*** (2001), ***Knight of the Order of Saint Maurice and Lazarus*** (1999), and the ***WOIR Medal for Merit in the Service of Peace*** (1999).