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THE FILM EFFECT: PERCEPTION AND SOCIAL FUNCTION

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Abstract

This research paper proposes a comprehensive examination of the “Film Effect” as a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond the screen and influences the cognitive and social structures of the individual. By integrating four primary theoretical pillars the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, the psychology of Rudolf Arnheim, the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, and the anthropology of Clifford Geertz the research argues that the cinematic experience is not a passive act of consumption, but a complex intersection of the ontology of the image and the viewer’s cultural predispositions. The analysis focuses on the transition from the movement-image to the time-image and the consequences of this transition on temporal perception. Furthermore, it examines how cultural capital dictates the depth of interpretation and how film, as a cultural text, serves as a modern ritual that shapes collective identities. The findings highlight that the film effect is a construct that depends on the synchronization of formal aesthetic elements with the audience’s social habitus.

Keywords: *Film effect, cultural capital, social ritual, visual perception, film ontology*

1. Introduction: Cinema as a Form of Thought

In the contemporary media landscape, where the image has become the primary language of human communication, understanding the “Film Effect” requires a perspective that transcends the boundaries of mere aesthetic or technical criticism. Film is not just an entertainment product; it is, as this paper argues, a thought machine that restructures the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us. This paper aims to deconstruct the internal mechanisms of this effect through an interdisciplinary lens, joining theories of perception with those of social structures.

The primary research problem lies in the duality of film: on one hand, it is a visual stim-

ulus of light and shadow operating at the psychophysical level of the viewer, and on the other, it is a carrier of symbols and myths decoded according to social affiliation. By analyzing this interaction, we can understand why a cinematic work has such different impacts on different groups of people and how directors manage to produce long-lasting emotional effects.

2.Theoretical Framework: The Four Dimensions of the Effect

2.1 Ontology and Time: The Perspective of Gilles Deleuze

Gilles Deleuze, in his two monumental volumes on cinema, offers the philosophical tools to understand how film influences our awareness of time. He sees cinema not

as a reflection of reality, but as a generator of new realities. According to Deleuze, the “Film Effect” is realized through two primary images: the **Movement-Image** and the **Time-Image**.

- **The Movement-Image** corresponds to classical cinema, where the narrative is linear and every action follows another in a causal chain. Here, the effect on the viewer is one of total absorption in the action;
- **The Time-Image**, however, produces a deeper effect in modern cinema. When time is liberated from movement (through long takes, narrative suspensions, or fragmentation), the viewer is forced to transition from a passive observer to a reflective subject. In this state, the film does not simply “tell” a story but allows the viewer to “think” within time, creating an ontological effect that alters the perception of existence.

2.2 Psychology of Form and Perception: Rudolf Arnheim

While Deleuze focuses on the nature of the image, Rudolf Arnheim, in his work “Film as Art”, examines the psychological process of how these images are received by the human brain. Drawing on Gestalt psychology, Arnheim argues that the “Film Effect” is the result of a creative organization of visual stimuli. Perception is not a mirror but a process where the viewer fills in the gaps of the two-dimensional image to create a three-dimensional emotional experience.

Elements like light, shadow, camera angles, and montage are the tools that dictate the psychophysical response. A fast and dynamic montage stimulates the nervous system, producing adrenaline and tension, while symmetrical compositions and slow movements produce a state of calm and contemplation. This indicates that the emotional effect of the film is programmed at its formal level.

2.3 Sociology of Taste and Cultural Capital: Pierre Bourdieu

On a social level, the film effect invades another sphere: that of classification and hierarchy. Pierre Bourdieu, through the concepts of Habitus and Cultural Capital, helps us understand why different people react differently to the same film. The effect of a “difficult” art film (e.g., auteur films) is not natural; it requires prior cultural training. For a viewer with high cultural capital, the effect of such a film is an intellectual and aesthetic experience that strengthens their social status. For audiences without this training, the same film may have an effect of alienation or boredom.

2.4 Anthropology of Interpretation: Clifford Geertz

Finally, cinema functions as a means of constructing collective meaning. Clifford Geertz sees culture as a text that people read to orient themselves in the world. In this context, film is a “modern ritual”. Its effect extends to the creation of myths and symbols that unite or divide communities. When a film deals with themes such as national identity, historical trauma, or migration, it produces an effect of collective catharsis. It becomes a space where society negotiates its values.

3 Methodological Analysis

This study relies on a qualitative approach, using the analysis of the filmic text in relation to the audience’s reaction. The methodology follows a three-step process:

1. Formal Analysis: Deconstruction of visual strategies to see how they affect attention.
2. Conceptual Analysis: Using Deleuze’s categories to assess temporal perception.
3. Contextual Analysis: Assessment of the film as a social and cultural product.

4. Results and Discussions

The “Film Effect” is a triple phenomenon: it is physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural. The following table summarizes the interaction of these effects:

Table 1.

Theoretical Pillar	Mechanism of Action	Effect on the Viewer	Field of Influence
Philosophy (Deleuze)	Time-Image	Reflection on time	Ontological

Theoretical Pillar	Mechanism of Action	Effect on the Viewer	Field of Influence
Psychology (Arnheim)	Gestalt Structure	Guidance of attention	Cognitive/Emotional
Sociology (Bourdieu)	Habitus/Taste	Social identification	Institutional
Anthropology (Geertz)	Symbol/Ritual	Meaning construction	Collective

5. Conclusions and Implications

This study has shown that the “Film Effect” is a multi-layered process that begins with visual perception and ends with social integration. Cinema provides tools that change the experience of time, provoke emo-

tional reactions, serve as a tool of social distinction, and function as a ritual. Future research should focus on how new technologies (such as virtual reality) are changing these four pillars.

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