Gaze and freedom: the "looking" and power dynamics in Sartre's existentialism

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Abstract:

This paper deeply explores the philosophical meaning of "gaze" in Sartre's existentialism and its complex relation to freedom. By making a detailed analysis of the core view of Sartre's philosophy —— existence precedes essence. Combined with the manifestation of "gaze" in modern society, this study aims to reveal how individual self-consciousness forms under the other gaze and how this process reveals power dynamics among individuals. The research of literature analysis and philosophical reasoning to a comprehensive analysis of Sartre's original works and related philosophical and sociological literature.

Through an in-depth analysis of Sartre's concept of the "gaze of the other," this paper reveals that the gaze is a way of confirming existence and exercising power. In the interaction of the individual with the other, gaze creates an unequal power relationship that affects the individual's freedom. Meanwhile, this study also explored how gaze shapes individual self-awareness and social behavior in different social environments, such as social media, monitoring society, advertising, and consumer culture.

Finally, the summary highlights the importance of the complex relationship between gaze and freedom, practical implications for journalism, and possible directions for future research.

Keywords: Sartre; existentialism; gaze; freedom; power dynamics; social media; surveillance society; media ethics.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

Sartre's existential philosophy attracted wide attention and discussion in the 20th century because of its unique view that existence takes precedence over nature. This philosophical position challenged traditional essentialism and idealism and laid a foundation for the development of later schools of thought, such as phenomenology and post-structuralism. The core of Sartre's philosophy highlights the subjectivity and free will of individual existence. He believes that individuals define their essence through their own choices and actions. This view had a revolutionary significance under the social and cultural background at that time and profoundly influenced personal freedom, social structure, and even political theory.

1.2 Research purpose

While deeply exploring Sartre's existentialism, the discussion of the concept of gaze shows the dual face of its philosophical depth and social significance. Through works such as Existence and Noity, Sartre helps us understand the complexity of human interactions. Under Sartre's existential framework, gaze is not just a simple eye intersection, but a way of communication with profound philosophical meaning, reflecting the relationship and free perception between the self and the other.

Sartre's analysis reveals a shift in the way individuals exist under the gaze of others, from free subjects to objective objects. This shift highlights one of the core concepts of existentialism: the existence of the other defines me. Freedom is no longer absolute but is related to the interaction of the other. Gaze becomes a force that shapes self-awareness and influences the feeling of freedom.

Further exploring the gaze concept, we found it closely related to power dynamics. As a way of exercising power, individuals confirm the existence of self and put others under observation through gaze, which reflects the unequal distribution of power. Gaze power establishes complex interactions between individuals, including competition, resistance, and identity. Through gaze, individuals strive to find a balance between the self and another and explore

new states of freedom.

Sartre's concept of gaze is enlightening to contemporary society. The development of the digital age makes the gaze phenomenon more complex, and individuals are both observers and observers in cyberspace. This new form of gaze has an important impact on the individual's sense of self and sense of freedom. Sartre's gaze analysis helps us to understand and examine these phenomena, recognizing how gaze functions in new social structures in the development of technology today and the implications for individual and collective freedom.

1.3 Research significance

Sartre's existentialist philosophy provides a unique perspective on understanding the relationships between individuals, especially in exploring gaze and power dynamics. In his work, Sartre suggests that the gaze of the other is a critical moment when we are aware of our existence as objects. This knowledge not only reveals the process of individual self-awareness formation but also points to the power structure implied in the gaze of others. Through the gaze of the other, the individual feels an external evaluation and judgment, which makes the individual have a passivity in social interaction. Sartre's view emphasizes that gaze can shape individual behavior and self-knowledge, a power that shows diversity in different social environments and cultural contexts. For example, in social media, the gaze of others is embodied through likes, comments, and other forms, and these interactions form a new social criticism and evaluation mechanism. In the context of monitoring society, the gaze is transformed into ubiquitous surveillance, affecting individual freedom and behavior.

There is a close connection between Sartre's gaze theory and the phenomenon of gaze in modern society. In the digital age, the form and meaning of the gaze have changed significantly. On social networking platforms, individuals are not only the subject of gaze but also the object of gaze. This two-way gaze constructs a complex interactive relationship with emotions such as appreciation, envy, and jealousy. The interweaving of these emotions reflects the power dynamics in social networks, influencing individual self-display and social behavior. On the other hand, large-scale data collection and analysis can cause individuals to be unknowingly monitored. This omnidirectional gaze comes from others and the technical system itself, posing a new threat to individual freedom. Therefore, understanding the role and influence of gaze in modern society is crucial to protecting personal privacy and freedom.

1.4 Research content

Sartre's existentialist philosophy, especially his explora-

tion of the concept of gaze, 'provides a unique perspective on understanding the power dynamics between individuals. In Sartre's vision,' gaze 'is not just a visual encounter but a profound existential experience in which one person becomes the' object 'in another person's sight, thus feeling a special sense of gaze. This feeling inevitably triggers individual reflection on self-awareness, especially how others perceive it. Sartre links this experience closely with freedom, arguing that the experience of individuals becoming an 'object' under the gaze of others reveals a fundamental conflict of freedom: the tension between the individual self in the eyes of the other and the self-understood by the individual himself.

From the perspective of modern society, the concept of gaze extends beyond the background of the Sartre era to the vast realm of digital media and social networking. In these areas, individuals are constantly stared at by others, but also at others. This modern gaze mechanism, especially on social media platforms, redefines the public-private boundary and complicates the relationship between individuals and society. How individuals remain free in such a widely watched environment has become a question to be answered. This is not only about protecting personal privacy but also about maintaining personal freedom under broad social observation. As the disseminator of information, the news media often shapes the public's views of some events or people. In this process, the media gaze has become a tool to shape public cognition and reflects the media's power structure. How the media chooses its focus and how to 'gaze' at an event from the Angle of its reporting, have all virtually shaped society's understanding and reaction to the event. Therefore, exploring the mechanism and effect of media gaze is crucial for understanding the power dynamics in news reporting and its impact on individual freedom. In the digital age, technological advances have greatly expanded the scope and depth of gaze, thus affecting the way individuals interact with the collective. For example, the spread of surveillance technology makes gaze more ubiquitous, while social networking platforms provide a new field of gaze and gaze. These changes affect individual self-perception and social behavior and redefine the relationship between power and freedom. Therefore, the study of the modern gaze mechanism should not only focus on its influence on individual freedom but also consider its role in shaping the structure and culture of modern society.

2. An Overview of Sartre's philosophy

2.1 "The gaze of the other."

The core view of Sartre's existential philosophy is that existence precedes the essence. He believes that man first

exists and then is the maker of his own life. Through this view, Sartre emphasized the importance of individual freedom, believing that each person is the master of his destiny.

The gaze of the other is a core concept that deeply reveals the social nature of individual existence and its complex relationship with others. Sartre believes that the gaze of others is how we realize ourselves as objective beings in the world of others. This process involves the formation of self-consciousness and reveals a profound power relationship. When we feel stared at by others, we not only passively accept the eyes of others but also find our own 'objectification' in this vision. This sense of objectification makes us realize that we are not completely free and that others somehow limit and define our existence. This interactive relationship reveals a complex power dynamic in which gaze is a cognitive behavior and a way of exercising power.

In Sartre's novel "Nausea," the inner experience reveals the influence of another gaze on individual freedom. For example, when Rogonordan felt himself fixed by the eyes of others, he described it: " I felt eyes on me, fixed and heavy eyes, which twisted me and turned me into objects."This gaze made Roggangdan feel that he was the object of scrutiny and judgment, depriving him of subjectivity and freedom. He felt like "an object on a naturalist's table," examined curiously and powerless to resist. This sense of powerlessness and objectification reflects the oppressive influence of individuals in the face of others' gaze.

In today's social media, individuals often confirm their existence through others' likes, comments, and sharing, a phenomenon that can be understood as a form of the other gaze under Sartre's framework. This gaze, while seemingly enhancing the individual's presence, may limit the individual's freedom. Because in this process, individuals may unconsciously shape their own identity and behavior according to the feedback of others, and thus be unconsciously under the control of others. Moreover, monitoring technology and advertising in modern society also use the concept of gaze to exercise power by monitoring and guiding the behavior of consumers, which further complicates the relationship between gaze and individual freedom.

2.2 Freedom and responsibility

In Sartre's existentialist philosophy, freedom is an abstract idea and the core of individual existence. According to Sartre, people define themselves through choice, and the ability to choose embodies freedom. However, this freedom is not without boundaries, and a responsibility for choice accompanies it. Selection means exclusion, and when a person makes a choice, he also abandons other possibilities. Therefore, every choice has a price, and that is the responsibility that accompanies freedom. When people face the gaze of others, they will be aware of their existence and the existence of others and thus realize that their own choices will affect themselves and others. This sense of self-generated under the gaze of others further strengthens the sense of responsibility of free choice.

In the digital age, social media, surveillance technology, and consumer culture have redefined the individual's self-awareness and social behavior. These factors partly blur the boundary between public and private and enhance the effect of others' gaze, thus having a new impact on individual freedom. In the face of the complex phenomena in modern society, individuals should focus on their free exercise and be aware of their responsibility to others.

2.3 Power dynamics

The way of a being changes when one is aware that others observe him. This awakening of self-consciousness triggered by the external gaze reveals a deep mechanism of power interaction. Through his other gaze, Sartre shows how individuals can establish a complex power relationship through mutual observation and judgment. This relationship is not simply domination and obedience, but a more subtle and internalized form of power. Individuals feel naked under the gaze of the other, not only because they become the focus of attention, but more importantly, they feel that their actions and ways of being are judged. This judgment does not need to be stated; the mere existence of the other is enough to make the individual feel pressure that causes them to somehow adjust their behavior and state of existence.

The power dynamics triggered by gaze are not one-way, but two-way interactive. When a person realizes that he can also stare at others, he gains the power to resist the other person's gaze. This power lies not only in the contrary but also in the ability to re-establish their subjectivity by staring at others. In this process, the gaze becomes a tool for the subject position and power. Sartre's view highlights the mobility and interactivity of the power relations between individuals. The power is no longer fixed but changes with the constantly changing individual interaction.

In social media and public space, individuals construct their social identity and power by mutual gaze and gaze. The gaze became a tool for social control and discipline. In the surveillance society, the ubiquitous surveillance camera always puts the individual in a state of observation, and this comprehensive gaze creates an invisible power mechanism that affects the individual's behavior and self-cognition. Similarly, in media and advertising, the

gaze controls and rules by manipulating individual desires and behaviors by creating desirable images and lifestyles. This social gaze reveals that power plays a subtle role in seemingly equal social relationships, affecting individual freedom and self-actualization. At the same time, what cannot be ignored is the ethical issues behind the gaze. Gaze is a social and psychological phenomenon and a profound ethical issue. Gaze involves an individual's privacy, dignity, and freedom of self-expression. The discomfort of an individual being stared at by the other points to an invasion of the boundary of the self, which is physical but also psychological and moral. Therefore, understanding the relationship between gaze and power dynamics also requires us to examine and reflect on the ethical standards of observation, judgment, and control in the current society and to fully consider the ethical dimensions of gaze.

3. "Gaze" and Power Dynamics in Modern Society

3.1 Gaze in the social environment

Gaze in social environments, particularly under media gaze, presents a unique pattern of social interaction. This model reshaped individual self-perception and redefined the social power structure. Gaze conveys the information and shapes the audience's values and behavior patterns. In this process, the gaze of the media acts as a tool of power, which influences the freedom and choice of the public by shaping public issues and guiding the direction of public opinion.

Technological advances and the rise of social media must be considered when analyzing how the media gaze is a tool for exercising power. These changes greatly expand the extent and depth of the gaze, allowing individuals to be passive viewers and active participants.

Users inadvertently reinforce their gaze on social media platforms by sharing their daily lives. This gaze form partly promotes strengthening social connections but may also lead to privacy intrusion and self-presentation stress. Social media is not only a platform for individuals to express themselves and share life segments but also a new field for others to gaze at, which crosses the boundaries of physical space and enables instant interaction on a global scale. In this context, individuals should face the other gaze in real life and deal with the extensive attention from the virtual world. The effect of this double gaze has had a profound impact on the construction of individual self-consciousness. Thumbs-ups, comments, and sharing can be seen as concrete manifestations of the other's gaze. Each interaction virtually verifies the value of the individual's existence and shapes the individual's social image. However, this interaction-based confirmation of existence is often accompanied by a strong desire for recognition by the other. Gaze on social media platforms is not limited to mutual observation among individuals but extends to algorithm-driven systematic gaze. In this case, the platform's algorithm decides what content to display according to the user's behavior and preferences to influence and manipulate individuals' social behavior to a certain extent. While seemingly neutral, this algorithmic gaze inadvertently shapes the user's range of information reception and social behavior patterns. For example, through the recommendation system to strengthen the exposure of some types of content, the platform guides the users' focus of attention and social interaction, changing the individual information consumption habits and creating a sense of social identity.

Under the gaze, the individual's freedom is redefined. Sartre said that freedom is one of the essential characteristics of human beings, but in the social media environment, individual freedom has encountered unprecedented challenges. On the one hand, individuals can freely express themselves on social media and freely release information and share opinions. On the other hand, this expression is also influenced by the gaze of others, and individuals often unconsciously adjust their behavior and speech to meet the expectations of others and the norms of social media platforms. This phenomenon reveals a contradiction: social media provides a space for freedom of expression but also limits the freedom of individuals to truly express themselves.

Ultimately, gaze and power dynamics in social media emerge as a complex interaction. Through interaction on social media, individuals constantly build and reshape their self-image. This process gives individuals certain power, enabling them to achieve self-presentation and social goals in the virtual space. However, this power is not absolute; it is formed under the multiple influences of platform rules, algorithmic logic, and the gaze of others. Therefore, the gaze on social media is a way for individuals to win social identity and influence and a power restricting individual freedom and behavior. This power dynamic not only reflects the new field of social media as the gaze of modern society but also reveals the intricate relationship between power and freedom, as well as individuals and others in this field.

At the same time, with the development of monitoring technology, gaze has become a continuous state in the monitoring society. On the one hand, monitoring is considered necessary to ensure public security; it may also lead to the loss of individual freedom and the increasing inequality of power structure. Through continuous, invisible surveillance, the monitoring gaze mechanism in society creates an 'invisible prison' in which individuals,

while apparently remaining free, operate in an invisible framework composed of rules and norms. This invisible framework limits individual behavior because individuals know they may be monitored at any time. Sartre's concept of gaze is magnified here, with individuals feeling the gaze not just from certain others but from society as a whole. This universal and ubiquitous gaze strengthens the social control over individuals as a way of power exercise, prompting individuals to change their behavior under invisible pressure to adapt to the expectations and norms of society.

The media plays an important role in shaping the gaze in the monitored society. Through the continuous dissemination of surveillance images and personal privacy, the media intensifies the public's acceptance of the monitored state, thus making the surveillance gaze a widely recognized social phenomenon. By shaping the specific public discourse, the media affects people's cognition and acceptance of surveillance. Further, it also changes people's understanding of themselves and the role of others in society. In this way, the media's gaze is a monitoring tool and a cultural force that shapes a brand-new cultural environment for watching and being viewed.

Finally, the gaze on advertising and consumer culture also shows a special way of exercising power. In this context, gaze is a behavior of watching and a means to stimulate desire and guide consumption. Through carefully designed advertising images and information, the gaze in the consumer culture shapes people's consumption behavior and lifestyle and then affects the individual's self-cognition and social status. This gaze not only conveys commodity information but also conveys specific values and life concepts, thus virtually shaping the power structure of society.

3.2 Gaze in the power structure.

Gaze is an embodiment of ideology and a way of confirming self-existence through the other. This view is particularly important in the power structure of modern society, especially in the background of news reports and public opinion supervision. Through analyzing power relations in news reports and supervision cases by public opinion, we can see how gaze is used as a tool for power exercise. As the main way of disseminatingdisseminating social information, the gaze power held by the news media can shape public awareness and influence or change the power structure to a great extent.

As a kind of social practice, the supervision by public opinion is essentially a kind of staring behavior. In this process, the gaze of the public and the media not only supervises and restricts the power but also shapes society's cognition of the power. Through gaze, the public can interpret and evaluate the power behavior, thus forming social pressure and prompting the power subject to make changes. This interaction demonstrates the complex relationship between gaze and freedom, namely the exercise of gaze as a form of freedom to promote social justice and the rational distribution of power.

In news reporting, the power dynamics of gaze manifest themselves as how the media chooses which events to report and how to report them. This affects the public's right to know and the formation of opinions and reflects the value orientation and power position of the media itself. Through the attention and neglect of specific events, the news media shows a hidden exercise of power, which plays a key role in shaping the public agenda and opinion.

3.3 Case of power relationship and public opinion supervision in news reports

The 2023 earthquake in Turkey and Syria, in this case, how the media reported the events and shaped the image of the affected countries and regions, reflected the core concepts of "the gaze of others" and "the struggle between freedom and power" discussed by Sartre.

First, from the perspective of "the gaze of others," the media reports and public responses to the people of the affected countries and regions constitute a collective gaze. This gaze is not only limited to the objective reports of the disaster but also includes the judgment of the affected people's personal identity, personality, and experience. Under this gaze, the affected people are transformed into objects, and their personal experiences and feelings are simplified or even misunderstood. This power of gaze makes them feel deprived of self-identity and freedom.

Secondly, from the perspective of "the struggle between freedom and power", the power dynamics in this event are manifested on multiple levels. As one of the authorities, the media shapes the public perception of the events through its reporting.

Affects the perception of the individual sense of freedom. In this case, the media selection and reporting style reflect the complexity of the power struggle. The media's pursuit of hits and influence may lead to overlooking respect for individual dignity and freedom.

In addition, the formation and dissemination of public opinion also reflect the power dynamics. Public opinion can be regarded as an embodiment of collective power, which can shape or change the individual's social status and self-cognition. In this case, the direction and response of public opinion may have further intensified the pressure on the affected people and limited their free space.

3.4 Stare and resistance

The other's gaze is an important factor in forming indi-

vidual self-consciousness. This gaze is not only physical or visible; it represents a deep psychological interaction and the construction of social relations. The individual becomes an object under the other gaze, losing subjectivity and an experience described in Sartre's theory as an extreme state of self-consciousness. However, from the point of view of resistance, this passive situation is not unsolved. Fighting the gaze of others is not only a recognition of self but also a pursuit of individual freedom.

For example, in the era of social media, some individuals begin to seek freedom by resisting social media rules, such as deleting social accounts, reducing online time, or creating reverse content to challenge the gaze of others and regain self-control. In the surveillance society, urban public spaces, workplaces, and even individual family life are filled with surveillance cameras. In this context of the passive gaze, individuals feel themselves continuously observed, a feeling that intensifies the desire for freedom. Some individuals adopt resistance strategies, such as facial shielding, encrypted communications software, or participation in counter-surveillance social campaigns. Through these actions, individuals attempt to shift from passive observers to active actors, challenging the power structure in modern surveillance societies. Similarly, seek freedom in advertising and consumer culture by resisting consumerism, such as refusing to buy from the products of mainstream brands, supporting sustainable and ethical consumption, or participating in a lifestyle that reduces consumption. In this way, individuals resist the consumer culture's gaze and look for a more authentic and freer way of self-expression. This resistance is not only a control of personal consumption choices but also a question of the gaze logic of modern consumer society. It shows that individuals can still influence and change their social environment through personal actions in the face of various social forces.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

4.1 Research summary

Through literature analysis and philosophical reasoning, we find that gaze makes an important impact at the individual level and shapes a specific power relationship at the socio-cultural level. In social media, in monitoring society. Sartre's existential philosophy provides a new perspective on understanding individual self-awareness and social behavior, where the concept of "gaze" plays a central role in revealing the power dynamics between the individual and others. Finding gaze is not only a means of confirming existence but also a means of exercising pow-

er. In different social environments such as social media, monitoring society, advertising, and consumer culture, the nature and influence of gaze show diversity. This diversity is reflected in how gaze shapes an individual's self-awareness and how it affects their social behavior and freedom. The complex relationship between gaze and freedom and its importance has profound philosophical significance in theory and has great application value in news communication.

In addition, with the rapid development of technology, especially in artificial intelligence and big data, the concept of gaze and its effects may present new changes. For example, artificial intelligence technology plays an important role in simulating or understanding human gaze behavior, and how this technology of gaze affects human behavior and social structure has become a topic worth further discussion. Moreover, in the era of big data, individual privacy protection and data ethical use issues are closely related to gaze. How to make rational use of the data generated by gaze behavior while ensuring individual freedom will become one of the urgent focuses of future research.

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