

**DIRECT GAZE OF THE ACTOR TOWARDS THE CAMERA IN CINEMA IN THE CONTEXT
OF ALIENATION: A DISCUSSION ON THE FILMS “THE BRAND NEW TESTAMENT”
(2015) AND “FUNNY GAMES” (1997)**

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ABSTRACT

From its beginnings to the present day the language of film has evolved in different contexts, undergone transformations and produced different cinematic narrative possibilities in different forms and contents. These narrative possibilities exist mainly within the classical Aristotelian structure, but with the adaptation of the Brechtian structure to cinema, they have also taken different directions. This shift has led to various changes in screenwriting, cinematography, acting and other areas. The central question of this study is based on these differences, with a particular focus on the gaze in cinema. The main aim is to analyse classical and contemporary narrative structures in the context of actors' direct gaze to the camera, interpreting the differences through The Brand New Testament (2015) and Funny Games (1997). The aim of this study is to examine the positioning of these two films in the context of contemporary narrative structures, with a particular focus on the direct gaze of the actors and the concept of alienation. The aim of this research is twofold. First, it aims to categorize the direct gazes of the actors in the two films that are the object of research and to examine them together with the characteristics of contemporary narrative cinema. Second, the study aims to clarify the role of the actor's direct gaze within this narrative framework. This study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of narrative nuances in contemporary cinema and aims to reveal the elements that transform classical viewing practices in cinema from a direct perspective.

Keywords: Gaze at the camera, Contemporary narrative, Alienation.

**YABANCILAŞTIRMA BAĞLAMINDA SİNEMADA OYUNCUNUN
KAMERAYA DOĞRUDAN BAKIŞI: YENİ AHİT (2015) VE
ÖLÜMCÜL OYUNLAR (1997) FİLMLERİ ÜZERİNDEN BİR
TARTIŞMA**

ÖZ

İlk dönemlerden günümüze film dili farklı bağlamlarda gelişmekte, dönüşmekte ve sinemanın gelişen ve değişen bu yapısı içerisinde çeşitli biçimlerde ve içeriklerde farklı sinematik anlatım olanakları ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu anlatım olanakları başat ve popüler bir biçimde klasik Aristocu anlatı yapısı içerisinde yer almakla birlikte, Brechtien yapının sinemaya uyarlanmasıyla farklı ve alternatif bir minvalde seyretmektedir. Bu alternatif anlatım olanaklarının etkisi ile senaryoda, çekim

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tekniklerinde, oyunculuk vb. alanlarda çeşitli değişiklikler ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu çalışmanın temel sorunsalı bu farklılıklar üzerine inşa edilmekte ve çerçevede sinemada bakışa odaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı çağdaş anlatı yapısını oyuncuların kameraya olan doğrudan bakışları bağlamında incelemek ve bu husustaki farklılıkları, Jaco Van Dormael’in “Yeni Ahit” (2015) ve Michael Haneke’nin “Ölümcül Oyunlar” (1997) filmleri üzerinden anlamlandırmaktır. Çalışma bu iki farklı filmdeki oyuncuların kameraya olan doğrudan bakışlarını çağdaş anlatı yapısı çerçevesinde yabancılaşma perspektifi altında ele almayı hedeflemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, bu iki filmin çağdaş anlatı yapısı bağlamındaki konumlanmasını, özellikle oyuncuların doğrudan bakışlarına ve yabancılaşma kavramına odaklanarak incelemektir. Bu araştırmanın amacı iki yönlüdür. İlk olarak araştırma nesnesi olan iki filmdeki oyuncuların doğrudan bakışlarını kategorize etmek ve bunları çağdaş anlatı sinemasının nitelikleriyle birlikte irdelemektir. İkinci olarak çalışma bu anlatı çerçevesinde aktörün doğrudan bakışının rolünü açıklığa kavuşturur. Bu çalışma çağdaş sinemadaki anlatı nüanslarının daha etraflı bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamakta ve sinemada klasik izleme pratiğini dönüştüren unsurları direkt bakıştan hareketle ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kameraya bakış, Çağdaş anlatı, Yabancılaşma.

INTRODUCTION

In its earliest days, cinema was quite distant from a cinematic and philosophical narrative language and from approaching content and form production in an artistic manner. However, over time, it gained momentum, continually enhancing its narrative language, reaching a level where the audience could genuinely identify with the events or characters within the film. Cinema was not merely seen as a tool operating on identification or catharsis and producing its images accordingly. Philosophical filmmakers saw and thought of cinema itself as having the potential to provoke the viewer to think and pose questions. Without a doubt, the contributions of directors like Vertov, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and thinkers like Bazin, Kracauer, as well as many other early directors and philosophical filmmakers like Hitchcock, Melies, Griffith, to the formation of the cinematic narrative language are undeniable.

Many thinkers and filmmakers perceive cinema as an art form that imitates humans, society, and nature in visual and auditory forms and presents them back to humans. During this imitation process, directors usually make use of elements like actors, nature, light, and sound. They have tried to mimic reality by using light, sound, and actors to the desired extent, contributing to the formation of film languages in this axis.

"Human beings take pleasure in using any capacity, natural ability they possess. In this way, they learn and attain knowledge. The joy of learning is inherent in everyone. The art of poetry is also an expression of this basic human trait. In the act of creation in art, and to respond to similarity, we must recognize the relationship between similarity and its object. This satisfies our human-oriented urge to understand. Hence, it gives pleasure" (Ünal, 2007). Throughout history humans have sought to format and define themselves within a structure of pleasure by employing specific artistic forms and their capacity for imitation.

As Aristotle also noted, arts such as poetry are manifestations of man's need to imitate, which is ultimately a pleasurable activity. Just like the seventh art form, cinema, which tends to imitate society and nature. For example, when portraying a character with a good disposition, actors with physical characteristics that fit this description were chosen, and both sound and light were used accordingly. With this proportional use, the audience is invited into the narrative and identifies with it. One of the most important elements in establishing a connection between the produced film and the audience is identification where the viewer thinks and internalises the narrative like the heroes and characters in the film. Alongside this, katharsis is essentially the relief felt by the viewer when an evil character is punished. One particularly noteworthy area of cinematic narrative is that of alienation in which the audience is not invited into the narrative and does not identify with it.

According to Ranciere the developmental plan of cinema from its early days to the present day has continued with significant changes that go beyond moving away from narratives with happy endings. In addition, cinema has also moved away from the Aristotelian narrative structure and the principle that a story should transition from happiness to sadness or vice versa as expressed by Aristotle has been increasingly ignored in modern cinema. This transformation has allowed filmmakers to create a structure enriched with visual elements that work in harmony with each other, instead of following a straight narrative path. Thus cinema has seized the opportunity to create richness in both visual and structural aspects by partially or completely moving away from the Aristotelian tradition (Ranciere, 2016: 8).

Referring to the Aristotelian classical narrative style, films have traditionally had a structure with a beginning, middle and end. However in the 1960s, Bertolt Brecht introduced a new perspective to theater called 'Contemporary Narrative,' breaking classical narrative molds and bringing formal innovations in light, sound, and acting, such as "alienation effects." In Contemporary Narrative films, unlike the Aristotelian ones, there is no need for the film to have a beginning, middle, and end. There is no systematic clichéd sequence like introduction, development, conclusion in the screenplay, and the actor may not act entirely in sync with the character portrayed.

Here the aim shifts from enhancing identification to supporting the film with arguments that will force the viewer to look from a different perspective, refusing to fit in with the characters. From Brecht's perspective, these include the Naive Attitude, Fable, Episodic Narration, Gestus, Alienation, Historicizing, Narrative Structure, Time and Space, Colloquial Language, and Types (Grimm, 1987: 134). In this study, the subject of direct gaze, which falls under Brecht's "Alienation in Acting," is addressed.

In conclusion, cinematic image and time is a continuously evolving process, and the viewer establishes a relationship between their own image and time and the cinematic image and time. In the process of connecting to the film, while the Aristotelian narrative identifies the viewer with the cinematic image and time through various molds as mentioned above, the Contemporary Narrative does the exact opposite, questioning using "alienation" effects. As Schefer points out: Cinema can only produce an imitation of real thinking, and the film communicates directly with the non-linguistic side of our mind (Frampton, 2013: 255). The specific illusion inherent to cinema is the illusion that this experience and moment are personal, private, intimate, and individual, because it (the story, images, emotional colors) strikes a deal with our expressionless living part; a part relegated to silence and relative non-verbalism, almost a fundamental mystery of our life—perhaps nothing other than our fundamental subjectivity. In this artificial solitude, a part of us is exposed to the effects of meaning even before we can linguistically articulate it (Frampton, 2013: 255).

According to Ranciere (2011: 27) in the new artistic structure, where classical narrative concepts described as "Romantic-Symbolist" are destroyed and the fourth wall is exceeded with an aesthetic regime, the actor's act of looking at the camera is seen as a disturbing act. Indeed, in Godard's film "Vivre Sa Vie" (1962), the story of Porthos is mentioned in the conversation between the Philosopher and Nana. While Porthos is trying to escape from the cellar that is about to collapse, he suddenly questions how his feet are moving rhythmically and when he stands still while thinking about this, the cellar eventually collapses on him. Thinking causes his destruction. Based on this, the way the character Nana looks at us is seen as disturbing and a move that directs the audience to question. Similarly, the way the character "Alex" looks at

the camera in Kubrick’s film “A Clockwork Orange (1971)” also appears as a disturbing act (Öztürk, 2017: 181).

In this context, it would be beneficial to ascertain whether the direct gaze of the characters in the films *The Brand New Testament* by Jaco Van Dormael and *Funny Games* by Michael Haneke serves to either “alienate” the contemporary narrative or, in a way, to examine the connection of the direct gaze with our “non-linguistic side of the mind”. This study will examine the suitability of the relevant films to the Brechtian narrative structure and analyse the actors' direct gazes into the camera, considering their contributions to the films. The aim of this article is to examine the use of contemporary narrative structures in two films and to analyse the function of the actor's direct gaze into the camera. The aim of this expansion is twofold: firstly, to categorise the direct gazes of the actors in the two films in accordance with the characteristics of contemporary narrative; secondly, to ascertain the role of the actor's direct gaze within this narrative structure.

The tradition of producing films in certain narrative templates and in an ongoing same formality since the first film was produced in the world has become customary. As if every director had agreed, the reality of maintaining the same shooting rules/formality was integrated into a new era in cinema following theater, with the aesthetics brought by German playwright Bertolt Brecht in the 1960s.

In 1939, Brecht mentions three kinds of alienation techniques. These can be found in “the structure of the play text, the stage arrangement, and the acting.” Therefore, the playwright, director, decorator, and actors each implement the alienation technique in their own way using their own tools (Grimm, 1987: 216, Lyon, 1982: 232). The primary focus of this debate is to examine the use of the actor's direct gaze into the camera in a cinematic work that employs Brechtian-style alienation, with specific reference to the films “*The Brand New Testament*” and “*Funny Games*”.

The question of who is the viewer of successive frames in films will lead us to the issue of 'gaze'. The subject of this article is an examination of the direct gaze of actors into the camera in the context of the form and functioning of contemporary narrative cinema. The analysis will focus on two films: Jaco Van Dormael's “The Brand New Testament” and Haneke's “Funny Games”. The initial phase of the study will focus on analysing the direct gaze of the actors in the film “The Brand New Testament” in relation to the concepts of contemporary narrative structures. In the second stage of the study, the concept of alienation, which also belongs to the contemporary narrative structure, will be employed in order to examine the gaze of the character into the camera in the film “Funny Games”.

1. Concepts of Katharsis and Identification in Classical Narrative Cinema

A person feels the need to convey their feelings, emotions, and thoughts to the other party and pours them into words, colors, motifs, and conveys them through various tools. This is called expression. Since the first human arrived on earth, narratives have existed almost everywhere in the world, alongside different cultures. Being able to communicate with words, humans have been able to convey this verbally or by encoding it in writing. Words, numbers, signs, and lines have been ongoing in this narrative template. It's possible to say every narrative has a medium. For example, the way to express feelings with music is through musical instruments, rhythm, and words, while the way to narrate with cinema is through image and sound.

The stage in which the audience's emotions are stirred up to create fear and pity, thereby facilitating a moral and psychological cleansing ritual, is called catharsis. According to Aristotle, 'Catharsis', one of the concepts he coined, especially for tragedy, should include a sense of pleasure as a result of the purification of passions through mimesis (imitation), via pity and fear (Aristotle, 2017: 22). Along with these feelings of fear and pity, the audience will undergo a cleansing process within their inner world while watching the play, and will purify their inner selves as a result of the defeat of the bad character or the punishment of another character for a wrongdoing.

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Aristotle regards tragedy as an art that accomplishes the catharsis of passions through pity and fear. Since tragedy is an imitation of a particular kind of object, involving fear and painful incidents, the special pleasure it provides must arise from "arousing pity and fear through mimesis" (Aristotle, 2017: 27).

In the aftermath of catharsis in a tragedy or film, the audience experiences a feeling of sorrow/pity as they identify with the hero facing misfortune. This emotional engagement is inherent in art forms like tragedy and cinema.

2. Contemporary Narrative Structure in the Brechtian Framework

The wars, industrialization, and the transition to a more mechanical society in Europe and the world during the first half of the 1900s also led to individuals questioning society. The questioning person has become alienated from society and even from themselves. As a result of this questioning, alienation has not only brought about new political changes but also introduced new ways of perception, manifestos, and practices in the field of art and cinema. Films expressing the surrealistic expression of the reflections of the impact left on their own people by the defeated Germany after the war in the 1920s were often produced as German Expressionist films during that period. The use of harsh light and shadows depicted the personality disorders of psychologically unstable people at the time, as well as their transformations into different characters, reflecting the collectively spread depression in movies.

German playwright Bertolt Brecht shaped his thoughts along an anti-capitalist and Expressionist line in the 1930s and applied them to theater. He rejected features of Aristotelian classical narrative, such as identification and catharsis, bringing to theatre a structure that allowed audiences to question events and their lives rather than becoming immersed and purified by the plays. Breaking from previous conventions, he introduced an epic-dialectical approach to theater, enabling the audience to question the play and the system in their own lives. This dialectical approach, which can be described as Thesis + Antithesis = Synthesis, was introduced to theatre by Bertolt Brecht and transitioned to cinema in the 1960s. In his theater plays and art, Brecht tried to eliminate the concept of inevitable tragic disaster, attempting to show instead that the world's structure could be altered through art.

In contemporary narrative film, “even if a concrete problem is presented, it is used to discuss an abstract problem” (KIRMIZI, 1990: 77). For instance, a film with a classical narrative showing the negative psychological reflections of environmental pollution on a person can present this concretely through the person, resulting in a closed-ended film culminating in the individual's suicide. However, a contemporary narrative approach would not present this issue directly but would abstract it in various ways. In other words, it could address the concept of environmental pollution at various points within the film. A change in human behavior could refer to the problem of environmental pollution, but this may not be immediately perceptible to the audience. According to Mutlu Parkan (Parkan, 1983: 66-67), Brecht talks about catharsis as a very dangerous concept on behalf of the audience. What reveals catharsis is ‘Einfühlung,’ which he describes as ‘emotional unity-experience unity.’ Moreover, the audience reaches catharsis, a purification ritual, through losing themselves in the unfolding plot, developing in accordance with the dramatic arc due to the emotional-experience unity established with the ‘Figür’ (personage, stage character) in front of them. Instead of this systematic, orderly, and numbness-prone tense structure, Brecht places episodes to create an environment for the audience to question events, figures, and characters. Thus, the audience liberates themselves from the dramatic environment they are in, achieving a position with the ‘Verfremdungseffekt’ (alienation effect), and become free.

Table 1. Differences Between Dramatic Theatre and Epic Theatre

Dramatic Theatre	Epic Theatre
Representation	Narration
Invites the audience into the scene	Transforms the audience into an observer
Exhausts the capacity to take action	Awakens the capacity to take action
Provides feelings to the audience	Challenges the audience to make decisions
Offers an experience	Paints a picture of the world
The audience is inside a story	Made to confront something
Suggestion	Discussion
Instinctual feelings are preserved	Brought to the point of recognition
The audience stays within the play, shares the experience	The audience stands outside of the performance

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Humans are underestimated	Humans are the object of investigation
The audience is unchangeable	The audience is changeable and can be changed
Eyes are on the end of the play	Eyes are on the process
One scene creates the next	Each scene exists for its own sake
Growth is present	Montage is present
There is linear development	It operates in curves
There is evolutionary determinism	There are jumps
Humans exist as a fixed point	Humans exist as a process
Thought determines human existence	Social being determines thought
Feelings exist	Mind exists

Source: (Willet, 1974: 128)

3. The Process from the Concept of Gaze in Cinema to the Actor’s Direct Gaze into the Camera

The concept of the gaze has become a subject of discussion numerous times since Lacan presented his paper titled “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” in Zurich in 1949. In Lacan's subsequent works, the ‘gaze’ is defined as the experience lived within the film itself, i.e., what the subject or the viewer in cinema encounters. As an object, the gaze is a trigger that visually stimulates our desire, and Lacan actually defines it as objet petit a or the object cause of desire. Todd McGowan describes this by stating, “The gaze is the objet a in the visible field,” and adds, “The special concept of objet petit a indicates that the object is not a concrete being, but a void (lacuna) in the visual field. “The gaze is not the act of looking where the subject sees the object; it is the void in the absolute gaze of the subject. This void in our vision points to where our desire exhibits itself in what we see (Mcgowan, 2012: 27).

The fundamental condition that determines from which angle we view the film is the director's act of highlighting and showing things they want to bring to the forefront based on the script structure through camera mediation at that moment. The position of the camera within the film actually reflects the area the viewer wants to look at. However, what the audience wants to see in that scene may not match what the director shows, so there may be shortcomings in satisfying our desire. Not every

director may allow us, the subjects, to have access to every look or piece of information.

Todd McGowan offers various views regarding the state of the gaze being an object. "Although the gaze is an object, it is not exactly an ordinary object; according to Lacan, it is a form of objet petit a that triggers our impulses. The gaze is the objet petit a of the scopic drive (the visual drive that directs us to look). In each of these drives, objet petit a is the lost object from which the subject falls apart, allowing itself to be established as a desiring subject. It is the object loss that initiates the process of desire, and the subject desires on the basis of this loss. The subject is incomplete and lacking because it cannot possess this object, whereas this object exists only as lost. Thus, objet petit a serves as the object-cause of desire, the trigger for the subject's desire, not as the desired object. While the subject can acquire some objects of desire, objet petit a lacks any status of existence and thus maintains its unattainability" (Mcgowan, 2012: 27-28).

The "Ego Ideal", one of the significant indicators of the gaze, describes the reacquisition of all strong emotions damaged as a result of various inhibitions, namely introjections, during the early childhood years from a Freudian perspective. The traumas experienced in the oral phase between 0-18 months later lead to the formation of the 'ego ideal', taking the person to the ideal image that will restore them to their strength. As an ideal image, the 'Ego Ideal' can be considered as a representative mirror placed between the desired self and the existing self (Freud, 1976: 24). It could be said that the 'ideal ego' is in search of seeing itself in the mirror. This form of 'ideal seeing' enables the audience to perceive the characters in cinema as their complete and flawless selves, their 'ego ideals', if we think of cinema as a mirror imagery. Looking at Lacan's theory, it is observed that the concept of "Ideal Ego" comes to the fore instead of "Ego Ideal" in the context of the "Mirror Stage".

Lacan, in his mirror stage article, points out that when a child looks in the mirror, they experience a mastery over their own body that they do not yet have in reality. He emphasizes the illusory nature of this mastery and states: The form of bodily wholeness that the subject awaits in a mirage, expecting the maturity of their own power, is given to them only as a Gestalt, that is, as an externality; this form is

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undoubtedly more determining than determined. According to early cinema theorists, the viewer gains a sense of mastery based on their position relative to the events, similar to the child looking in the mirror" (Mcgowan, 2012: 19).

Lacan's self-coined term, objet petit a (object little a), conveys to us the transformation of the gaze. The objet petit a, which directs us to the gaze, drags us into the search as the lost object separated from the subject, and wants to satisfy its desire, but actually objet petit a exists with its loss, and it will never be found by us, yet it will always exist as a concept. Therefore, the gaze in the film is a process that immerses us in an infinite search among the cinematic images shown to us, aiming to make us attain what we desire.

Sobchack, in his interpretation that compares film perception and human perception, says that film makes human consciousness visible using its technical possibilities and describes film as "the sight of someone else who resembles me but is not me" (Sobchack, 1992: 136). According to this understanding, film imitates the ways humans see to show something. It shows using the details found in human sight.

In his 1978 study, Bruce Kawin developed the concept of "Mind Screen", The mind screen wants the character itself to be the one actively presenting its gaze, its world, and its feelings, but it struggles to fully adapt this to the film's control over the characters" (Frampton, 2013: 40). Within the elements that compose the film, the character should freely reveal the mind screen, but it seems impossible for the character not to participate in the ideological and philosophical dimensions of the film. This is because the philosophical view or worldview the character thinks of is obviously not the character's but the director's and the script team's. This is similar to how in Ömer Kavur's films, characters actually express the director's philosophical views. When looking at the act of looking from a phenomenological perspective, it can be characterized as an extension of possession. The classic outcome of looking is equivalent to the desire for possession. The film's attention/direction intertwines with the objects we notice and transforms them into new 'directed objects' (contemplated things), showing us the expression of the mind in the world. Who knows, maybe the biggest difference is this: For human beings, to possess an object means to 'change' it

so that it becomes a part of themselves; for the film-being, to possess an object means to become that object" (Frampton 2013: 71).

The cinema audience, which appears to be the absolute consumer and subject of the film, can also become an object of the film. By drawing in the audience, which the film objectifies, it is a potential result for the film to possess them. The director's effort to explain his world perspective and philosophy to us on the big screen using various figures can also be seen as a product of the situation where we are consumed as objects. According to the Lacanian view, which positions the audience as the absolute subject, it is likely that one faces a situation beyond pleasure from jouissance (a state of discharge of a mental tension). "It shows that there is a disturbance in the normal symbolic activity of the subject, and the subject inevitably suffers the pain of its pleasure" (McGowan, 2012: 37).

For Metz, film is an ambiguous mirror. On one hand, it is like the mirror stage for the audience's imagination; on the other hand, 'cinema' involves more of the symbolic and the secondary than the mirror of childhood. By positioning the audience as voyeurs in front of the screen, Metz claims that the viewers actually identify with their secondary appearances rather than the mirror of childhood. He says that the audience is in front of the screen as voyeurs and they actually identify with their own gazes (Nolan, 2009: 80).

From Lacan onwards, the concept of gaze can be evaluated as a result arising from the mutual relationship between object and subject according to the views of the thinkers producing theories. Even if the gaze is an object of desire, in the form of 'objet petit a', or a process that provides the state of discharge (jouissance) of tension, what does it mean for the actors inside the film to directly look at us, the audience, through the camera? At this point, from the direct gaze of a psychotic character in the final scene of Alfred Hitchcock's 'Psycho' shot in 1960, to the film "A Four-Sided Triangle" directed by Mehmet Güreli in 2018, it is possible to see examples of direct gaze into the camera in film history. The direct gaze of the actor, which is not often preferred by directors but can be evaluated within the film narrative, is used by the director multiple times in some films to strengthen its meaning. The direct gaze, supported by the actor's words and angles at necessary points within the film's

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structural setup, is almost an act of direct communication by the director with the audience. Within this communication, as in Jaco Van Dormael's "The Brand New Testament (2015)", while the director shows his ideology with classical narration and identification, on the contrary, as in Haneke's 'Funny Games', it is also possible for the director to show the situation found in the direct gaze in an alienating and estranging way.

4. Method

To identify the place of the elements of the actor's direct gaze into the camera within the two previously mentioned film narratives, it is necessary to utilize descriptive analysis techniques along with qualitative data analysis processes.

Qualitative analysis is concerned with interpreting elements that have specific content, whether written or not, through the process of interpretation. "Qualitative analysis" is based on drawing conclusions from meaningful codes under each thematic title. In qualitative data analysis, codes correspond to subjects and themes, and the structure within behaviors, phenomena, and relationships can be interpreted to reach a conclusion (Kumbetoglu, 2012: 151-153).

Qualitative researchers begin evaluating situations with a substance at the socio-historical focal point. Qualitative researchers do not concentrate narrowly on a question; they examine the codes representing the situation with an investigative attitude while adopting a perspective around the theoretical-philosophical paradigm (Neuman, 2013: 22).

Given that the film world also has a structure based on a series of visual codes, it becomes possible to use the qualitative analysis method to analyze "direct gaze" in two specific films. In the study, both the content of the films and formal arguments have been interpreted using this method to reach a conclusion. Alongside qualitative analysis, the descriptive analysis technique has also been incorporated into the study to support the holistic structure of this work. In this context, various social concepts stemming from the mandatory content inherent in the nature of the filmic structure have been interpreted using the descriptive analysis technique during the analysis of the films.

4.1. Jaco Van Dormael and The Brand New Testament Movie

Belgian director Jaco Van Dormael, predominantly known for his works in comedy and dramatic comedy genres, often challenges widely accepted values or empirically proven laws in his cinema through the lens of absurd comedy. Dormael's films prominently feature a film universe where imagination takes center stage. Dormael once stated in an interview, "I believe a film needs multiple lifestyles. A new setting and style are always necessary. Also, every life is captured in a different style, with a different camera language, colors, and set design. Even if all the styles are very contrasting, they melt together and become striking" (Vlaeminckx, 2012).

"The Brand New Testament (2015)" is a fantastical, absurd comedy film by Dormael, released in 2015. The film critically examines the religious values of Christianity, including the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as presented by the church. It portrays God as a man living in an apartment in Belgium with a poor family life. This depicted figure has actually imposed various laws that complicate people's lives and has shaped the world around these laws. His room, from which he governs the world, consists of a computer and hundreds of little boxes. This figure, who does not value his wife and child, is depicted as a combative and incompatible authority. One day, God's daughter 'EA' secretly enters her father's room, cracks the password on his computer, and sends everyone on earth the time of their death, thus bringing herself into a position to upheave the balances. The film offers a critical and absurd comedic perspective on the authority governing the world and Christian values. At this point, instead of 'Jesus Christ' and 'The Twelve Apostles' seen as 'the son' and 'savior' in Christianity, the film brings to the forefront 'EA', the daughter of the God figure. After hacking her father's computer and sending the time of death to people, 'EA' escapes to the world through a washing machine to avoid her father's wrath. Upon arriving in the world, she first tries to find an additional 6 apostles to join the existing '12 Apostles' from Christianity, alongside a homeless man. The people they find have suffered in life, much like 'Jesus Christ.' 'EA,' actively and dominantly involved in changing the world throughout all these stages, will transform the 'world into a livable place' in the film. The film emphasizes the idea of rejecting the

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patriarchal "Father God" in Christianity and adopting a female/goddess system for a new order at every stage.

The film rewrites the Bible from a female perspective, similar to "The Fair Bible" penned by German experts in 2007 from a female perspective. In "The Fair Bible," written by some individuals, the social understanding, and consequently 'Woman,' has been brought to the forefront. According to the thesis of its authors, the old Bible was mistranslated with a male bias during its translation from Aramaic or Greek, and in fact, 'Jesus' had as many female apostles as he had male apostles from the beginning. This rewritten "Fair Bible" has sparked numerous debates (Tekin, 2019:1).

Again, with this film, Dormael tries to convince us of the ease that will come with transitioning from a patriarchal 'Father God' based faith to a female-originated, matriarchal Goddess belief-even to the point of believing that the melting in the glaciers will stop. Although technically implementing these changes in real life through religion may not be possible, the director at least ideologically sees the potential for some concepts to change by bringing female empowerment to the forefront.

4.2. Actors Directly Gaze at the Camera as an Alienation Effect and Analysis of the Movie of The Brand New Testament Film

In light of the aforementioned factors in the film "The Brand New Testament," it can be posited that the film rewrites the "Bible" from scratch, aligning it with the modern worldview. It places women at the forefront with a feminist perspective and employs arguments that reinforce this ideology within the visual narrative. The film presents its ideological perspective in a manner that is both surreal and comedic. In addition to its popularity, the film employs contemporary narrative structures in a formal sense, as conveyed to the audience through the character 'EA'. The film's use of direct gaze by various actors into the camera serves to formally demonstrate the contemporary narrative structure, ultimately causing discomfort to the audience and prompting them to question the events depicted. The selection of individuals who have endured hardship in their lives as apostles in The Brand New Testament may be

interpreted as a reference to Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the protagonists' direct gazes into the camera during their diegetic entrances play a significant role in the transition from the representative to the aesthetic regime, as previously mentioned and discussed by Rancière. Similarly, the templates of classical narration have evolved in a different direction with the actor's direct gaze into the camera, which is intended to increase identification. The audience attempts to ascertain the identity of the principal character, designated 'EA', as the narrator of the events, through the actor's gaze into the camera. Similarly, when 'EA' identifies the individuals he will select as the apostles or those in his immediate vicinity, the audience is prompted to interrogate the characters and events through their expressionless direct gazes into the camera during their introduction.



Figure 1. Character of EA

Source: The Brand New Testament Movie (2015)

I. In the Direct Gaze Framework: In the context of the direct look, The character designated as 'EA' contravened a prohibition by gaining access to her father's room and thereby acquiring knowledge of the truth about her father's mismanagement of the world. This was achieved by means of tampering with his father's computer, which is in a position to exert control over the entire global system. In the face of these revelations, her father confronts her while she is eating and inquires as to her motivation for committing such an act. However, he ultimately succumbs to his father's rage and is subsequently assaulted. Subsequently, EA proceeds to her room and addresses the camera directly, declaring her intention to exact revenge on her father and stating her need to leave the house. In this scene, the audience is compelled

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to consider the broader implications of family relations and the system at large through the lens of the young protagonist, EA, who seeks to assert her dominance over her father, whom she perceives as lacking self-love. Director Dormael intensifies this questioning and encourages the audience to transition from the conventional mimetic representation paradigm to the aesthetic one, characterised by EA's direct gaze into the camera. The aesthetic regime prompts the audience to engage with the questioning posed by 'EA'. This formal approach eliminates the possibility of classical identification; This initial direct gaze into the camera can be interpreted as somewhat surprising, but it serves to reinforce the representation of a challenge to the patriarchal world order and demonstrates that the director will advance the matriarchal system ideology throughout the film through the character of 'EA'.



Figure 2. Character of Aurelie

Source: The Brand New Testament Movie (2015)

II. In the Direct Gaze Framework: The entity designated as "EA" arrives on Earth with the objective of locating her disciples. The film commences with a narrative account of a young woman named Aurelie, as conveyed by the film's protagonist. Despite the loss of one of her arms at a young age, the young woman is depicted as an object that can be exploited by all men around her, from children to old men, in addition to her beauty. Subsequently, we are presented with a portrayal of Aurelie's life, as narrated by her own voice. In her capacity as narrator and voiceover, Aurelie recounts the circumstances of her arm being lost at a young age on the subway, a traumatic event depicted in a direct and unsettling manner. In this scene, the director presents the simple life of a woman who has lost one of her arms against the odds, who

has been defeated since childhood but still cannot escape being an object of exploitation by men. The audience is invited to question the status quo through the protagonist's direct gaze at the camera.



Figure 3. Character of Jean-Claude

Source: The Brand New Testament Movie (2015)

III. In the Direct Gaze Framework: Jean-Claude, aged 58 and designated 'EA's second disciple', was fulfilling the role of manager with responsibility for the financial affairs of the store. In the role of narrator, EA portrays Jean-Claude as a man who, in his formative years, was a visionary striving to actualise his aspirations. However, he ultimately became enmeshed in the tenets of capitalism, resorting to a suboptimal position and being compelled to "barter his exquisite hours for survival". Subsequently, the audience is able to empathise with the character of Jean-Claude, who aligns with the criteria of being a victim due to his selection as a disciple, and thus gains insight into his world. Subsequently, the camera moves in a pan movement to Jean-Claude, who, as presented by 'EA', is a 58-year-old former child dreamer. When the focus shifts to Jean-Claude, the subject looks directly at the camera and states his name, age, and that he has no children, thereby demonstrating his sense of helplessness. The direct gaze of an individual who has been unable to actualise their aspirations throughout their lifetime, ensnared within the intricate web of capitalist dominance and facing the imminent threat of mortality, enables us to interrogate their way of life and the underlying tenets of the capitalist system.



Figure 4. Character of Mark

Source: The Brand New Testament Movie (2015)

IV. In the Direct Gaze Framework: The third apostle selected for examination is a man named Mark. As with the preceding characters, the film examines Mark's formative years and prompts him to engage with the camera directly. In a moment of reflection, the young Mark is unable to dislodge from his memory the image of a German girl he observed on a beach during a family excursion. In adulthood, the character continues to grapple with this romantic dilemma, which has constituted a significant psychological void in his life since childhood. Mark has transformed his unrequited love into a pathological and neurotic condition. In the context of these challenging circumstances, nostalgic sentiments from his formative years assume a transformed quality, leading him to become a person fixated on the notion of romantic attachment to women. The profound emotional void experienced by Mark, who is psychologically vulnerable and unable to identify an individual who could fulfil the image of his childhood love even in his 50s, is a disturbing scene that prompts the viewer to reflect on the nature of longing and the complexities of the human condition. In this context, the camera gaze of the youthful Mark enables the viewer to consider the images presented in the scene from their own perspective.



Figure 5. Character of François

Source: The Brand New Testament Movie (2015)

V. In the Direct Gaze Framework: This sequence is centred on the character François, who previously worked in insurance and has recently engaged in simulated human hunting trips in open areas with a telescopic rifle that lacks ammunition. Subsequent to these innocuous expeditions, during which he imitates the discharge of a firearm and derives gratification from the act, François is selected as the fourth apostle. The sequence then takes a dramatic turn when 'EA' joins 'François' in the open field and provides him with live ammunition, resulting in the shooting of the first apostle, 'Aurelie', in the arm. However, since Aurelie had lost an arm at an early age and was therefore unable to feel the impact of the shot, she captured François's attention. In recounting his childhood experiences, he reveals that he was deprived of affection during his formative years, which instilled in him an inclination to inflict harm upon others. This lack of nurturing has led to a lifelong inability to form attachments, including those to his family members. He was compelled by societal expectations to marry a woman with whom he was not in love and to live a life devoid of love. François's profound introspection into his childhood and his unwavering gaze into the camera as an adult prompts the audience to examine the entire event from a comprehensive standpoint.



Figure 6. Character of Willy

Source: The Brand New Testament Movie (2015)

VI. In the Direct Gaze Framework: In this sequence featuring the character 'Willy,' we observe a reiteration of the portrayal of the child as a helpless figure within the filmic narrative. Willy is a hypochondriac, suffering from an extreme preoccupation with and worry about having a serious illness, due to his mother's overbearing control. He is in his early teens and is expected to die in less than a week. Despite the absence of any tangible illness, he is subjected to a regimen of constant scrutiny and inappropriate pharmacological interventions from his family, particularly his mother. As he awaits his demise in his debilitated state, Willy, as depicted by the character EA, expresses a desire to dress in feminine attire, thereby symbolising his aspiration to live as a female.

In a world dominated by patriarchal power, the film makes reference to this through the character of Willy, who is presented as the last chosen disciple. This implies that the transformation of the world and its progression towards a better path will be triggered by the presentation of a world dominated by women and purified from patriarchal power. The director's objective is to prompt the audience to reflect on the prevailing ideologies of the modern world through the portrayal of the last Apostle's despair. In his film, Director Dormael shapes the ideological aspect of the cinematic world through his frames, thereby allowing the audience to examine their own ideological perspectives. The director addresses the anti-patriarchal ideology in the context of exploited women, while simultaneously questioning religious concepts

and beliefs through the lens of Christian values. This offers a discussion of the potential implications of a religious and systematic understanding that is influenced by a woman's perspective.

4.3. Haneke and "Funny Games" Movie

In the cinema of German director Michael Haneke, phenomena such as alienation in the face of life, and becoming meaningless as a result of commodification, are reflected on the big screen predominantly among the middle or upper-middle class, or what can be termed as the new bourgeoisie. In Haneke's films, we often see middle and upper-middle-class individuals leading secure and isolated lives undergoing critical transformations that they would never expect in their modern, warm, and protected environments. These critical transformations, side effects of modern life, indeed turn the elite individual's own weapon against them. Haneke's films demonstrate the turmoil experienced by people who continue their happy lives within imposed routines in the necessity of being Modernist, when they are confronted with serious situations that confuse them and are hard to make sense of.

In the film "Funny Games" events unfold around a family that could belong to the upper-middle class, adhering to modern living standards. The story begins when Georg, his wife Anna, and their son Georgie settle in their detached house located at the edge of forests and a lake, a place where they can be alone with nature during a vacation or in their free time. Their house, surrounded by fences in a grandiose yet secure manner, offers impeccable amenities, resembling a mansion. The tranquility of the setting begins to turn upside down with the arrival of two young men named Paul and Peter, who present themselves as relatives of the neighbors. Initially behaving like polite individuals from the upper-middle class, the young men soon take the family hostage, subjecting them to various forms of increasing violence. They implement their sadistic plans, named "games" intending to harm, demean, and eventually kill the family members. "The film indeed has a narrative belonging to the show society of Guy Debord and the cultural industry of Adorno, progressing within a chain of cause-and-effect relationships just like in a classic narrative" (Kılınç, 2015: 176). Haneke's statement during a gala night of one of his films, "I wish you all an uncomfortable viewing," actually indicates that the viewers will not reach the feeling of catharsis.

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Moreover, in an interview for a book, Haneke states: "...No animal is harmed, no child dies, and the good must win in the end. As I told myself before, in 'Funny Games,' we do the exact opposite. First, the dog dies. Then the child is killed, and everything gets harder" (Assheuer, 2013: 55).

In "Funny Games" by breaking the molds of 'Classic Narrative,' Haneke forces the audience to think from a different perspective and deliberately deprives them of what they desire, transforming them into a character resembling a child crying because their candy has been taken away and not given back. A focal scene in this film occurs towards the end, when violence has reached its peak and the audience's hatred for the sadistic, torturous young men has intensified. After Anna gets hold of a gun and kills Peter, one of the sadistic young men, the other sadist, Paul, finds the remote control and presses the rewind button. With this unexpected move, Director Haneke actually breaks the classic story molds, altering a structure that should result in the ultimate victory of the character with whom the audience usually empathizes. In addition to this, one of the most striking scenes that alienates the audience from the film is the development of scenes where Paul, one of the torturous young men, looks directly into the camera several times.

4.4. Direct Gaze as an Alienation Effect and Analysis of the Movie "Funny Games"

In Haneke's "Funny Games," there is a direct look into the camera by the actor, which can be considered as a Brechtian Contemporary Narrative, breaking the fourth walls of classic narrative patterns and enabling the audience to delve deep into thought-provoking inquiries on an intellectual level. The character Paul looks directly into the camera, and consequently at us, the audience, at four different stages.



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Figure 7. Character of Paul

Source: Funny Games Movie (1997)

I. In the Direct Gaze Framework: The character Paul, one of the sadistic young men, demands Anna, a family member whom he tortured, to find the dead body of the dog he killed as part of his sadistic games. During this, the character Paul looks at us and winks in a 'okay' manner, stepping out of his fictional world. With this unexpected gaze from Paul, we witness that he has transitioned from the plane of events in a dramatic sense to our space. This active attitude is the first stage where the fourth walls in dramatic narration are broken, interrupting the fictional motion and leading us to a dimension of thoughtful inquiry. From the first stage gaze that the hero makes at us, it is possible to conclude that the events are progressing as he wishes within his control. Since the characters behave in a sadistic manner and 'out of the blue' enter someone's house to torture them, it is not possible for the audience, which is 'on the side of the good' in the classical sense, to form an identification. Therefore, since there is no gaze of the good or the victim, this direct look of the sadistic Paul at the camera, meaning at us, can be evaluated within the scope of 'Alienation Effects' in acting, as mentioned by Brecht.



Figure 8. Characters of Paul and Peter

Source: Funny Games Movie (1997)

II. In the Direct Gaze Framework: The sadistic character Paul engages in a longer interaction with the audience, establishing a dialogical stance. Prior to the scene, he tries to garner sympathy for his friend 'Peter' by narrating a tale of his harsh

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background and the family drama unfolding around him, expecting the audience to empathize with the character. However, as Peter bursts into tears, Paul changes his story, admitting that he lied and revealing that they actually come from a wealthy and reckless background. Upon hearing this, Peter stops crying and starts smiling. All these interactions seemingly bestow upon Paul a 'Deus ex machina' role, shaping, revealing, and directing the events of the drama. The term 'Deus ex machina,' of Latin origin, refers to a character or entity in films and artworks that suddenly appears to resolve a complex situation. Paul uses this authoritative stance to shape the film and manipulate events to his favor. Although it may seem like Paul has a certain dominance over Peter, in reality, Peter is entirely a character created and inserted into the film by Paul.

By breaking the fourth wall in the narrative drama and inviting the audience into the 'game,' Paul, through his questions—'What do you think?,' 'Do they stand a chance?,' 'You're on their side, aren't you?'—encourages the audience to engage in critical reflection. In Aristotelian narrative, there is an adherence to truthfulness and characters represent events in a manner consistent with reality, a concept referred to by Ranciere as the representative regime. However, in cinema, this has been disrupted in numerous films, resulting in a myriad of contradictions. Ranciere has termed this heterogeneous system, structured by German idealist philosophy, the aesthetic regime (Ranciere, 2008: aktaran Gönen, 2008: 42-43). By breaking the fourth wall, Paul transitions into what Ranciere refers to as the aesthetic regime, reinforcing his role as a dramatic outsider and, in a Brechtian sense, as a catalyst for estrangement, not only through his words but also through his direct gaze into the camera.

CONCLUSION

A review of the history of film reveals that instances of actors directly addressing the camera are relatively uncommon within the context of the narrative. However, it can be observed that from the 1960s to the present, direct looks into the camera have been employed for various purposes, particularly in contemporary narrative films. In Jaco Van Dormael's film *The Brand New Testament*, the actors engage with the camera in a direct and unflinching manner, thereby inviting the audience to confront the tenets of the masculine world system and the anti-patriarchal

utopian ideology. This approach encourages the audience to engage in a process of questioning and reflection regarding the veracity of alternative ideological beliefs and systems.

The direct gaze observed in contemporary narrative and popular films represents a heterogeneous phenomenon within the idealist system, as postulated by Rancière, who designated it as the aesthetic regime. The direct gaze is a technique that is employed to dismantle the fourth wall of the dramatic narrative, which is regarded as a symbolic construct within cinematic discourse. This gesture directs the viewer to a plane of engagement that is parallel to the aesthetic regime. Indeed, the character 'EA' in the film *The Brand New Testament*, which serves as the research object in this study, and the characters Paul and Peter in the film *Funny Games* have been revealed to be figures that effectively dismantle the symbolic fourth wall, which Rancière terms the aesthetic regime. This aesthetic transition results in the dissolution of dramatic chains and the emergence of a sense of alienation. The concept of alienation, as defined by Brecht, is reinforced not only by the film's content but also by the actors' direct gaze into the camera, which serves to engage the viewer in a process of reflection and interpretation.

In conclusion, the actor's direct gaze into the camera is not limited to the passive gaze of the classical audience at rationalised film images. Moreover, direct gaze is linked to the creation of conditions that provided audience engagement within the context of a Brechtian contemporary narrative structure. In contrast to the superficiality of classical narratives, Brechtian-contemporary narratives have developed a range of narrative techniques with the objective of challenging the conventional boundaries between audience and performer. Brechtian structure challenges the conventional narrative patterns by prompting the audience to reflect on the effectiveness of established narrative structures and conventions. Additionally, he introduces the concept of the "alienation effect," or "Verfremdungseffekt," which provides narrative different nuance for the audience. One of the elements that provides this 'alienation' feature is the actor's direct look into the camera, which can be considered within the scope of 'Alienation in Acting'. In the case of Haneke's *Funny Games* and Van Dormael's *The Brand New Testament*, which can be considered as

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films that break classical cinematic molds, the,"direct look" has been identified as an example of "Alienation in Acting," within the "Alienation" category of the Brechtian structure. Furthermore, the act of looking into the camera in both Funny Games and The Brand New Testament can be evaluated in terms of the symbolic interaction established with the audience, in addition to the 'alienation' feature that encourages questioning.

Ultimately the actor's direct gaze enables the audience to maintain a critical distance from the film, thus allowing them to engage in an intellectual interaction with the themes, events and ideologies presented in the film. In this context the viewer is not merely a passive recipient of a pre-established narrative universe; rather they become an active participant in a dialogue with the film. In such circumstances, the viewer is compelled to engage in more deliberate questioning of the social, political and cultural discourses that pervade the cinematic realm. Consequently this interaction allows for a re-evaluation of the role of cinema from a conceptual perspective thereby facilitating a more analytical approach to the viewing practice for the viewer.

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