

FIRST PERSON SHOT
Technology and New Forms of Subjectivity
in Post-cinema Landscape

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First person shot

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1. FPS as a stylistic and theoretical figure

First person shot is a typical *figure* of the "postmedia" landscape, resulting from the evolution of the classical point of view or subjective shot within the hybridizing and contaminating contemporary media field.

FPS is characterized by the direct expression of a dynamic grasp of the world enacted by an hybrid agent (a body - sensor), and consequently by the representation and the re-enacting of its living, perceptual, practical, emotional, ongoing experience on the side of the spectator.

1. FPS as a stylistic and theoretical figure

First person shot can be manifested by a number of different media materials such as:

- film and television hand held shots;
- video produced with web cams or cellular phones cams directly showing "live" events;
- viral video shot with helmet or combat cam;
- raw materials produced by surveillance devices and "remediated" by other media;
- videogames playable in first person mode,
- Many others...

1. FPS as a stylistic and theoretical figure

I will consider FPS as both a *stylistic* and a *theoretical* figure

As a *stylistic* figure, it originates both from a series of technological innovations, and from the contamination of their stylistic consequences through different media

As a *theoretical* figure, it implies a specific conception of subject and subjectivity, and it entails a recasting of many views of film and media scholars about this topic

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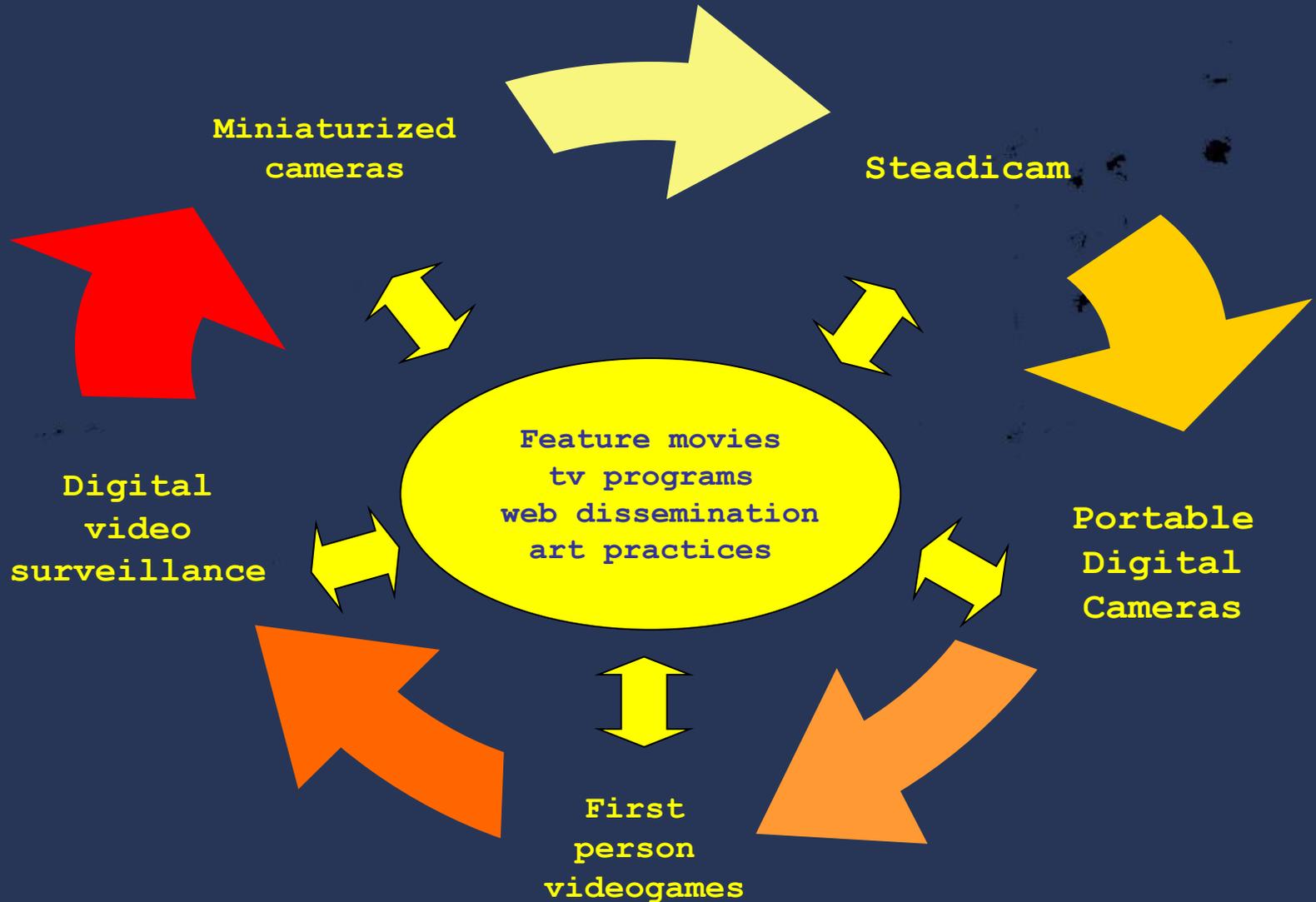
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2.1. A genealogy of FPS

FPS derives from five main technological and stylistic innovations

- ↳ Steadicam (Since 1980s)
- ↳ Portable digital cameras (Since beginning 1990s)
- ↳ Miniaturized cameras (Since beginning 1990s)
- ↳ Digital video surveillance (Since end 1990s)
- ↳ First person videogames (Since beginning 1990s)

2.1. A genealogy of FPS



2.1. A genealogy of FPS

FPS emerges from the complex web of reciprocal interactions, "remediations" and hybridizations of technological and stylistic innovations having occurred within the media field over the last thirty years or so

Consequently, if the classical and modern point of view shot was a figure closely tied to cinema institution, FPS is a radically "postmedia" stylistic figure

2.2. A definition of FPS

FPS is defined by two main features

(a) the instance responsible for the perceptual constitution of the diegetic world is exhibited as embodied, and as embedded in a network of living relations with subjects and objects that inhabit this very world.

Therefore, FPS expresses an intentional stance of the subject of perception; in some cases this intentionality is reciprocated by the intended subjects and objects of the diegetic world: both one-way and two-way directions of relations can be indeed expressed

2.2. A definition of FPS

FPS is defined by two main features

(b) The nature of the instance responsible for the perceptual constitution of the diegetic world is hybrid; namely, it ranges between a "subjectual" pole characterized by human nature, and an "objectual" one endowed with a mechanical nature.

I will call this hybrid and unstable entity, constantly re-defining and negotiating its nature between these two poles, a "body sensor".

2.2. A definition of FPS

The definition of FPS highlights similarities and differences from the point of view shot

FPS partially shares the feature (a) with the cinematographic point of view shot. However, unlike the latter, FPS escapes any kind of syntactic rules, and may be extended as long as the audiovisual product duration.

The feature (b) marks a clear difference from point of view shot, which is grounded on an implicit and non-negotiable distinction between the characters looking inside the diegetic world, and the cameras that take their perceptual position for a while.

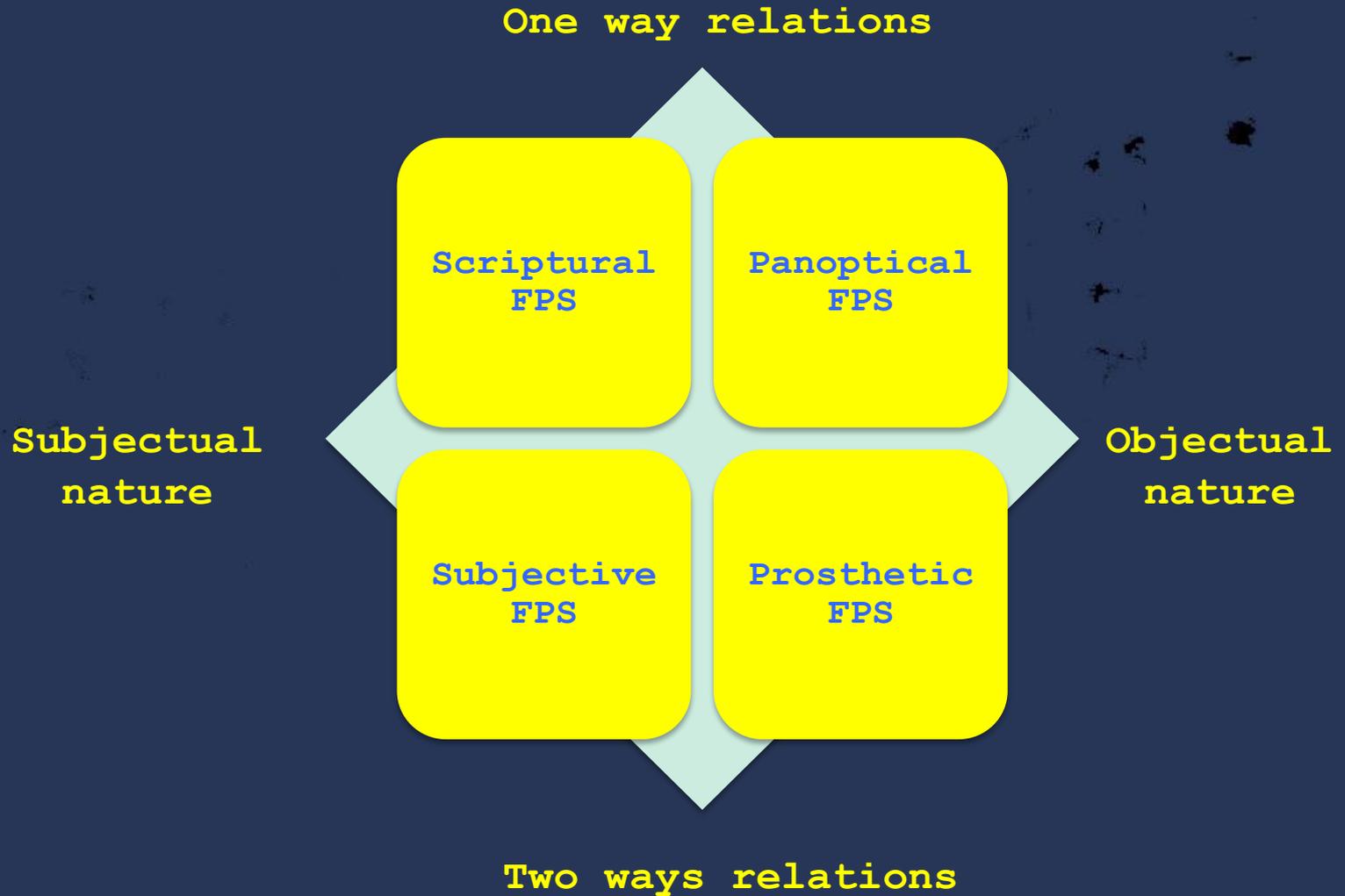
2.2. A definition of FPS

On the basis of the definition of FPS it is also possible to construct a typology of its configurations or regimes.

Indeed, we can combine the possibility of one-way or two-way directions of the intentional relations lived by the body sensor (feature a) with its oscillation from a subjectual to an objectual nature (feature b).

Hence, four major configurations take place. Since they are fluid and negotiable, most interesting are the cases of shifting from one configuration to another

2.2. A definition of FPS



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3.1. FPS as symbolic form

In this section we'll consider FPS as a "figure of thought", i.e. a perceptual configuration expressing an abstract idea by activating a living and concrete experience

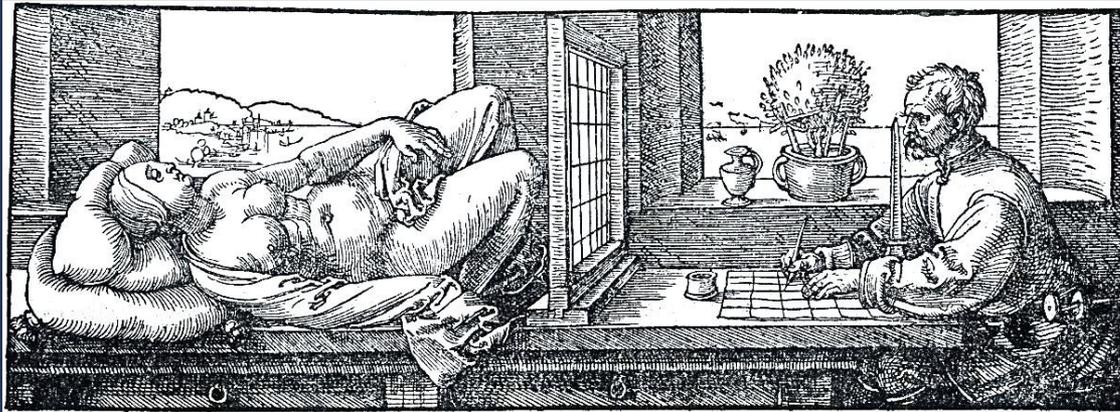
FPS expresses and activates processes of constitution of subject, based on perception, action and emotion, and involving a close interaction of mind and body

3.1. FPS as symbolic form

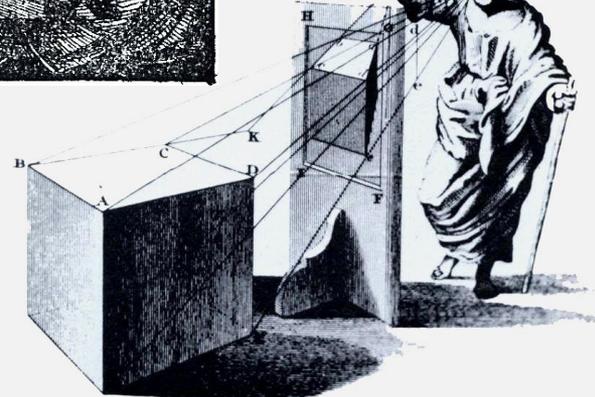
In this sense, FPS can be compared to central perspective as "symbolic form" (Panofsky 1927). Indeed, both perspective and FPS express and enact models of subject constitution generally widespread in the cultural context

However, perspective and FPS expresses and activates two different and opposing ideas of subjectivity. While perspective refers to a "positional" and static conception of subjectivity, FPS introduces a "relational" and dynamic one.

3.1. FPS as symbolic form

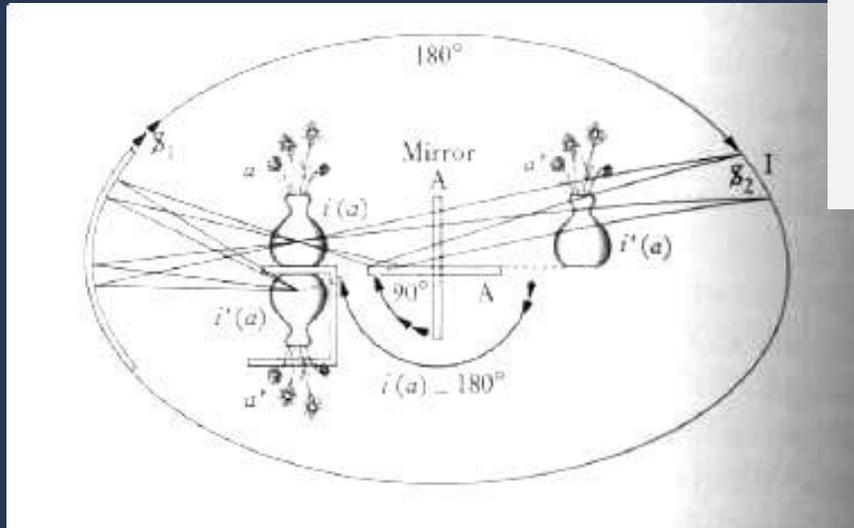


Durer, 1525



The visual cone, from B. Taylor, *New Principles of Linear Perspective* (1715).

Taylor, 1715



Lacan, 1960

3.1. FPS as symbolic form

From a diachronic point of view, we can assume that FPS has been overlapping and partly replacing central perspective as the dominant model of the constitution of subjectivity within the cultural landscape over the last thirty years or so.

The ongoing shift from a positional to a relational model of subjectivity is a trend currently observable in many cultural fields. See for instance cognitive neurosciences and film studies

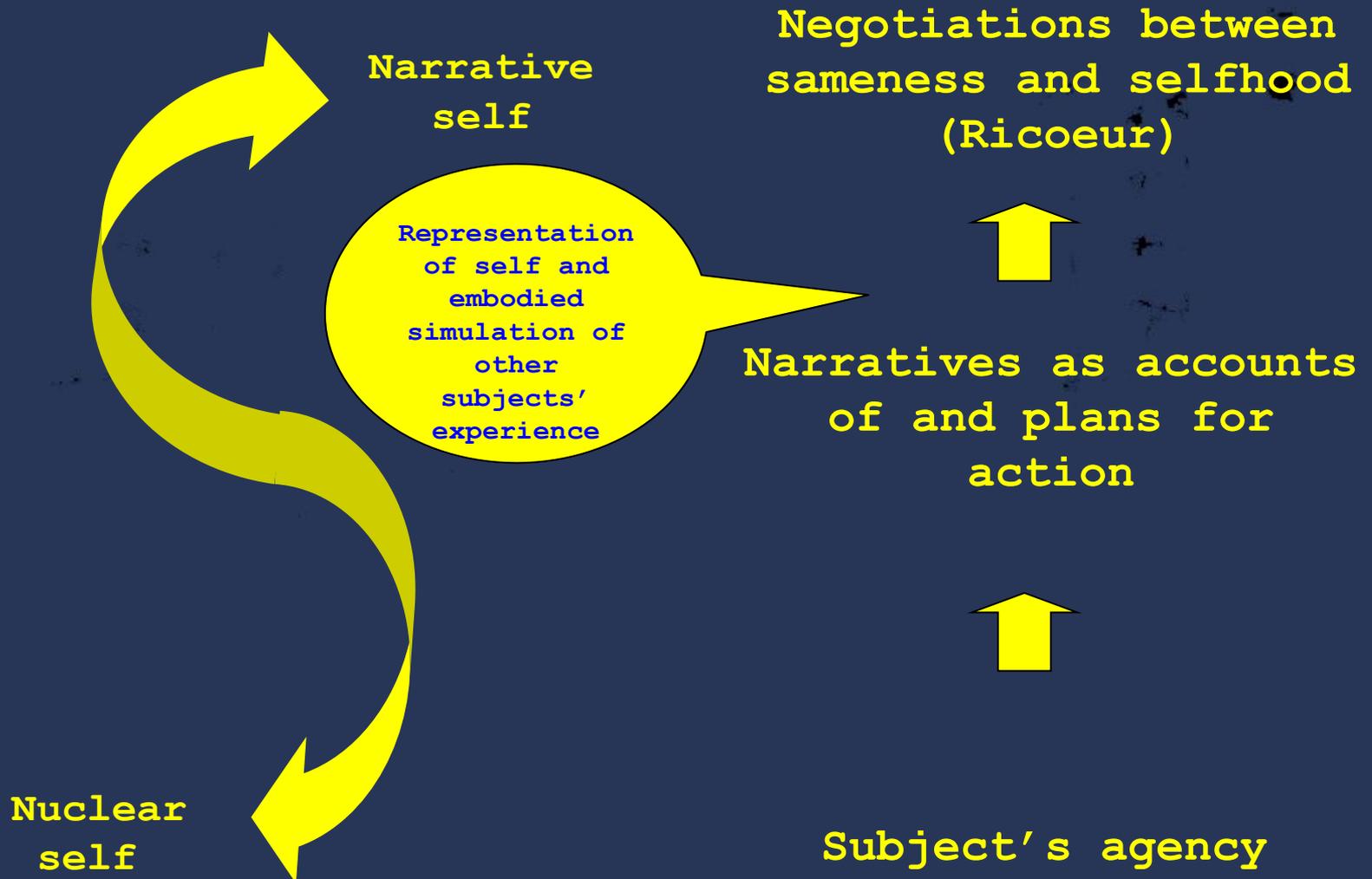
3.2. FPS and current theories on subjectivity

Contemporary cognitive neurosciences challenge the computational model proposed by classic cognitivist scholars.

Computational model	Neurocognitive model
Separation of mind from body (Descartes' Error)	Close and reciprocal relationship between mind and body
Central and transcendental subject	Subject emerging from an ongoing flow of experiences, perceptions, actions, emotions, representations and self-representations
Unitary subject	Multiple and fragmentary subject, unfolding as a unitary entity in function of the dynamic coping with the environment requested to the organism

3.2. FPS and current theories on subjectivity

Model adapted from Antonio Damasio, *Self Come to Mind*, 2010)



3.2. FPS and current theories on subjectivity

A similar situation can be observed within the field of film studies. In this area, a phenomenological wave led to both a retrieval of the question of subject and subjectivity already emerged in the Seventies Theories, and its radical reformulation

3.2. FPS and current theories on subjectivity

Jean Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" (1970)

Two main points:

- ① The cinematic apparatus defines the subject as "location" on the basis of filmic images. On the one hand the single still frame defines the viewer's spatial location on the basis of the central and absolute point of view derived from Renaissance perspective; on the other hand different images define a "transcendental subject" who subsumes the fragmented and diversified flow of images into a coherent unity of consciousness

3.2. FPS and current theories on subjectivity

Jean Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" (1970)

Two main points:

- ② The cinematographic apparatus produces the subject as a "position" through the identification of the viewer with the transcendental subject, by means of a repetition of the Lacanian "mirror stage". Moreover, the use of Lacan's mirror stage confirms and reinforces the idea of the subject as a "location" defined by visual data.

3.2. FPS and current theories on subjectivity

Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye. A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992)

Not only the spectator but also the film itself should be considered as a subject; indeed, the film expresses a perceptual, introceptive experience of an enworlded body as well as the spectator

«the direct engagement, [...] between spectator and film in the film experience cannot be considered a monologic one between a viewing subject and a viewed object. Rather, it is a dialogical and dialectical engagement of two viewing subjects who also exist as visible objects (if of different material and in different ways to be elaborated further)» (P. 23)

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Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye. A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992)

From this perspective

«the film is the expression of a [living and embodied] experience, and this expression is itself [bodily] experienced [by the spectator] in the act of watching a film, becoming as a consequence the experience of an expression» (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010, p. 116)

As a consequence, subject constitution through film experience is based on a twofold dynamic relation: (a) that of the experiencing "body" of the film with the intentioned objects of the perceived world and (b) that of the spectator's body with the film as "viewing subject"

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Baudry does not recognize that film constitutes a kind of subject; consequently, he

(1) depicts the cinematic experience as a kind of manipulative and "paranoid" constitution of subjectivity unfolding not "from the outside in", but rather "from the inside out"

(2) conceives the subject as a disembodied entity, grounded on a punctual, abstract, void position defined by the perspective centre

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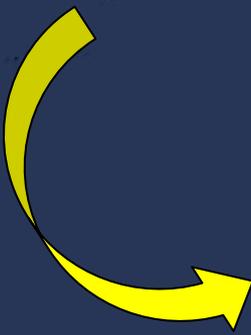
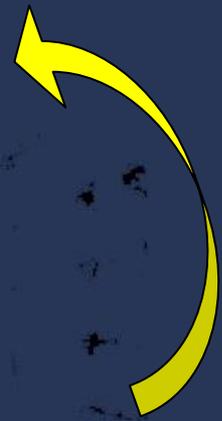
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FPS on the one hand and new conceptions of subjectivity on the other one, emerged over the same period (last thirty years or so)

I argue that between the two series of phenomena there is a relation not just of analogy, but rather of mutual causal determination

4. Conclusion. For a visual history of subjectivity

The development and widespread diffusion of first person shot has been influenced by the emergence and spread of the new dynamic and relational conception of subjectivity



In turn, first person shot has been responsible for the spread of a "new" conception of subjectivity, both in the general field of culture and in specific disciplinary areas, such as neurocognitive sciences and film studies

4. Conclusion. For a visual history of subjectivity

Despite its appearance of naturalness and immediacy, the relational and dynamic subjectivity is actually the result of a complex cultural process of construction and mediation

Within this process, the "techniques of the visible" such as central perspective and FPS, played and still play a key role

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Thank you for your attention!

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