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What does it mean to **see**? This is a complex question. **Seeing** involves questions of perception, existence, desire, and power. (1) The phrase “**see**” refers not only to visual perception but also to the cognitive processes behind it. In other words, **seeing** is intrinsically linked to perception. The act of **seeing** precedes speaking or writing and establishes our relationship with the external world outside the self.

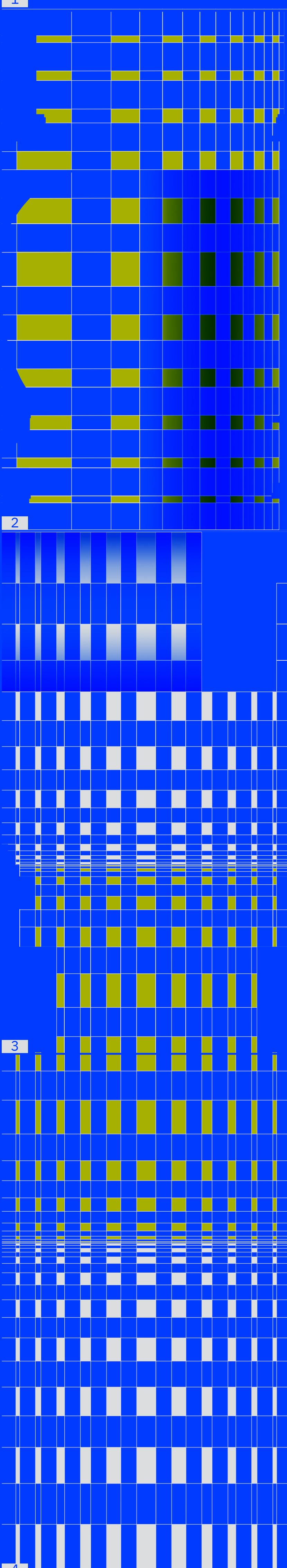
This process is so natural that we often think of **seeing** if we think of it at all as a neutral, physiological phenomenon. However, how we **see** is shaped by the cultural context of the society in which we live, and it molds both society and the individual by influencing how we perceive and understand the world. Thus, the human act of **seeing** goes beyond mere visual perception through the eyes as bodily organs. It also shapes our worldview and simultaneously produces the subjects of a particular era. What we know and believe influences our “ways of **seeing**.” In other words, our ways of **seeing** are shaped not only by biological factors, but also by social and historical contexts that hybridize cultural constructs. By identifying the ways of **seeing** in a particular time and place, we can gain deeper insights into the cultural patterns of a given society.

Central to this investigation is the concept of “scopic” regimes, a term introduced by film theorist Christian Metz. A scopic regime refers to the dominant visual system within a society or era, shaped by its material, institutional, and ideological arrangements. Unlike the biological act of **seeing**, which is universal, scopic regimes are historically and culturally specific. They define not only how we **see** but also what is visible or hidden, and how the act of **seeing** is framed and interpreted within a specific social context. In this sense, a scopic regime is more than a visual framework—it is a system that regulates visual experiences and organizes knowledge through visual means. To understand the significance of scopic regimes, we must first ask how they function within society. At their core, scopic regimes mediate the relationship between the observer and the observed, shaping not only what is **seen** but how it is **seen** and interpreted. They determine the mechanisms through which visual experiences are constructed, regulating what is visible, what remains hidden, and how meaning is assigned to the act of **seeing**. This interplay between visibility and interpretation situates scopic regimes as active systems that frame knowledge and organize perception. But why does this matter? Scopic regimes are not simply frameworks for visual experience; they are integral to shaping how societies understand and structure the world. By analyzing the dominant visual systems of specific historical periods, we can uncover how power, ideology, and

cultural values are embedded in the act of **seeing**. For instance, the Renaissance perspective not only transformed artistic representation but also redefined human subjectivity and established new ways to perceive space, authority, and the self. Understanding scopic regimes allows us to **see** how visual systems reflect, reinforce, and challenge the social and ideological structures of their time.

between the observer and the observed, contributing to the emergence of a new visual subject. The fifth chapter, “The Gaze of Power in Perspective,” examines how perspective intersects with authority, particularly in such works as Velázquez’s Las Meninas and bird’s-eye landscape paintings. These examples illustrate how visual systems reinforce power dynamics, creating both spatial order and an experiential framework that positions the viewer within networks of control and ownership. Finally, the Conclusion synthesizes these discussions, demonstrating how scopic regimes have functioned as powerful tools for shaping perception, ideology, and subjectivity. By tracing the evolution of visual systems, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary visual culture.

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Seeing and The Seen Images

Vision, or the act of **seeing**, often predates language and writing and is often understood as an objective, instinctive sense that provides a link to the outside world. As the saying goes, **Seeing** is believing, meaning that vision has the direct ability to capture the truth of the external world. However, this is never so clear or absolute. For example, how often has the phrase, "it looks like a scene from a film" been uttered? In these cases, socially formed images and concepts already influence our visual experience, and act as frames of reference that guide our perception prior to visual perception. The act of **seeing** is therefore not only physiological, but also social and historical. In other words, the human act of **seeing** is more than the visual perception performed by the eye as a bodily organ. Society mediates the cultural content, and a particular society at a particular time creates a particular way of **seeing** through which its members view the world. Vision, or the way of **seeing**, is therefore always historically shaped and socially learned. Several psychological theories have already shown that the perception of a shape or form through the eyes is not a passive process of perceiving. Instead, it is an active mental process involving the intervention and mediation of various psychological operations. Furthermore, socially learned ideas and preconceptions influence this active mental process. For example, the psychologist Gibson distinguishes between the "visual world" and "visual field" (22) The former is the world of visual perception that follows the constant movement of our eyes and head, where we perceive the shape and position of familiar objects in three dimensions. In other words, a circle is a circle and a polyhedron a polyhedron, and we can perceive objects as we know them. The visual field, in contrast, develops when we look at the world with only one fixed eye. In this case objects appear differently from their familiar appearance in our everyday experience, with the edges of the visual field are distorted. Circles for example, appear as ovals. In the everyday visual world, visual perception combines with the other senses to create depth shapes, whereas in the visual field, visual perception creates projected shapes that lack depth. Our everyday world of visual perception is what Gibson terms the "visual world." Thus, everyday vision is synesthetic, working in conjunction with the other senses. It involves socially learned ideas about the world that allow us to perceive certain objects with familiarity. Everyday vision is not strictly natural, but culturally mediated.

Accordingly, it makes sense that **seeing** things is deeply influenced by what we know or believe. What

we **see** is a choice, and this act of choice brings what we **see** within our understanding, and vision thus constitutes what we call reality. (3) Visual experience is not direct and universal. Rather, it is social, historical, and mediated by our knowledge and beliefs. It is also situated in relation to others. Baldridge divides culture into the cognitive, aesthetic, and normative. He also notes that culture affects the general way we **see** and interpret the world, including what we believe to be physiological. According to Baldridge, definitions of cultural entities are learned. Vision is not an automatic process. Instead, we have been taught how to **see**. (4)

"Vision is, in itself, an artifact, produced by other artifacts, namely pictures" (5). We live in a world inundated with images. An image is a sight that has been re-created or reproduced and embodies a specific way of **seeing**. The photographer's way of **seeing** is reflected in their choice of subject. The painter's way of **seeing** is reconstituted by the marks they make on the canvas. An image shows what someone or something once looked—and thus my implication of how the subject had once been **seen** by other people. Later still the specific vision of the image-maker was also recognized as part of the record. (6)

In this vein, we may understand that human vision transcends a mere natural instinct—it is a visual experience reconfigured and realized within various social and historical contexts. It is within this context that I wish to introduce the concept of the "scopic regime." This term refers to how a specific society or era organizes and governs visual experiences.

It is not merely an individual's subjective perspective, but a systematic framework through which social power relations and ideologies control and reshape visual experience. In addition to being a solely subjective perspective, it is also a comprehensive framework within which social power relationships and ideologies control and adapt visual experiences.

A scopic regime molds our visual encounters through images, further bolstering certain power hierarchies. Our gaze is not confined to what lies before us. Rather, we are guided by how social power determines what and how we should view through imagery. This affects societal values and norms via visual portrayals in art, media, advertising, and other visual cultural forms, thereby deeply influencing individual perspectives and thought processes. As such, scopic regimes emerge as crucial elements in shaping visual encounters and reconstructing reality via imagery. This exploration reveals that there is more to what we **see** than the sensory—it is deeply entrenched in social systems sculpted by power and ideology, regulating our visual experiences and outlining how we **see** understand, and interpret within these frameworks. In the following chapter, I more closely examine the scopic regime and relate it to the ways of **seeing**.

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(3) John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

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(93) Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Representation And The Scientific Understanding* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 19

Perspective and The Gaze of Power

Gaze and Authority: The Visual Framework of Las Meninas

Any discussion of perspective as a tool for visual or that reconfigures our world and contributes to capitalist thought and subject—inevitably raises questions of power. Perspective is deeply intertwined with power. It is both the origin and the point where the gaze converges and finds completion. It is thus understood as the locus of power, privileged in that it represents both a central focus and a goal toward which action and vision are directed. By positing this focus, the painting desires at this point to reorient the spatial and existential frame of life around its central goal. The relationship between power and gaze is illustrated in Velázquez's Las Meninas.

Portrait of the Infanta Margarita, the perspectival visual system intersects the gaze of power to organise a visual experience of the

Fig. 14) Velázquez, Las Meninas, 1656.

Foucault, in his work The Order of Things, presents the classical age. For him, painting as more than a representation of objects; he interprets it as a revelation, revealing the complex mechanism that examines the interplay between what is visible and invisible, making it a profound expression of Las Meninas.

The painting transcends tradition, creating a single vanishing point and mirror reflections. At the heart of the composition are Princess Margaret and her handmaids, the reflection of the King and Queen in the mirror, and Velázquez himself in the act of painting. These elements are not merely decorative devices in harmony, but rather represent the operation of power through a complex interplay of representation and reality. The reflections of the King and Queen in the mirror are particularly significant in interpreting the paintings. While the mirror suggests within the scene, it also demonstrates that power is not solely through visible presence, but also through concealment and revelation, and organization.

In Las Meninas, the "power" operates on two levels. The King and Queen, as authority figures, are only indirectly through their mirrored reflection. While their reflection is invisible to the viewer in the scene, the convergence of the King and Queen's gaze with that of the viewer creates a focal point, establishing a clear visual connection. This ambiguity: the viewer is left to wonder whether they are the gaze or an object with power dynamics. (44)

First, Velázquez meticulously organizes the viewer's gaze through the compositional elements of the painting. The vanishing point created by the positioning of the back, combined with the gazes of the other figures, narrows the viewer's eyes naturally to the crossroads of multiple gazes within the painting, creating a perception of depth and place. The viewer is positioned at the intersection of the painting's power structures and visual systems. The mirrors, vanishing points, and the painter's boundaries between the real world and the nature of what they represent, are already structured within these systems, aligning with Velázquez's concept of the "power of the gaze," through which power both compels and releases itself, and serves to expand the intricate ways in which they are positioned within a broader network of power.

The Organization of Power with Las Meninas does not simply establish authority or idealize life. Rather, it visualizes the real world through the viewer's visual experience. Through the use of mirrors, vanishing points, and the painter's boundaries, the real world is organized to challenge the viewer to continue the process of power relations, while simultaneously being utilized to legitimate power and economic hierarchies.

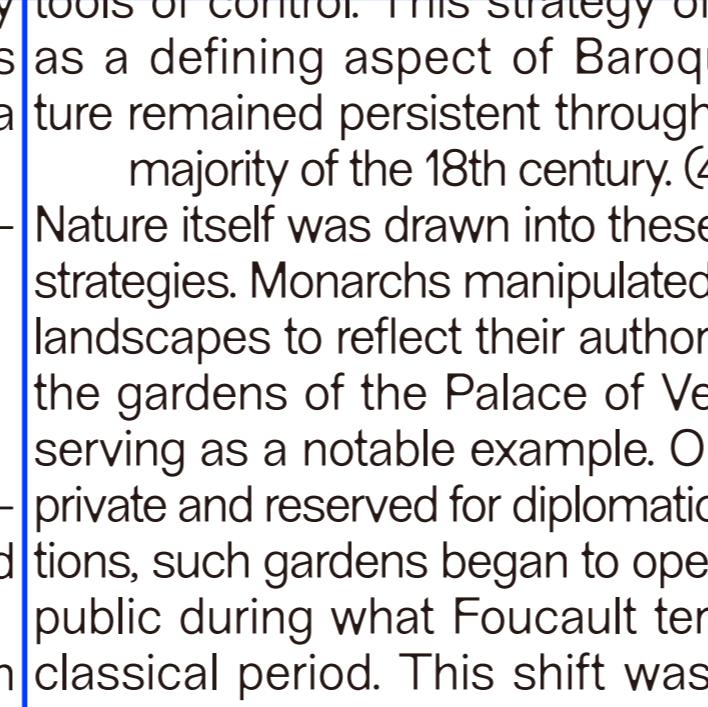
Moreover, perspective extended beyond organizing the viewer's gaze; it became a vital tool for exposing and sustaining power relations. The vanishing point, more than a visual focal centre, revealed the mechanisms through which power

stands as one of the most compelling explorations of the relationship between visual organization and power. Beyond a simple depiction of court life, the work redefines the viewer's position through its orchestration of the gaze and the dynamics of power. Through Foucault's analysis, we come to see that Las Meninas is far more than a portrait; it is a profound philosophical inquiry into the gaze of power and the construction of visual order.

Visualising Power Through a Bird's-Eye Perspective

More than a technical tool for creating visual order, the perspective visual system is deeply intertwined with power, serving to reorganize the world. According to Foucault, power operates not only within the visible realm but also exerts profound influence within the invisible, whereby it structures visual experience and order. As illustrated in Velázquez's Las Meninas, discussed earlier, the interplay between perspective and power creates intricate mechanisms of control. Similarly, the bird's-eye view, a hallmark of the classical period, explores the visualization of power in its unique way.

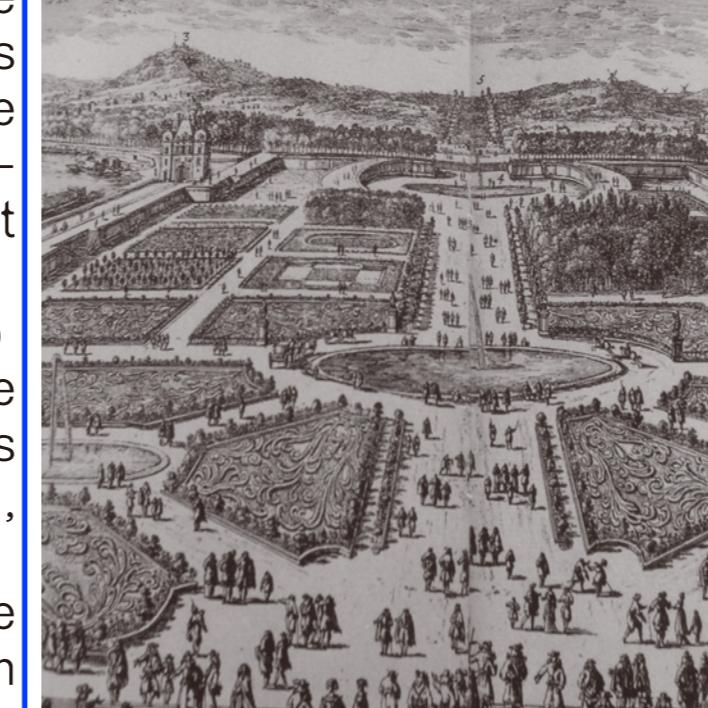
Bird's-eye views, which depict the world from an elevated perspective (akin to a bird looking down), should not be considered a mere extension of perspective. Rather, they embody a desire for power to reconfigure the world into a space that is both controllable and analysable. (Fig. 15)



Formal gardens and landscape paintings from this period serve as prime examples of this visualization of power. Foucault describes the power of the monarch in this context as a "power of visibility," which operated not only by making itself visible but also by shaping the position and gaze of the spectator. Monarchical power manifests through spectacles that both display authority and impose a burden of visibility on the subjects, effectively controlling their behaviour and gaze. By the end of the 18th century, this bourgeois form of power expanded into a microphysical network that permeated everyday life, creating a more efficient economy of power.

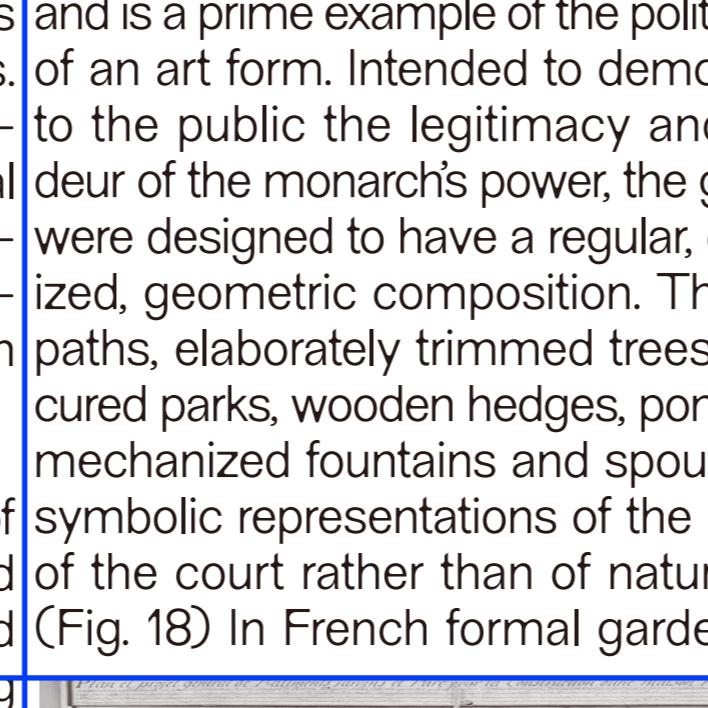
In the 18th century, European monarchs faced growing social unrest, including protests linked to economic fluctuations and other social changes. To suppress these tensions, they employed a dual strategy: physical military force on the one hand, and artistic, religious, and ideological means on the other. Monarchs mobilized images, architecture, monuments, theatres, and other spectacles as tools of control. This strategy of power as a defining aspect of Baroque culture remained persistent throughout the majority of the 18th century. (46)

Nature itself was drawn into these power strategies. Monarchs manipulated natural landscapes to reflect their authority, with the gardens of the Palace of Versailles serving as a notable example. Originally private and reserved for diplomatic receptions, such gardens began to open to the public during what Foucault terms the classical period. This shift was driven by monarchies' need to assert their own legitimacy and showcase national pride. Accordingly, monarchs invested heavily in lavish gardens, introducing the public to a highly developed garden culture for the first time. (Fig. 16) For example, the



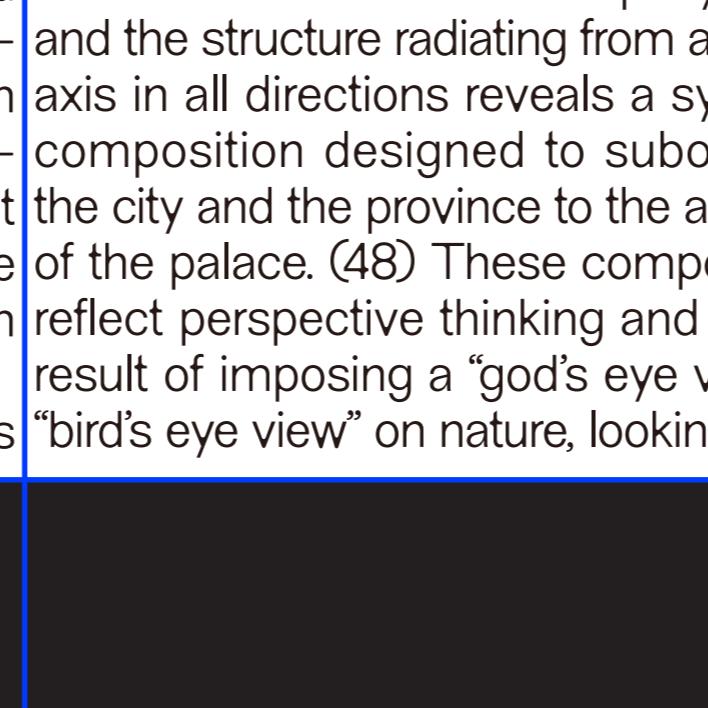
Tuileries Gardens (Fig. 17) in Paris were open to the public as early as the 16th century; Charles I of England opened the Royal Gardens at Hyde Park in 1635; Joseph II opened the Prater in Vienna in 1766; the Archduke of Düsseldorf ordered the transformation of the Court Gardens into a public promenade in 1776; and Berlin's Zoologischer Garten was first opened to the public in 1740. Versailles was the quintessential example of an open garden. Since the court and government had moved there in 1682, the building had been tasked with strictly exemplifying the political code of the Sun King, Louis XIV. However, a travel guide dated to 1718 indicates that the royal gardens of Versailles were already open to the public.

(47) The style of French garden typified by Versailles is known as a royal garden and is a prime example of the political use of an art form, intended to demonstrate to the public the legitimacy and grandeur of the monarch's power. The gardens were designed to have a regular, centralized geometric composition. The ruled paths, elaborately trimmed trees, manicured parks, wooden hedges, ponds, and mechanized fountains and spouts were symbols representations of the lifestyle of the court rather than of nature itself. (Fig. 18) In French formal gardens, the



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shapes of the growing trees, the structure of the watercourses and the orientation of the landscape must conform to calculated standards and exemplary forms, and the structure radiating from a central axis in all directions reveals a symbolic composition designed to subordinate the city and the province to the authority of the palace. (48)

These compositions reflect perspective thinking and are the result of imposing a "god's eye view" or "bird's eye view" on nature, looking down

on the whole from a privileged vantage point. This privileged point of view was that of a monarch who sought to survey and control the world.

This visual power is also strongly represented in landscape painting. Birds-eye view landscape painting not only depicts the beauty, but serves as a tool to organise the desire of power over the world at a particular time. In particular, the s of the classical per

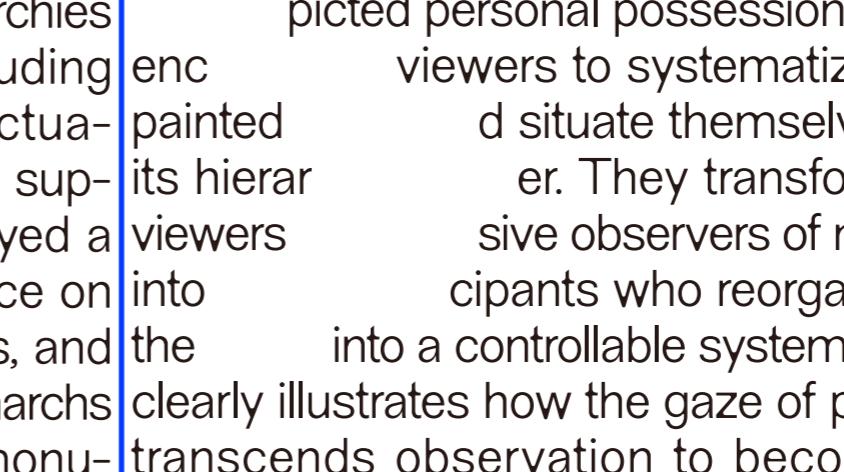
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clearly illustrates how the gaze of power

transcends observation to become a

visual representation of power's active

organization and control of the world.

Ulti d's-eye view landscape

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Conclusion

Our eyes do not perceive objects as they truly are; they are always influenced by the content of our experiences and knowledge.

Across different times and spaces, the content of our knowledge and experiences varies, and the way we perceive them changes accordingly, because they allow us to selectively define both visual order and disorder. Beyond this, they pose a transversal power, reshaping reality in ways that extend beyond mere visual perception.

Building on this understanding, this paper investigates the nature of the modern visual system of perspective and its contribution to the formation of the modern visual subject. Originating in Renaissance Italy, perspective was more than just a technique of representation. It introduced a rationalised and mathematical approach to visual space, establishing the foundations of the modern visual system.

Alberti's theories and Brunelleschi's experiments enabled the rational organization of space around a vanishing point, breaking away from the medieval visual order and opening up a new worldview.

By compelling viewers to observe space from a singular, fixed vantage point, perspective became a symbolic order centre, shaping the modern visual subject.

Perspective was not merely a technical advance in visual representation; it was deeply entwined with the core values of modern society. In 15th-century Florence, the rise of commerce and individualism provided fertile ground for the visual articulation of the capitalistic order. Perspective encapsulated modern rationality as a visual representation, while simultaneously being utilised to legitimise power and economic hierarchies.

Moreover, perspective extended beyond organising the viewer's gaze; it became a vital tool for exposing and sustaining power relations.

The vanishing point, more than a visual focal centre, revealed the mechanisms through which power

operates. It suggests that the viewer is not merely an observer but is simultaneously constituted as a subject and subordinated within a system of visual power.

This duality is particularly evident in Foucault's analysis of Las Meninas. Here, the vanishing point is not merely a structural center imparting visual order but functions as a mechanism that immerses the viewer in the dynamics of power.

The absence of the monarch from the painting becomes symbolic, compelling the viewer to internalise their gaze, reconfigure their position, and participate in the hierarchical order of power.

Similarly, birds-eye view landscape paintings from the Classical period transcended mere depictions of nature and space, functioning as tools to visualise and legitimise the power of the gaze. The dominant viewpoint in such paintings provided viewers with an illusion of ownership or control over the depicted landscapes, thereby reinforcing social hierarchies and power structures.

In this sense, the implications of perspective go far beyond artistic innovation or technological advancement.

Perspective exemplifies how power, economics, and visual experience are intricately interconnected in modern society. Perspective visual systems shape not only how we see the world but also how individuals and societies reconstruct and comprehend it. These questions remain relevant in contemporary society, prompting reflections on how

visual experiences and power structures influence individual agency and maintain social order. This discussion reminds us that remnants of perspective thinking and visual systems continue to shape the way we perceive the world today. It highlights that visual experiences are not mere reflections of reality, but actively contribute to its reconstruction and redefinition.

Ultimately, visual representation is not just about what we see, but how we see, interpret, and construct social order. It challenges us to rethink how we understand and restructure our world, even though our visual experiences are shaped and regulated by socio-economic systems, there remains the possibility of

reorganising reality by transforming the way we

see.

Finally, we must confront a critical question: is it possible to establish a truly decentralized visual system in a world dominated by the hegemony of vision? Seeing the world without deception, while critically examining how visual systems shape and alter reality, remains an enduring challenge. Through heightened awareness and reflective practice, we can reaffirm that visual experiences are not passive reflections of reality but active tools capable of driving transformative change.

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