In a culture dominated by visual images, most people use their eyes to obtain vast amounts of information without the need for direct or close physical contact. A human recognizes the outside world through the ability of nervous systems which construct internal visual representations of the outside world. The eye is like a camera in that it has a set of lenses in the front (the cornea and the lens) that focus images on a light-sensitive film (the retina) in the back [see photography]. The retina contains several layers of nerve cells that analyze visual information before it ever leaves the eye. Signals from the retina are transmitted via the optic nerve to a way station in the core of the brain called the geniculate body, then to the primary visual cortex at the back of brain. Our image of the world is mapped topographically onto the visual cortex.

It is important to note that the internal perception of visual media is not only a reflection of its physical properties, but also the changes induced by its transduction, filtering, and transformation by the nervous system. [1] It is the brain, and not the eye, that is the true organ of visual perception. Given the brain’s integral interpretive role in the construction of any complex visual impression, it is necessary to be aware of how a human understands his or her physical environment as a perceived environment.

The term "gaze" is broadly used by media theorists to refer both to the ways in which viewers look at images of people in any visual medium and to the gaze of those depicted in visual texts. [2] The "gaze" is a double-sided term. There must be someone to gaze and
there may be someone to gaze back. To give the gaze is to perceive that one is looking at an object. To set oneself at gaze is to expose oneself to view or display oneself. [3] Words for the agent of gazing are beholder, viewer, and occasionally spectator or audience. Like a person, gaze also can be exchanged in a medium. Several key forms of gaze can be identified in photographic, filmic or televisual tests, or in figurative graphic art based on who is doing the looking: the spectator’s gaze, the intra-diegetic gaze, the direct or extra-diegetic address to the viewer, and the look of the camera. [4]

The antiquity of the discourse on gaze can be seen in such myths as that of the evil eye and the gorgon Medusa, whose gaze could turn its object to stone. Folkloric representations of eyes sought to protect their wearmers from the power of the evil gaze. In the nineteenth century, the discourse on the visually perceptual object was centered on an opposition between the optical and tactile senses. The tactile sense placed us in contact with reality while the optical sense was regarded as the sense of the intellect, the spirit, and the imagination. Impressionists and symbolists were attracted by the fact that optical perception seemed to unite the subjectivity of artistic vision with the objectivity of the external world. It survived in the work of critics of the mid-twentieth century who used formal criteria to interpret such artistic movements as abstract expressionism. This discourse was continued, but replaced to a large extent by the term “gaze.” In early twentieth-century, German expressionism exploited the sense of power in images that stared out at the viewer menacingly. The charisma of the gaze came to its peak in Hitler, who prided himself on his hypnotic gaze. Jean-Paul Sartre’s almost paranoid treatment of “le regard” (the look) in his treatise on existential philosophy, Being and Nothingness, portrayed the state of being watched as a threat to the self. [5]

A late-twentieth century interest in the eye and the gaze has been largely investigated so far in terms of psychoanalysis. According to Jacques Lacan, human recognition of the visual object is overlaid with mis-recognition. In “Of the Gaze as object petit a “ Lacan indicates some sort of outsider observer; the imagery petit a is the lure for the subject’s desire. [6] The embodiment of object petit a is what we may call the gaze. According to Lacan, the subject’s attempt to view the other must pass through the intermediary. The plane mirror provides a virtual image that covers up the fundamental lack in the real image. Thus, the gaze corresponds to desire, the desire for self-completion through the other. “The eye and the gaze--this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field.” [7] In this permutation the gaze is the unattainable object of desire that seemed to make the other complete. However, for Lacan, it is important to understand that the eye and gaze, although split, are part of the same person. [8]

Marshall McLuhan, in his Understanding Media: The extensions Man, refers to the tragedy of Narcissus caused by the misrecognition of his own image: “The Greek myth of Narcissus is directly concerned with a fact of human experience, as the word Narcissus indicates. It is from the Greek word narcosis, or numbness. The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system.” [9]

Lev Manovich notes that Lacan emphasizes that perspective extends beyond the domain of the visible. Manovich points out that Lacan reminds us that an image is anything defined “by the correspondences from one point to another in space” [10] and the idea that perspective is not only limited to sight but also functions in other senses defines the classical discourses on perception: “The whole trick, the key presto!, of the classic dialectic around perception, derives from the fact that it deals with geometric vision, that is to say, with vision in so far as it situated in a space that is not in its essence the visual.” [11] Manovich argues that Lacan’s clarification that the principle of perspective is not limited to the visible helps us understand that the technologies of remote sensing function on the principle of perspective. According to Manovich, regardless of their lengths, all waves travel in straight lines, and therefore points in space are connected by straight lines to a

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[16] Ibid., p. 11.
point of reception (such as radar antenna) or recording (such as photographic camera). [12] Radar, infrared imaging, sonar, or ultrasound are all part of what Lacan called "geometric vision," perspectival vision which extends beyond the visible. [13]

On the other hand, the film theorist Christian Merz made an analogy between the cinema screen and mirror, arguing that by identifying with the gaze of the camera, the cinema spectator re-enacts Lacan's "the mirror stage," [14] the moment when a child recognizes its own image in the mirror as an idealized image of itself. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey also made use of psychoanalytic theories of Lacan and Sigmund Freud to explore the practices of representation and spectatorship in films. Mulvey argues that cinematic viewing is the interplay between narcissistic identification and erotic voyeurism. In his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Sigmund Freud associated scopophilia with the pleasure involved in looking at other people’s bodies as objects. Mulvey argues that cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. [15] According to Mulvey, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness." [16]

Many feminist art historians also have presented historical instances of the dominating "male gaze" and the socio-cultural uses of the female body as signifier. For instance, Patricia Simons explores the female profile portrait in fifteenth-century Florence. She argues that the operations of the gaze in a "display culture" in which the presentation of the female sitter with "an averted eye and a face available to scrutiny" served the needs of a strongly male-dominated society in which brides and wives were visible emblems of status and property exchange. For this reason, the portraits were not so much images of human individuals as they were highly idealized "bearers of wealth," presenting a fixed display of fetishized body parts, dress, and ornament to the appraising male eye. [17]

Michel Foucault related the "inspecting gaze" to power rather than to gender in his discussion of surveillance. For Foucault, the asymmetry of seeing-without-being-seen in the panopticon is the very essence of power. Jeremy Bentham envisioned the panopticon or "all-seeing place" to provide complete observation of every prisoner. The panopticon serves as a laboratory of humans, with data collected and collated through what Foucault termed "the gaze": an inspecting gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be minimal cost. [18] The faceless prisoners of this space are held in darkness, illuminated only by roving spotlights that prevent them from observing their observers, reinforcing Foucault’s idea of a citizen who "is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication." [19]

The functions of photography can be seen in the context of Foucault’s analysis of the rise of surveillance in modern society. Photography promotes "the normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them." [20] On the other hand, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins combine Foucault’s "inspecting gaze" and Lacan’s "mirror stage" to still photography. They argue that "mirror and camera are tools of self reflection and surveillance. Each creates a double of the self, a second figure who can be examined more closely than the original - a double that can also be alienated from the self - taken away, as a photograph can be, to another place." [21]

The idea of "all-seeing" comes in the form of literal observation through cameras in public spaces and electronic monitoring of workers. The view is that a society is being constructed where all behavior will be sharply regulated through the fear of theoretical observation by some oppressive entity. [22] "There has been much ballyhoo about the liberating and decentralizing aspects of new media technologies like the Internet and..."
ubiquitous computing, but the fact remains that new information technologies will be every bit as effective for established organizations as they will be for garage e-zine publishers. It still remains to be seen to what extent the new media technologies will in fact increase the centralization of power by facilitating unprecedented monitoring and observation." [23]

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