

## **“ARE YOU LOOKING FOR ME?” NEW FORMS OF GAZING ON THE INTERNET**

**Julie Alev DİLMAÇ<sup>1</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

Today, screens are everywhere and allow individuals to see and be in contact constantly with the world. New technologies have allowed them to ubiquitously display themselves. They can be everywhere at the same time, sharing opinions and photos, appreciating or hating, seeing and being seen by the other, even from a faraway country, with just one click. Through these interactions, new forms of viewing seem to have emerged: new technologies make the image into a thing that is looked at as at a staged actor. The eye is distracted by what it sees on the surface and does not seek to capture the image’s deeper meaning. Communicational fluctuations lead, little by little, to dehumanization of the gaze which gives way to new behaviors that may be, in certain cases, tragic for the individual.

**Keywords:** Internet, Interaction, Humiliation, Technologies, Virtual World.

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Cyprus International University, Faculty of Health Sciences

## “BANA MI BAKMIŞTINIZ?”: İNTERNETTE YENİ BAKIŞ BİÇİMLERİ

### ÖZ

Bugün, ekranlar her yerde ve bireyler dünya ile ilgili her şeye, istedikleri zaman erişebiliyorlar. Yeni teknolojiler sayesinde, aynı zamanda, çeşitli faaliyetlerde bulunabilirler: birbirleriyle iletişime girip, her konu üzerine fikir beyan edebilirler; dünyadaki olaylardan haberdar olabilirler; kendi fotoğraflarını paylaşıp, başkalarınınkine de tek bir klik aracıyla bakıp beğenebilirler. Yeni iletişim teknolojileriyle gelen bu tür etkileşimler, yeni “bakış” biçimlerini meydana çıkarttı: artık, İnternette her birey, kendini ortaya koyan ve bakışları üzerine toplamak isteyen bir faile dönüşmektedir. Fakat sanal âlemde göz, birçok uyarıcıya maruz kaldığından dolayı, dikkatini toplayamaz ve gördüğünün derin anlamını kavrayamaz. Bu durumda, bakış yavaş yavaş insandışılaştırılır ve bazı durumlarda birey için tehlikeli olabilecek yeni davranışlara (siber taciz gibi) yol açar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İnternet, Etkileşim, Mobbing, Yıldırma, Teknoloji, Sanal Alem.

According to Rousseau (1968), there can be no human existence without the gaze that we place on each other; it allows us to fulfill a universal desire for reputation and honor. Todorov (2001) went as far as to say that the need to be seen is a fundamental human need: through this behavior, the individual seeks to capture the regard of others through various facets of his or her being, body, intelligence, voice or silence, thus securing the recognition of peers. That is, others confirm our existence by looking at us.

Consequently, in a society that now can be called a screen society (Barus-Michel, 2011), not being “seen” is a tragedy. It even equates non-existence in the eyes of others, essentially a refusal of relations with the Other that are established through viewing. Thus, to improve chances of being seen and to avoid having one’s image lost in the communicational flux, the individual must find ever-new ways to attract the Other’s gaze. Within this socio-technical system, all individuals submit to the same imperatives of self-exposition and compete for visibility. Indeed, to feel they exist, individuals must be seen through images, make themselves seen as much as possible, and offer constant images of themselves: be present, known, even famous, through the image (Haroche, 2011). This is why individuals go to great lengths to stand out from the ordinary in order to be “viewed” and “in view” of others on the Internet: they must make a “buzz” (Boëton, 2013) so that others’ gaze will not pass them by. In today’s “society of exhibition” (Barus-Michel, 2011), not being viewable on the Internet is suspicious behavior.

The individual must not only exist, but also last in the eyes of others. Through self-presentation (Goffman, 1990), individuals attempt to attract alterity’s gaze in order to obtain approval and confirm existence. To “feel you exist” is not automatic; rather, others’ gaze plays a primordial role in the construction of this feeling (Flahault, 2002). This relation to the Other is based on a reciprocal and dialectic relation between “being-seen-by-other” and “seeing other” (Sartre, 2003). Yet, with the emergence of new technologies, ways of seeing seem to be redefined, particularly

through screens<sup>2</sup>. Though screens have simplified communications and access to information, and have made it possible to retain large quantities of data, perhaps the Internet’s biggest innovation is in having made it commonplace to see, say, and show everything (Uhl, 2002). This “visibility requirement” (Haroche, 2011) to which individuals must submit in contemporary society follows social rules based on the obligation to communicate and show oneself in order to exist permanently, and without which one will be forgotten.

The eye of individuals must also adapt to these new forms of communication: they must instruct their gaze, training it to capture rays of information in a vast kaleidoscope (Rosenbaum, 1998) that is the Internet. In a flash, the gaze must overcome the ocular dizziness in which new technologies have submerged it; eyes must get used to the ubiquitousness of images and screens, the constant sensory and informational flux (Haroche, 2011) characteristic of contemporary society. Stimulated by the profusion of signs and signposts that grab the eye, it is as if the gaze stops short of reaching its true destination due to the visual detours (Vincent-Buffault, 2004). Individuals today are part of a world where they see images everywhere, where they are constantly bid to look, are led, are grabbed (Rosenbaum, 1998).

The aim of this article is to grasp the ways of viewing on the Internet<sup>3</sup>. A typology of the different gazes and their various aspects will be provided. We will discuss how the act of being viewed by others on the Internet not only brings recognition to the individual, but also how the gaze can be invasive and can represent a threat to actors’ privacy. We will see that these new ways of gazing each other on the Internet can no longer being described only as surveillance (Çakır, 2015), since this situation of being viewed is provoked and wished by the individual himself.

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<sup>2</sup> For a turkish example on the use of Facebook and its relation to gaze: Tuğrul Çomu, Ali Toprak, Ayşenur Yıldırım, Eser Aygül, Mutlu Binark, Senem Börekçi, 2009, *Toplumsal Paylaşım Ağı Facebook: “Görülüyorum Öyleyse Varım”*, İstanbul, Kalkedon / Sosyoloji Dizisi.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the arguments debated here have been discussed in Dilmaç 2015.

## **THE CAPTURED GAZE**

One of the means individuals employ to attract attention and capture the gaze of the Other is dramatization and staging of their existence (Lasch, 1979; Goffman, 1990). This self-exposition can be established through the image and the sharing of it, but can also express itself through webcams that penetrate individuals' private lives to shed light on them. The emergence of sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat contribute to sharing the “Digital Me” (Lalo, 2012). Viewers of these sites can grasp in a flash the image of the Other that jumps out at them. The viewed is reduced to a “visual stimulus” (Rosenbaum, 1998). In this, everything is done for the pleasure of the eyes, to make them stop for a second (Rosenbaum, 1998): the individual attempts to hypnotize his or her viewers and to make them dream of his/ her life. It is necessary to fascinate, make it happen in the blink of an eye, and try to capture the attention of the surfer with diverse eye-grabbers (Rosenbaum, 1998). In short, individuals must constantly sell themselves, and for this, display themselves repeatedly (Haroche, 2006). In a society of exhibition (Barus-Michel, 2011), viewing contest competition is stiff: each person must claim his/ her place in the social game of appearance and seduction (Vincent-Buffault, 2004).

Many Internet users willingly unveil themselves and entire chunks of their existence, as if this exposure will “anchor” them more deeply in the virtual world. In the digital world, self-presentation is no longer based on the distinction between two spheres, one intimate and one public. Ordinary and ubiquitous traditional limits are deconstructed by the Internet. The intimate and the public tend to coexist, to be layered upon each other. This can be called extimity (Tisseron, 2002): the movement that compels each person to put forward a part of his/ her private life, both physical and mental. This implies a space that, although public, is nonetheless fed by the intimacy of the person, whose goal is to show certain aspects of his/ her intimate self in order for others to approve and thus, to increase their value in his/ her own eyes (Tisseron, 2011). In a society of exhibition, bodies and souls strip down however they want (Kaufman, 2003), like a trap for the eye, a swamp to slow you down (Rosenbaum, 1998).

Thus, individuals’ private lives are revealed with even the most personal films put online and the most intimate moments broadcast via webcam. Individuals exhibit themselves, consent to unveiling their lives, and in return they are viewed. This relation between “voyeurism” and “exhibitionism” questions the secret described by Simmel (1906) as an aspect of respectable sociability. Rather, the transgression, which gives rise to viewing, has become the norm in hypermodern society. Limits of intimacy and secrets are overturned; nothing better than to show yourself doing it (Barus-Michel, 2011). In this way everyone has become both voyeur and exhibitionist of everyone else.

Even the “walls” on the Web become places for self-exposition: on the Internet, they are no longer a barrier separating individuals and hiding them from others. Walls now allow for offering oneself to the eyes of alterity through sharing documents, images and comments. Wanting to be seen, existing through showing off, they leave “traces of the self” (Lalo, 2012). The Wall of digital networks connects today with the unveiling of subjectivity and contributes to a “certain staging of self” with the goal of filling up more and more space (even virtual). It is no longer a question of hiding the most intimate details of one’s life, nor even of one’s body behind a barrier, but to expose them to spectators’ eyes in order to spark their desire (Rosenbaum, 1998): Walls are written with intimate details and offer the spectacle of self to alterity, hoping the alterity will leave a comment.

## **THE COUNTED GAZE**

The individual can even track the number of viewings, the number of *gazes* placed on his/ her messages or profile. Cybersociability on the Internet is based on a calculated communication where views of followers (as they are called on Twitter) are evaluated and made profitable (Georges, 2012). Facebook is a probing example: it is possible to display relational capital through publishing one’s friend list (120 on average). This counting is all the more significant in that it assigns a popularity rating to each individual; it allows for determining who is winning the immense gaze race (Rosenbaum, 1998), who is succeeding in attracting and maintaining the largest number of eyes the longest possible. Inversely, if our postings are not “followed”,

commented on or shared, this means that we are invisible in others’ eyes. The feeling of invisibility is all the more unbearable in that it takes place in a world where *connection* with alterity establishes itself through viewing. In such a situation, the individual is aware that s/he can disappear without leaving a trace in anyone’s memory, as if his/ her life never held any meaning for others (Enriquez, 2006).

On the Internet, the gaze of the Other constructs us and makes our e-reputation (Digout, 2013; Tisseron, 2008). It is this Other who confirms our existence and who makes us someone “worth taking a look at” rather than “worthless looking”. As Béliard (2009) has stated, forum members acquire a higher and higher rank within the forum according to the total number of messages posted. In this way, reputation tends to take on a specific definition; to make a reputation in the virtual world, it is no longer enough to be an individual with irreproachable morality that others would praise. Rather, to construct an e-reputation, the individual must above all be the most seen and the most viewed, whatever be the reason.

I consider this over-exposure of the individual as a kind of “look at me” based on a reciprocal and dialectic relation between being “seen by others” and “seeing others” (Sartre, 2003). It connotes the idea of existence as cyber-narcissism (Boyd and Ellison, 2008), behavior exemplified by the trend of taking “selfies”<sup>4</sup> through which we look, see ourselves, and desire to be seen. The “Look-at-Me” individual is, by definition, made to be seen and to be noticed. S/he loves to show off, be seen, and display her/ his vanity.<sup>5</sup> Yet, although on the one hand Look-at-Me’s strut their stuff in front of the Other, they also lead that gaze to a certain unease: they disturb by their extreme unveiling, their ocular attack (Rosenbaum, 1998). Their overexposure teeters on the limits of vulgarity while they refuse conventions of restraint and those that impose on the individual any feelings of shame. They defy manners and they ignore the conventions for keeping secrets

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<sup>4</sup> Common practice in which the individual takes a photo of him/herself with his/her Smartphone. It is actually a self-portrait, an image of the Self (hence a Selfie).

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/m’as-tu-vu](http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/m%27as-tu-vu)

(Simmel, 1906) that govern interactions by unveiling everything—even the intimate—and by exaggerating things.

The French term for a “Look-at-Me”, someone who likes to show off, is “m’as-tu vu,”<sup>6</sup> which betrays a certain idea of doubt as it is a question: Have you seen me? It is directed at the Other, with the goal of finding out if the self has really been noticed, if s/he has been “worth a glance”, and thus worthy of attention. If not, the invisibility would be unbearable. But the term also implies that this visibility is insatiable and that the individual will continue to exhibit him/ herself to the extreme, until s/he is “seen”.

Nonetheless, in attempting to occupy the most space possible on the Web, the individual undeniably *consents* to alienation from the trained eye of peers; s/he *accepts* to submit to the avidity of the Other’s gaze and the tyranny of visibility (Barus-Michel, 2011), which requires him/ her to be exposed constantly. Through this voluntary servitude, the individual aspires to be commented on, “shared,” and “liked”. This exposure to the gaze of others sharpens the concern for social approval (Vincent-Buffault, 2004). It leaves the individual feeling that s/he cannot exist without being seen, everywhere and all the time, by the Other.

## **THE JUDGING GAZE**

While attempting to exist as much in the real world as in the virtual world through self-exhibition, the individual exposes him/herself to peers’ judgment. On the Internet, individuals *accept* to submit to the views and comments of others; they bow to the tyranny of public opinion. Now able to not only express oneself on everything via forums, but also to create places to denounce injustice or indecent behavior of another person, the Internet user becomes a judge. On the Web, the gaze becomes sharper: it can see images and events over and over, scrutinize, analyze, cut up, reframe, understand details, and do more precise research. On the Web, the gaze is hungry and

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<sup>6</sup> Aware of the academic ineptness and the pejorative connotation of such a term (and the English equivalent of “showing off”), I have nonetheless chosen it as an interesting term to use in this context, insofar as it sheds light on the current article’s topic.

craves secrets to read between the lines (Vincent-Buffault, 2004). The eye unveils the imperfections of others and pursues an impassioned search for the sort of clues of which the viewer never tires (Vincent-Buffault, 2004).

In a screen society, the individual thus has a view (both gaze and opinion) on everything, and his/her opinion counts; the views are even counted, which allows for measuring the impact (or total insignificance) of the image in the virtual world. The Internet user selects images on which s/he will condescend to gaze; detecting content rapidly, s/he can zap those images considered uninteresting. Thus, through the gaze, the subject expresses him/herself (Vincent-Buffault, 2004) by measuring, and judging. The viewer even has the power to question both the reputation and the e-reputation of the individual whose behavior displeases him/her, in revealing the viewed's secrets for all to see, “publically” exposing anything blameworthy. Through his/ her gaze and judgment on the Web, s/he makes and remakes the image of alterity: the mechanisms of gossip and defaming others' images become as influential as in real life. I suggest that this contemporary approach to interpreting how individuals construct themselves and others through images is crucial to understanding the prevalence and significance of such behaviors.

### **THE GRABBED EYE**

In a screen society, which is based on being seen, communicational fluxes do not allow the individual to discern the depth of images because screen societies reduce the meaning of the image and the relation that people have to the image. Faced with immeasurable quantities of shared information that is passed on and multiplied, the eye cannot stop at each image to understand its meaning. In “visibility regimes” (Mongin, 2004), each image is related to a cliché characterized by its ephemerality.

Interactions between Internet users are not just based on an exchange of images reducing the individual to a reified body emptied of an interior: the individual is reduced to how s/he is perceived, and essentially to what is represented. This emptiness of meaning characterizing the image stems from, according to Uhl (2002), a loss of connotation in the virtual world. Thus, for

the author, the Internet develops two distinct and dualistic types of messages typologized by Barthes (1992): one corresponds to a *denotated message*, the *analogon* of itself, and the Other to a *connotated message*, a specific form with which society speaks. According to this perspective as used by Uhl, the Internet exhausts the totality of its being in the denotation, and is now only made of the denotated message. In other words, faced with the computer screen, the *feeling of denotation* would only be so intense if it banished all forms of connotation and made it impossible to perceive a second meaning. The image is reduced to a *rhetoric without rules* which suffices unto itself.

In addition, being shared by a large anonymous community, this image is reproduced on a large scale, such as the technique of mechanized reproduction of works of art (Benjamin, 1991) and tends to lose its “aura” resulting in a quantitative multiplication of images (Mongin, 2004). The situation represented on the photograph, whatever be its signification, transforms itself into a simple shared image, devoid of its unique and specific story.

The image is simply devoured by the gaze of a crowd of anonymous people who respond to the quest for details and attempt to satisfy their “gourmet eyes” (Vincent-Buffault, 2004). Individuals are then confronted with “cannibal eyes” (Thomas, 1984) that devour their image without capturing the depth. The image is only taken to the first degree and the individual represented can only appear in a reified form. S/he is absorbed by the gaze of others, and is victim to their scopic impulse and ocular voracity (Vincent-Buffault, 2004). On the Internet the gaze is set without looking, without seeing; who the person *is* no longer seen.

Inner strength and non-visibility within a person (Haroche, 2011) have no meaning and are replaced by an image that, by definition, cannot reflect any depth of the soul. The avatar, the profile, the nickname, the photograph become our reflection in a public virtual space. Reputation, defined by its link to consideration taking the shape of qualities specific to the individual, cannot stand up to this situation. Even the “aura” of the individual, his/her personality and authenticity, are emptied of substance to be reduced to an “e-reputation”.

What is troubling today is that the simulation, which is the image on the Internet, tends to be confused with reality. As Tisseron affirmed during an interview with Belhomme (2010), yesterday images were a reflection of the world; today, they create a/ the world. Disapproval over the Internet can be like a violent symbolic death, with repercussions on one’s real-life reputation. Vanities, concretized through the creation of “shame pages,” prove that the virtual world evolves alongside real society. Thus, the image has begun to contaminate and modernize reality. It only conforms to the real in order to better deform it, to better mold reality to its own profitable ends. In this way, the image gets ahead of the real, so that the latter no longer has time to produce itself as such (Baudrillard, 1987). Seeing his/her e-reputation questioned can lead to reproaches from others in his/ her real life. These new ways of looking also hinder empathetic relations in the virtual world (Tisseron, 2010): although the gaze does observe, analyze, evaluate and judge, it is far from being considerate towards the Other.

New technologies have thus influenced the gaze making the image into a thing that is looked at as a staged actor. The eye is distracted by what it sees on the surface and does not seek to capture the image’s deeper meaning. Communicational fluctuations lead, little by little, to dehumanization of the gaze, which give way to new behaviors that may be, in certain cases, tragic for the individual.

### **SHOOTING DAGGERS: IF LOOKS COULD KILL**

One behavior resulting from new ways of viewing on the Internet is cyber-humiliation (Dilmaç, 2014a and 2014b). It stems from the opaque gaze set on the person and corresponds to a toxic way of seeing (Mongin, 2004). Like all forms of humiliation (Dilmaç, 2014b), it is linked to the abasement of a person or group of people in a process of submission that damages or destroys pride, honor or dignity. To be humiliated signifies being placed against one’s will and often very painfully in a position clearly inferior to that which the individual deserves. Humiliation corresponds to a specific situation in which two entities are opposed in an unequal relationship: one entity (individual or collective) has a hold over another entity, and that other entity suffers from that hold (Ansart, 2006). It is a process in which the victim is forced, having no room to

maneuver in response to the attack, to passively submit to it. This passivity is all the stronger in that the humiliation takes place on the Internet: the attacker takes over a profile or exposes a defaming image in another person’s name, and that person cannot respond directly because s/he is unable to identify the attacker.

Since existing in the virtual world means existing in the eyes of others and through one’s avatar, the hijacked or dishonoring image has a considerable impact in the destruction of e-reputation. No longer pointing to a concrete body, but rather tarnishing the reflection of a reified image through its reproduction, the attack can only induce procedures near to those of a symbolic death by attempting to further attenuate an identity already devoid of interiority. And this questioning of e-reputation through anonymous judgment cannot be followed up by a reply. I believe this is the crucial fact that makes this into a form of humiliation and degradation. Through this, aggressors come to possess their victims, reducing them to silence while simultaneously forcing them to see their own humiliated images. A relation of domination is thus established: this creates a dissymmetry between s/he who contemplates and s/he who is the subject of contemplation (Taïeb, 2004).

Multiple forms of humiliation are perceivable today in the virtual world. In some cases, the individual does not consent to being on the Web and sees it happen in spite of him/herself, against his/ her will but according to the will of a network that s/he has not chosen. Or perhaps usurpers express themselves in another’s name, serving as his/ her voice. In other cases, the person’s image is taken over by alterity in order to stigmatize it. This is notably the case in false profiles: one person stands in for another, pirating their identity, recreating their personal story. The pirate wishes to make the victim exist on the Web in order to better deny and humiliate him or her.

Divulging images and personal information in someone else’s name constitutes another form of imposed humiliation, as does sharing photographs or intimate videos filmed (also known as “sexting”) when the person is unaware that interior space is being unveiled (Haroche, 2006), both of which have become current practice in the digital era. The case of Rehtaeh Parsons, an

adolescent of 17 years who hung herself following the publication of a video of a sexual aggression she suffered, is one of many examples of cyber-humiliation. This also goes for moral harassment (Hirigoyen, 2000): victims discover they have been “given over” to the eyes of other Internet users who can clap, comment or raise the stakes in participating in the aggression, all the while repeating and multiplying the victims’ humiliation. Hate speeches (Akin, 2010) can lead for example to this situation. Cyber-humiliation’s gaze is a shameless one, which stares the victim in the face and strips her/him down in order to share and comment on the individual’s undoing. This gaze is critical, bitter, mocking, and sometimes devoid of the least concern for others.

To be taken into account on the Internet would thus seem to be based on contradictory principles. On one hand, individuals seek approval, appreciation, and even adoration in the eyes of other Internet users (Jauréguiberry, 2011). On the other hand, they post photos of themselves so that other users who happen upon them can judge and attribute a score from 1 to 10 (Tisseron, 2011), an action that could prove dangerous for the person and his/ her image. Yet the individual accepts such alienation and tyranny of opinion and exhibits him/herself anyway, since this may also allow for situating oneself in the world and imposing oneself on other members as an established subject. Through such means, individuals attempt to be seen in a way that would allow for receiving the consideration of the Other.

In the case of cyber-humiliation, however, this choice is taken away: individuals are refused the recognition they wish to obtain, and are given no chance to defend themselves. This situation forces them to accept, in spite of themselves, being placed in the ranks of the humiliated, the “loss of face” (Goffman, 1990): the image they have of themselves and that which they wish to expose to alterity diverge completely. The “image for Self” no longer corresponds to the “image for Other,” and there is no room to push back against this. Basically, the victim of humiliation is confronted with a situation or event that is against his/ her expectations, against his/ her desires, makes no sense to him/ her, and, perhaps, is even the negation of his/her self-image (Ansart, 2006).

On the Internet, the gaze is thus no longer an attribute, a duty or a right recognized as belonging to the subject (Haroche, 2008). Rather, the gaze establishes itself beyond the individual and imposes itself on him/her while passing judgment. The individual becomes a spectator of his/her profile, of this imaged representation of his/ her body. Victims are thus both themselves, concrete and real, but also their avatars, simulations that steal their identities.

The absence of body in virtual relations does not mitigate the existence of humiliation. Admittedly, the absence of body and face-to-face relations of intersubjectivity make it impossible for negotiations of honor and reputation to take place in the virtual world itself. The attacker is, in most cases, unidentifiable by the victim, which makes it impossible to reply to the offense, to fight back. However, even if there is no real “body” in virtual interactions, the image of the body called the “profile”—denoted by a name or nickname—stands in for it. The profile represents the individual on the Web, and is his/her image and name. In the case of cyber-humiliation, the victim’s name is “tarnished” just like the loss of honor in real life. The absence of a body does not modify the impact of humiliation, since the body is simply replaced by an “image” of the individual that represents it. Besides, in these situations of humiliation, the body remains the entity on which the attack operates: even if the intersubjective relation is abstract, it calls into question the sexuality of the agent, denouncing outrageous behaviors or sometimes shedding light on physical deformations. It is above all an issue of having a “view,” and thus an opinion, on the person.

Another practice that can harm a person has emerged: “happy slapping”. This practice consists of a group assault on an individual that is filmed and put online. The humiliation may include punches, sexual aggressions, and even rape. The illustration of degrading statements with photographs or pirated images of the victim are examples proving that the body, although existing in virtual space, is a primordial representative of a person’s integrity. The individual is summed up as the simple projection of the most archaic fantasies and desires, and those that are the most abject in the people who deploy them (Enriquez, 2006).

New technologies and those of communication seem to thus have transformed ways of seeing (Dilmaç, 2014a and 2014b). It appears that today, they make it possible to photograph perversion in order to get off on it and help others get off (Barus-Michel, 2011). It is through viewing in this way that Internet users symbolically execute the victim. In the case of cyber-humiliation or pirating profiles, the individual’s identity and body are stolen. The exposition of erroneous or inflammatory information place the victim in a degrading position. His/ her own image and name have gotten away: alterity takes possession. S/he is subject to a malicious, oblique view, a view of want, beyond exchange (Vincent-Buffault, 2004) and is “handed over” to the vagrant, incommensurate gazes of Internet users. Thus, an anonymous crowd attempts to ridicule him/ her, laughing at their troubles, pointing out defects; they actively participate in lynching, raising the stakes of humiliation. The crowd comes to compose the active misery (Taïeb, 2004) of the victim. This can be called active viewing, which not only attends the staging of the execution, but is a full participant in it.

Individuals are subject to a questioning of their reputations in forms and ways resembling those found in real life (e.g., gossip, rumor, deprecation of the image) without being able to respond because virtual space is elaborated through regulations depending on the subjectivity of each person. Therefore, individuals cannot master all the rules of the game and are unable to respond to an attack as would be done in real life. Responding by fighting back in the virtual world is not an option: the aggressor is not identifiable or is represented only by an abstract “Internet User”. However, a relation of power would be necessary to allow a return to honor and dignity. For their own self-respect, slighted individuals must regain credit in the eyes of other members. Unfortunately, in the case of cyber-humiliation, even if the situation is in itself revolting, revolt is impossible. Victims can neither impose themselves on the Other, nor regain balance within the power structure. They cannot beg for mercy or try to create empathy. This feeling of powerlessness is equally reinforced by the temporality of the digital world: considered as “the world’s open library”, characterized by a stock of information, the Internet retains in “its memory” and submits to viewers all sorts of data and images, even the most slanderous. Thus, like someone

condemned to death, the body of the victim can be exposed for a very long time to the view of everyone (Taïeb, 2004).

The repetitive and extreme aspects of this humiliation can drive some victims to seek refuge in death. The hijacked image, with its severe mockery and slander, tarnishes the virtual image of the individual in front of such a large audience that it can be a veritable path to death. The practice of *bashing*, which refers to an ongoing and collective degradation of the person, is an extremely visible humiliation technique in contemporary societies. In this collective humiliation, words join views to depreciate the scapegoat.<sup>7</sup> In some instances, the victim of social lynching cannot stand the torture anymore, the having to endure the view of others who judge, and chooses to take his/her own life. The number of suicides committed following a humiliation endured on the Internet is quite high. Here, we will mention only the case of Amanda Todd, a Canadian adolescent girl of 15 years, who ended her life after having told her trials on Youtube. She said that she had been harassed for three years by an unknown person she met online, who threatened to post a video of her baring her breasts. After having been subject to numerous intimidations both on the Internet and in her real life, particularly by youths of her high school, this teenage girl killed herself. The exposure of the affront and its lastingness on the Internet, as well as the anguish of living through further attacks in daily life following the sharing of a humiliating image, can push some individuals to suicide. Thus, in contemporary society, and notably through the use of new technologies of communication, it seems quite accurate to say that looks (views) can kill.

## **THE MISSING GAZE**

Certainly today, an oblique and critical view can kill. What, then, about having a profile erased from the Internet, thus bearing witness to one's own virtual disappearance, amidst total indifference, in a society in which recognition is established through views? In this case, the individual experiences disappearance of his/ her image as being unbearably reduced to

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<sup>7</sup> Famous people have been victims of bashing, such as Sarah Palin and George Bush in United States.

invisibility. S/he is denied, essentially, the act of being viewed. Thus, as Ellison (2001) states, the absence of viewing, the inattention, can also reveal an indifference that ignores, scorns, or even denies the dimension of humanity within the individual. The absence of views may in certain cases be worse than an unapproving view: the later at least sees, judges, and tells of disapproval. The former ignores, denies and forgets (Smith, 2010). Therefore, the hatred of someone is rejection, but even this can reinforce the feeling of existence. But to not be taken seriously, to condemn to silence and solitude, is going even further: the victim is threatened with nothingness (Todorov, 2002). The individual from whom the visibility has been “removed” suffers from a refusal of recognition, whereas the humiliated person experiences a refusal of approval (Todorov, 2002). Through the situation of invisibility, the view is refused; the victim is ignored, which gives him/ her the impression of being reduced to nothingness, provoking suffocation (Todorov, 2002).

## **CONCLUSION**

As McLuhan (1962) has stated, the relation between meanings changes when one of the meanings or one of the functions of the body is exteriorized in a technological form. In my view, and as we have attempted to demonstrate in this article, this is also the case of viewing in contemporary society. Today, visibility is based on a double relation: on the one hand, for the individual, it signifies being seen and recognized, conduct which seems to respond to the precept “I am seen, therefore I am” (Birman, 2011); and on the other hand, it relies on the will to « see » the Other evolve on the Web. The Internet represents a platform where views confront each other and come together.

However, new information technologies have given a larger scope to viewing: a view can see a lot, instantly and constantly; it can capture information and details, but also see again as much as it wants, and analyze, probe. Communicational fluxes in which the individual is submerged affect and dehumanize his/ her views; these can no longer discern the profound character of the image and that of the person represented. The relation to the Other is impoverished by this relation of alienation: it reifies alterity, which is no longer seen with consideration or empathy. Its photographic image suffices unto itself, and since the person is only as s/he is represented, his/

her image can be modified, shared, deformed, commented, falsified, caricatured, and judged by its appearance rather than by its content or its deeper meaning. The subject of the image and the subject of the viewing are thus distinct: one fully dominates the Other, preventing the exchange of views between the two (Taïeb, 2004).

Ways of seeing the Other are never without consequence; they threaten the integrity of the person when s/he is faced with criticisms that are excessively sharp. On the Web, “the least movement of the eye speaks” (Vincent-Buffault, 2004). This gives rise to cyber-humiliation, cyber-intimidation or even cyber-harassment, terms referring to the malicious and corrosive gaze that enjoys the suffering of the Other. Thus, through the world of screens, the fragmented world is shown, a world of multiple views, untuned to each other, which are never again an “orchestrated whole” (Mongin, 2004). To combat this type of alienating relation, forged through the extreme exhibition of self and the judgment of the Other, a shift in how we view seems to be needed; individuals must know that they must in no case be content with the appearance, meaning the avatar of the image of alterity, but *solicit* and *place* a view that gazes beyond the visible.

## ÖZET

Bugün, ekranlar her yerde ve bireyler dünya ile ilgili her şeye, istedikleri zaman erişebiliyorlar. Yeni teknolojiler sayesinde, aynı zamanda, çeşitli faaliyetlerde bulunabilirler: birbirleriyle iletişime girip, her konu üzerine fikir beyan edebilirler; dünyadaki olaylardan haberdar olabilirler; kendi fotoğraflarını paylaşır, başkalarınıninkine de tek bir klik aracıyla bakıp beğenebilirler. Yeni iletişim teknolojileriyle gelen bu tür etkileşimler, yeni “bakış” biçimlerini meydana çıkarttı: artık, İnternette her birey, kendini ortaya koyan ve bakışları üzerine toplamak isteyen bir faile dönüşmektedir. Bu durum, “gözetim” kavramına yeni bir tanım getirir: sanal âlemdeki görülen “bakan” ve “bakılan” bireylerin arasındaki ilişki, geleneksel gözetim tanımına uymaz: İnternette, “bakılan”, pasif olmaktan çıkar, ara sıra “bakan” statüsünü alır ve en önemlisi sürekli olarak görülebilir durumda olmayı kabul eder. Gözetim, arzulanmayan, bilinmeyen bir kontrol aracı olmaktan çıkar.

Bu makalenin değindiği başka bir konu ise, sanal âlemde bakışların ve bakma biçimlerin çeşitleridir. Sıra sıra, bakışın “arzulanan”, “sayılabilen”, “eleştirebilen” ve “aranan” bir olguya dönüştüğünü görülür. Fakat bireyler için en tehlikeli biçim, “öldürücü bakıştır”: sanal âlemde göz, birçok uyarıcıya maruz kaldığından dolayı, dikkatini toplayamaz ve gördüğünün derin anlamını kavrayamaz. Bu durumda, bakış yavaş yavaş insandışılaştırılır ve bazı durumlarda birey için tehlikeli olabilecek yeni davranışlara (siber taciz, aşağılayıcı davranışlar, istenmeyen fotoğraf ve bilgi paylaşımı gibi) yol açar.

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