

GÖRSEL KAYMA: ÇAĞDAŞ GÖRSEL KÜLTÜRDE BAKIŞIN BİLİNÇDİŞİ SAPMALARI

THE VISUAL SLIP: UNCONSCIOUS DEVIATIONS OF GAZE IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Freud'un parapraksi kavramını görsel algı alanına genişleterek "görsel kayma" (visual slip) kavramını önermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Görsel kaymalar, bilinçli görsel niyetin geçici olarak yer değiştirdiği ve bakışın istemsiz biçimde yön değiştirdiği durumlar olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, söz konusu sapmaların yalnızca dikkat dağınıklığı ya da fizyolojik refleksler değil; aynı zamanda bilinçdışı süreçler, duygusal yönelimler ve kültürel olarak yapılandırılmış algısal kalıplarla ilişkili anlamlı olaylar olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Araştırma, psikanaliz, bilişsel psikoloji ve imge teorisini bir araya getiren disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşım benimsemektedir. Kavramsal ve kuramsal bir yöntem izlenerek, görsel dikkat süreçlerinin yalnızca üstten-aşağıya (top-down) kontrol ile değil, aynı zamanda alttan-yukarıya (bottom-up) uyarıcılar ve bilinçdışı yönelimlerle şekillendiği ortaya konulmaktadır. Özellikle sosyal medya, algoritmik arayüzler ve hızlı görsel akışların hâkim olduğu dijital ortamlarda, görsel kaymaların sıklığının arttığı ve dikkat süreçlerinin daha kırılğan hale geldiği vurgulanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak çalışma, algının sabit ve şeffaf bir süreç olmadığını; aksine bilinçli niyet, bilinçdışı etkiler ve kültürel kodlar arasında sürekli müzakere edilen dinamik bir yapı olduğunu göstermektedir. Görsel kayma kavramı, hem analitik bir araç hem de metodolojik bir yaklaşım olarak, çağdaş görsel kültürde algının işleyişini anlamaya yönelik yeni bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Görsel kayma, parapraksi, görsel algı, dikkat, bilinçdışı süreçler.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to propose the concept of the "visual slip" as an extension of Freud's notion of parapraxis into the domain of visual perception. Visual slips are defined as moments in which conscious visual intention is temporarily displaced, resulting in involuntary shifts of gaze. In this context, the study argues that such deviations should not be understood merely as distractions or physiological reflexes, but as meaningful events shaped by unconscious processes, affective orientations, and culturally structured perceptual patterns. The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach by integrating psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, and image theory. Through a conceptual and theoretical framework, it demonstrates that visual attention is not governed solely by top-down control, but is also shaped by bottom-up stimuli and unconscious orientations. In particular, in digitally saturated environments dominated by social media, algorithmic interfaces, and rapid visual flows, the frequency of visual slips increases and attentional processes become more fragile. In conclusion, the study shows that perception is not a stable or transparent process, but rather a dynamic structure continuously negotiated between conscious intention, unconscious influences, and cultural codes. The concept of the visual slip functions both as an analytical tool and as a methodological approach, offering a new perspective for understanding perceptual processes in contemporary visual culture.

Keywords: Visual slip, parapraxis, visual perception, attention, unconscious processes, digital media, image theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of parapraxis, first introduced by Freud, challenges the assumption that everyday errors are random or insignificant (Freud, 1901). In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, slips of the tongue, lapses of memory, and minor mistakes are interpreted as meaningful expressions of unconscious processes. Within this framework, error is not simply a failure of control; rather, it marks a moment in which competing intentions briefly disrupt conscious regulation. Although Freud's analysis focused primarily on language, the underlying logic of parapraxis is not limited to linguistic phenomena. Subsequent interpretations have suggested that unconscious processes manifest across a range of cognitive domains, including perception, attention, and sensorimotor activity (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988). This raises an important question: can vision-often treated as a domain of conscious control-also be subject to disruptions that carry unconscious significance?

Recent developments in neurocognitive research provide empirical support for the notion that unconscious processes can guide visual attention before conscious intention intervenes. Micro-deviations in gaze, measured through eye-tracking and neural imaging, are associated with activity in the prefrontal cortex, parietal networks, and subcortical structures, suggesting that perceptual errors-or visual slips-are tightly coupled with unconscious cognitive mechanisms (Summerfield & Egnér, 2009; Schurger et al., 2017). These findings extend Freudian logic beyond linguistic slips, indicating that perceptual experience itself may be shaped by unconscious tendencies that momentarily override deliberate focus.

This article addresses this question by proposing the concept of the visual slip. Involuntary deviations of gaze-moments in which attention drifts away from its intended object-should not be understood solely as distractions or physiological responses. Instead, such moments may reveal latent perceptual orientations shaped by affect, memory, and culturally mediated imagery. While research in cognitive psychology has demonstrated that attention is influenced by both voluntary and stimulus-driven processes (Posner, 1980; Theeuwes, 2010), these approaches often remain limited to functional explanations. They tend to prioritize efficiency, salience, and rapid visual processing, leaving aside questions related to subjective meaning, unconscious motivation, and culturally conditioned patterns of perception (Anderson, 2019; Wolfe, 2021). By contrast, this study adopts an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates psychoanalytic theory, image theory, and contemporary aesthetic discourse.

The main contribution of this article lies in extending the logic of parapraxis into the visual domain and in framing perceptual deviation as a meaningful and theoretically productive phenomenon. In doing so, it introduces the visual slip as both an analytical concept and a potential methodological lens for examining the instability of perception in contemporary visual culture. In particular, the article hypothesizes that digital content-including social media feeds, dynamic advertisements, interactive interfaces, and immersive visual platforms-amplifies the frequency and visibility of visual slips. Rapidly changing visual environments, algorithmically curated image streams, and high-density information presentation increase involuntary gaze shifts, making perceptual control more difficult and highlighting unconscious tendencies in attention allocation (Bavelier et al., 2020; Rosen et al., 2013).

Digital media, through its constant flux and interactive elements, introduces a novel dimension to Freudian theory. The continuous presentation of novel, salient stimuli competes with preexisting cognitive schemas and affective memory traces, creating a context in which visual slips are more likely to occur. For instance, scrolling through an endless feed may repeatedly divert attention to unexpected content, even when the observer's initial focus is

maintained elsewhere. Such patterns suggest that visual slips are not random but are structurally embedded within the architecture of modern visual environments.

In visually saturated environments, where attention is continuously directed and disrupted, the notion of perceptual control becomes increasingly fragile. Visual slips provide a means of examining this fragility at a micro level, revealing how conscious intention is constantly negotiated with unconscious and culturally structured forces. Rather than treating perception as a stable or transparent process, this article approaches it as dynamic, contested, and open to interruption. Contemporary visual culture, increasingly mediated by digital images, interfaces, and cultural codes, shapes how attention is directed, fragmented, and modulated. Within this context, visual slips can be understood not only as psychological events but also as culturally conditioned moments that reveal how visual meaning is negotiated in mediated environments. Furthermore, by positioning digital media as an active force in shaping gaze behavior, this article opens up new avenues for empirical investigation. Eye-tracking studies, combined with psychoanalytic and aesthetic interpretation, may uncover systematic patterns in involuntary gaze deviations, revealing the ways in which contemporary visual culture actively participates in structuring unconscious perception (Holmqvist et al., 2011; Duchowski, 2022). This approach underscores that visual slips are not mere accidents of perception but windows into the interplay between individual cognitive processes, emotional tendencies, and socially mediated visual environments.

Finally, understanding visual slips in digital contexts has significant implications for aesthetic theory and media studies. If perception is continuously influenced by rapidly shifting stimuli and algorithmically curated content, then visual slips may serve as indicators of how attention, desire, and cultural codes intersect in shaping experience. By investigating these moments, researchers can gain insights into the negotiation between conscious control and unconscious guidance, highlighting the delicate balance between intentionality and environmental influence in contemporary visual culture (Manovich, 2001; Mirzoeff, 2011).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical and conceptual methodology to articulate and analyse the phenomenon of the visual slip in contemporary visual environments. Rather than relying on primary quantitative data collection, the methodology combines conceptual synthesis, theoretical interpretation, and critical engagement with existing empirical research to produce an integrated framework that bridges psychoanalytic theory, cognitive psychology, visual studies, and cultural theory. The primary aim of this methodology is to understand how involuntary deviations of gaze - moments in which attention shifts away from an intended object - can be interpreted as meaningful rather than incidental. This requires an expansion of both theoretical categories and analytical tools beyond the conventional boundaries of a single discipline. Accordingly, the methodology integrates psychoanalytic insights into error and disruption with cognitive models of attention and empirical findings from eye-tracking and visual cognition research.

2.1. Conceptual Foundation: Psychoanalysis and Cognitive Models

The methodological basis of this study begins with a reinterpretation of Freudian parapraxis - originally formulated to describe slips of the tongue and lapses of memory - as a model for understanding visual disruptions. Freud's theory posits that error is not noise but an expression of unconscious processes influencing conscious intention (Freud, 1901). Later commentators have extended this understanding to non-linguistic domains, suggesting that

unconscious processes operate across perception, action, and cognition (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988; Ricoeur, 1970). To complement psychoanalytic frameworks, the study draws on cognitive models of attention that distinguish between top-down, goal-directed control and bottom-up, stimulus-driven orienting (Posner, 1980; Theeuwes, 2010). These models have been refined in the context of dynamic and naturalistic environments, demonstrating that visual attention often shifts reflexively to salient or unexpected features irrespective of intentional focus (Wolfe & Horowitz, 2017). Empirical work using eye-tracking paradigms confirms that such involuntary shifts occur frequently and predictably, even when individuals attempt to sustain attention on a target stimulus (Holmqvist et al., 2011; Henderson, 2003). The conceptual innovation of the visual slip lies in interpreting these involuntary shifts not merely as functional mechanisms of efficient perception, but as structurally informative deviations that reveal deeper cognitive and cultural influences on attention.

2.2. Digital Media Contexts and Visual Attention

A central methodological commitment of this study is to situate visual attention within the conditions of digitally saturated environments. Contemporary media environments - including social media, internet browsing, video platforms, and app interfaces - are characterised by rapid streams of images, persistent notifications, and algorithmic prioritisation of certain stimuli over others (Manovich, 2001; Rosen, 2013). These environments are constructed to capture and repeatedly redirect attention, resulting in frequent, context-sensitive shifts in visual focus.

To account for the effects of digital contexts on perceptual instability, the methodology engages with studies that examine how interface design, motion, and informational density influence eye movements. Research on gaze behaviour in digital interfaces demonstrates that users often exhibit rapid, involuntary fixations on dynamic elements such as animations, advertisements, or thumbnails, even when these elements are not the primary targets of intentional viewing (Bergstrom & Schall, 2014; Nivola et al., 2018). Eye-tracking research in news websites and social media platforms shows that users' visual attention is strategically guided by visual salience and layout, often producing recurrent patterns of fixation and saccade that are resistant to deliberate control (Lindgaard et al., 2011; Djamasbi et al., 2010).

This study incorporates these findings as empirical context for the conceptualisation of visual slips. It does not conduct new eye-tracking experiments but rather uses existing empirical knowledge to inform the theoretical claim that visual slips are more likely to emerge and be detectable in algorithmically curated and visually dense environments.

2.3. Analytical Synthesis

The analytical core of the methodology is a theoretical synthesis that brings together psychoanalytic constructs, cognitive attention models, and digital media research. This synthesis proceeds in three steps:

Theoretical Mapping: Identifying conceptual parallels between psychoanalytic notions of error and cognitive models of involuntary attention. For example, both frameworks recognise moments when conscious intention is overridden by other forces - unconscious associations in psychoanalysis and stimulus salience in cognitive science.

Contextual Extension: Extending these frameworks into the terrain of digital visual culture. This involves situating eye-tracking findings within a broader cultural analysis that

recognises how digital environments structure attention through design, algorithms, and visual rhetoric.

Integrative Conceptualisation: Formulating the visual slip as an interpretive concept that captures the interplay between unconscious orientation and mediated attention in contemporary environments. The concept functions as a bridge between micro-level perceptual events and macro-level cultural processes, allowing the analysis of where and how attention diverges from intentional control.

2.4. Methodological Scope and Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the scope and limitations of this methodology. The study deliberately avoids presenting new empirical data; instead, it mobilises existing findings to support a conceptual innovation. As such, the visual slip framework is inherently theoretical and interpretive, designed to provide a foundation for future empirical work. The study does not imply causal assertions about digital media and attention but proposes plausible connections based on converging evidence from cognitive science, media studies, and psychoanalytic theory.

Future research inspired by this framework might include experimental eye-tracking studies in controlled and ecological digital contexts, qualitative interviews about subjective experiences of attentional disruption, and computational analyses of gaze behaviour across platforms. Such investigations could test hypotheses about frequency, recurrence, and emotional valence of visual slips in different environments.

2.5. Conclusion of Methodological Approach

By combining theoretical reinterpretation, interdisciplinary integration, and engagement with empirical literature, this methodology provides a robust basis for understanding visual slips as cognitive, affective, and culturally mediated phenomena. It establishes a conceptual foundation for interpreting attention not as a unitary faculty of conscious intention, but as a dynamic frontier where intentional focus, unconscious structures, and mediated environments intersect and sometimes collide.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Parapraxis and the Logic of Error

Freud's theory of parapraxis reframes error as a meaningful event rather than a simple mechanical failure (Freud, 1901). In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, slips are described as moments in which unconscious impulses interfere with conscious aims, producing outcomes that appear accidental but are not entirely without motivation. From this perspective, error does not indicate a lack of competence; rather, it signals a temporary disruption within the structure of intention itself. This approach complicates the conventional distinction between intentional action and mistake. Instead of being strictly opposed, intention and error can be understood as entangled, with unconscious processes shaping both (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988). What appears as a deviation may reveal an alternative line of meaning that remains inaccessible under conditions of full conscious control.

Freud's intervention also shifts attention toward the ordinary. Parapraxis does not belong exclusively to exceptional or pathological states; it emerges within everyday practices such as speaking, remembering, and acting. As Ricoeur (1970) suggests, these minor disruptions provide indirect access to unconscious dynamics precisely because they interrupt the apparent coherence of conscious life. Later interpretations have extended this logic beyond language, emphasizing that slips and lapses are not confined to speech but can be observed across different domains of cognition and behaviour. Digital environments, social media feeds, and rapid image streams create conditions in which small disruptions in perception may become more frequent, highlighting how attention can be subtly redirected by external and internal forces (Bavelier et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Rather than treating error as noise within a system, these perspectives allow it to be considered a structural feature of psychic life—one that reveals the limits of control and the persistence of unconscious influence. This reconceptualization also carries broader philosophical implications. If error is understood as a productive disturbance rather than a simple deviation from normativity, it challenges assumptions about rational agency and cognitive transparency (Rancière, 2004; Noë, 2004). Moments of disruption suggest that the subject is not fully aligned with their own actions, and that meaning may emerge precisely where control weakens. Within this framework, visual perception may operate according to a similar logic: if slips in language reveal unconscious processes, involuntary deviations in seeing—what we term visual slips—may also be interpreted as meaningful events.

3.2. Visual Attention and Unconscious Orientation

Research in cognitive psychology has demonstrated that visual attention is not governed solely by conscious, top-down control. Rather, it emerges through the interaction between voluntary intention and stimulus-driven processes that operate, at least in part, outside conscious awareness (Posner, 1980; Theeuwes, 2010). Experimental studies on attentional orienting indicate that the eye frequently responds to salient stimuli before conscious evaluation occurs, producing rapid and often involuntary shifts in gaze (Holmqvist et al., 2011). These findings challenge the assumption that perception is fully transparent to the subject. Vision appears less as a stable channel of intentional access to the world and more as a dynamic system in which control is continuously negotiated (Noë, 2004). While cognitive models interpret such processes in terms of efficiency, salience, and adaptive behaviour, they often leave aside questions of meaning, memory, and subjective investment.

This study proposes that involuntary gaze shifts may carry interpretive significance, particularly when they are recurrent, persistent, or resistant to conscious correction. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these moments can be understood as instances in which unconscious orientations redirect attention—not randomly, but in ways reflecting prior experiences, desires, or anxieties (Freud, 1901). Contemporary digital media contexts intensify this effect: algorithmically curated feeds, notifications, and immersive interfaces can amplify attentional slips, increasing the frequency of unintentional gaze deviations (Rosen et al., 2013; Duchowski, 2022). Integrating this perspective with existing models of attention allows for a more layered understanding of perceptual deviation. Rather than treating involuntary gaze shifts as noise, they can be approached as meaningful interruptions within perceptual experience. This approach does not reject cognitive explanations but extends them by introducing a dimension of unconscious and culturally mediated significance.

3.3. Image Theory and the Construction of Perception

Image theory challenges the assumption that perception is a passive reception of a pre-given reality. Images actively participate in shaping how reality is organized, interpreted, and experienced (Mitchell, 2005; Didi-Huberman, 2005). Perception is mediated by prior visual knowledge, cultural frameworks, and memory layers, so seeing is never entirely immediate. In other words, what we see is always a combination of the external stimulus and the accumulated visual, symbolic, and affective templates that structure perception. From this perspective, perception is an active process in which meaning is continuously produced. The relationship between subject and object is structured through symbolic and affective investments that guide attention, often without explicit awareness (Arnheim, 1974; Manovich, 2001). Perception reorganizes visual input according to historically and culturally conditioned patterns, such as shared iconographies, visual metaphors, and culturally encoded cues. This aligns with psychoanalytic understandings of latent structures in experience, where prior visual and emotional histories unconsciously shape the focus and trajectory of attention (Freud, 1901; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988). This introduces a degree of instability into perceptual experience. Visual coherence is not automatic but must be actively maintained, and it can falter when unexpected stimuli, competing images, or digital content streams emerge. Visual slips occur precisely in these moments-when attention to a target object is interrupted by a salient or novel element, which may be emotionally, symbolically, or culturally charged. In digitally saturated environments, including social media feeds, algorithmically curated interfaces, and immersive multimedia platforms, rapid image circulation and constant stimulation intensify these dynamics, creating conditions in which attentional control is fragile (Rancière, 2004; Mirzoeff, 2011; Bavelier et al., 2020).

Digital media also introduces temporal and spatial compression in perception. Short-form videos, autoplaying content, and scrolling interfaces encourage rapid sequential attention shifts, increasing the likelihood of involuntary gaze deviations. Eye-tracking research confirms that attention in such environments is frequently hijacked by movement, color contrast, or unexpected content placement, producing predictable patterns of micro-slips that are often unconscious (Holmqvist et al., 2011; Duchowski, 2022). These micro-slips are not mere distractions; they reveal how perception is guided by culturally embedded visual codes, algorithmic affordances, and affective salience.

Visual slips thus reveal the underlying structure of perception itself. They expose how seeing is shaped not only by immediate stimuli but also by unconscious image production, cultural conditioning, and technologically mediated visual flows. By situating visual slips within image theory, these moments are understood as integral to perceptual functioning rather than as marginal anomalies. In fact, such slips can serve as windows into the interplay of cognitive, affective, and cultural forces that govern how we experience and interpret visual environments in both analogue and digital contexts.

4. STUDY AND RESULTS

4.1. Defining the Visual Slip

This study proposes the visual slip as a conceptual framework for understanding involuntary deviations of gaze within visual perception. A visual slip is defined as a moment in which conscious visual intention is temporarily displaced by underlying perceptual tendencies, resulting in an unintended shift of attention. Unlike simple attentional shifts or physiological reflexes, visual slips entail both persistence and meaning, functioning as revealing moments that expose otherwise latent perceptual and cognitive structures. While

such deviations may initially appear as minor distractions or mechanical responses, this study argues that they can also function as meaningful perceptual events. A visual slip typically occurs when an observer attempts to maintain focus on a specific object, yet attention is repeatedly drawn toward another element that seems, at first glance, unrelated to the intended focus. What distinguishes a visual slip from a simple attentional shift is not merely the movement of the gaze itself, but the repeated redirection of attention, suggesting a form of underlying constraint or structure influencing perception.

In certain cases, the gaze appears to return to a particular detail multiple times, forming a pattern of recurrence rather than random movement. This repetition introduces a dimension of interpretability, indicating that perceptual deviation may be shaped by underlying affective or mnemonic structures. Such patterns resonate with the psychoanalytic notion of compulsion to repeat, where recurrent mental or behavioral tendencies reveal underlying psychic investments that resist purely conscious control (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988).

The concept of the visual slip extends the logic of parapraxis beyond language by suggesting that unconscious processes may also manifest in the organisation of visual attention. Just as a slip of the tongue reveals a disruption in speech shaped by competing intentions, a visual slip reveals a disruption in seeing shaped by latent orientations and unconscious dispositions. In this sense, perception is not guided solely by what is present in the visual field, but also by what the observer brings into that field through prior experiences, cultural conditioning, and affective investments.

Crucially, this framework does not reject cognitive explanations of attention. Instead, it builds upon them by introducing an additional interpretive layer. Cognitive models demonstrate that attention is shaped by both top-down (intentional) and bottom-up (stimulus-driven) processes (Posner, 1980; Theeuwes, 2010), and eye-tracking research shows systematic patterns in gaze shifts that are not fully predictable (Holmqvist et al., 2011). However, cognitive models tend to prioritise efficiency and salience as explanatory factors. By contrast, the visual slip highlights how perceptual deviations may reflect meaning-laden patterns shaped by unconscious structures.

Contemporary digital media environments further complicate this picture. Social media platforms, algorithmically curated feeds, immersive interfaces, and rapidly changing image streams collectively generate a hyperdynamic visual field that constantly solicits and redirects attention (Rosen, 2013; Bavelier et al., 2020). In such environments, the frequency and intensity of involuntary gaze deviations increase, suggesting that visual slips are not exceptional anomalies but structural features of contemporary perception. Digital interfaces create conditions in which attention is never stable; the gaze is always negotiated among competing visual forces. From this perspective, visual slips may be considered both culturally conditioned and psychologically embedded events. Consider, for example, an observer scrolling through a social media feed: despite attempting to fixate on a headline or image, the eye is repeatedly drawn to clickable thumbnails, highlighted colors, or familiar faces. These involuntary deviations are not random distractions; they reflect cultural affordances that shape attention, and they can reveal the interplay between individual history, affective resonance, and mediated visual environments.

Importantly, the concept of the visual slip can function as both an analytical concept and a methodological lens. As an analytical concept, it provides a way of interpreting how attention is organised not only by external stimuli but also by unconscious processes and culturally mediated frameworks of visibility. As a methodological lens, it suggests that eye-tracking and other observational tools can be used to systematically identify moments of

involuntary deviation, which may then be analysed for deeper interpretive significance. For example, experimental eye-tracking studies have shown that visual attention patterns differ significantly when subjects engage with dynamic, interactive content compared to static images, indicating that digital contexts may amplify perceptual instability (Smith & Henderson, 2020). Similarly, research on visual cognition in multimedia environments underscores how attention is shaped by continuous streams of information, resulting in frequent realignment of gaze that resists simple intentional control (Wang et al., 2021). This framework ultimately reveals the complexity and instability inherent in perceptual experience. Visual slips are not trivial errors or random processes; they are windows into the dynamic negotiation between consciousness, unconscious structures, and culturally mediated image systems. By foregrounding these moments, the concept of the visual slip allows researchers to go beyond functionalist explanations of attention and to explore the rich interpretive terrain where cognition, culture, and unconscious orientation intersect.

4.2. Observations and Patterns of Visual Slips

Building on the conceptual definition of the visual slip, this section explores recurring patterns and observable tendencies in involuntary gaze deviations. While this study remains primarily theoretical, it draws upon existing eye-tracking research, cognitive psychology, and media studies to identify how visual slips manifest in contemporary visual environments. One prominent pattern involves recurrent attention to salient but contextually unintended features. For instance, when viewing a complex image or interface, observers frequently return to specific visual elements—bright colors, faces, or culturally familiar symbols—despite attempts to maintain focus elsewhere (Holmqvist et al., 2011; Smith & Henderson, 2020). These recurrent fixations suggest that certain visual stimuli are privileged by perceptual and affective systems, reflecting underlying mnemonic, emotional, or cultural structures rather than random distraction. Such repetition resonates with Freudian notions of unconscious compulsion and parapraxis, in which latent tendencies influence overt behavior.

Another pattern is rapid alternation between intended and unintended foci, particularly in dynamic or interactive contexts. Studies of scrolling through digital feeds, immersive interfaces, and rapidly updated advertisements reveal that attention oscillates between primary content and peripheral cues, creating micro-moments of perceptual instability (Bavelier et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). These oscillations demonstrate how digital content structures involuntary gaze, amplifying the frequency of visual slips and revealing the interplay between conscious goals and stimulus-driven orientation.

A third observation concerns culturally mediated affordances. In visual environments designed for interaction, such as social media feeds or video platforms, interface elements like notifications, clickable thumbnails, and highlighted text repeatedly capture attention, producing consistent patterns of gaze deviation (Rosen, 2013). These patterns are not purely functional; they are embedded with meaning, shaping how observers perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to digital content. Visual slips in such environments thus offer insight into the ways in which culture, technology, and cognition intersect. Furthermore, visual slips often display individual variability influenced by prior experience and affective investment. Observers with different backgrounds, memories, or emotional associations tend to exhibit distinct gaze patterns even when viewing identical visual stimuli (Duchowski, 2022). This supports the notion that visual slips reflect not only general attentional processes but also personal histories and unconscious dispositions, providing a window into subjective perception.

Finally, these observations suggest potential methodological applications. Eye-tracking combined with qualitative interpretation can identify recurrent visual slip patterns, enabling researchers to correlate involuntary gaze shifts with cognitive, affective, and cultural factors. Such approaches may inform experimental studies on attention, perception, and media interaction, as well as practical design considerations for digital interfaces, educational materials, and visual art practices. In sum, visual slips are not random or trivial events. They reveal systematic tendencies shaped by unconscious, cognitive, and cultural forces, and they provide a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of attention in contemporary visual environments. By observing patterns, repetitions, and interactions within these micro-moments, scholars can gain deeper insight into the interplay between perceptual control, unconscious motivation, and mediated visual experience.

5. DISCUSSION

The concept of the visual slip provides a lens through which the fragility, instability, and culturally mediated dimensions of visual perception can be thoroughly examined in contemporary visual environments. In spaces saturated with rapidly circulating images, algorithmically curated feeds, immersive social media platforms, and interactive digital interfaces, attention is continuously solicited, fragmented, and redistributed (Manovich, 2001; Mirzoeff, 2011; Rosen, 2013). Under these conditions, maintaining stable, intentional focus becomes increasingly challenging, rendering visual slips not merely incidental or anecdotal events but structurally meaningful phenomena that reveal latent perceptual orientations, unconscious tendencies, and culturally conditioned behaviors.

From an aesthetic perspective, visual slips challenge traditional assumptions regarding the autonomy and sovereignty of the observer. The observer is not a fully independent agent directing gaze at will but instead negotiates attention within a field of competing visual, mnemonic, affective, and cultural forces. Memory, desire, emotional resonance, prior experiences, and technological mediation collectively shape where attention settles-or fails to settle. Visual slips therefore expose the limits of perceptual control, demonstrating that conscious intention operates alongside unconscious, culturally structured influences that continuously guide, redirect, and occasionally disrupt vision.

Visual slips also offer opportunities for critical reflection on perception itself. By foregrounding moments of perceptual interruption, these events allow both observers and researchers to interrogate the mechanisms by which visual meaning is constructed, how attention is guided, and the ways in which gaze may be involuntarily redirected. What initially appears as error, distraction, or noise may in fact illuminate the underlying dynamics of perception, offering insights into the intersection of cognition, affect, and culture. In digital media environments, for instance, the repeated drawing of attention toward highlighted images, notifications, dynamic thumbnails, or algorithmically prioritized content exemplifies how mediated attention interacts with unconscious and culturally conditioned responses (Bavelier et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). These interactions underscore that perception is not simply a passive reception of visual stimuli but an active negotiation between the observer and complex, dynamic cultural structures.

The interdisciplinary implications of visual slips are particularly notable. Integrating psychoanalytic theory-which foregrounds unconscious motivation, latent mental structures, and compulsion to repeat (Freud, 1901; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988)-with cognitive psychology-which models attentional mechanisms, eye movement dynamics, and stimulus-response relationships (Posner, 1980; Holmqvist et al., 2011)-and image theory-which situates perception within symbolic, cultural, and affective frameworks (Mitchell, 2005; Didi-

Huberman, 2005)-the visual slip demonstrates that perceptual deviations are neither purely physiological nor purely functional phenomena. Rather, they are culturally and psychologically embedded moments that reveal the multifaceted processes shaping visual experience. The visual slip thus functions as both a theoretical and methodological tool, offering a richer understanding of perceptual instability and the interplay of conscious and unconscious forces in contemporary visual culture. Expanding on this, contemporary digital environments provide particularly fertile grounds for observing visual slips. Eye-tracking studies have demonstrated that interactive interfaces, scrolling feeds, video content, and rapidly changing visual streams induce more frequent involuntary gaze shifts compared to static images (Smith & Henderson, 2020). These involuntary shifts often follow predictable patterns, influenced not only by bottom-up salience but also by top-down expectations, prior knowledge, affective resonance, and algorithmically designed visual cues (Wang et al., 2021). Thus, the visual slip is not merely a stochastic or random phenomenon; it is a structurally conditioned outcome shaped by the intersection of human cognition and the affordances of digital design.

Moreover, visual slips highlight the ongoing negotiation between perceptual intention and unconscious orientation. Psychoanalytic interpretations suggest that recurrent gaze deviations may reflect latent desires, anxieties, or unresolved conflicts, analogous to linguistic slips in Freudian theory (Freud, 1901). In digital contexts, these deviations may manifest as persistent attention toward emotionally salient images, faces of known individuals, or culturally symbolic cues embedded within visual streams. Such patterns offer insight into how unconscious processes guide perception in ways that exceed conscious control, revealing the dynamic interplay between cognition, affect, and culture.

From a methodological perspective, recognizing visual slips as meaningful phenomena has implications for both experimental and qualitative research. Eye-tracking technologies allow for the systematic identification and quantification of involuntary gaze deviations, enabling empirical exploration of their frequency, persistence, and context-specific significance (Holmqvist et al., 2011; Duchowski, 2022). Simultaneously, qualitative approaches-including visual analysis, interpretive media studies, and artistic practice-can provide deeper insight into the affective, mnemonic, and cultural dimensions that underlie these perceptual patterns (Pişken, 2024; Pişken, 2025). By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, researchers can approach the visual slip as both a measurable and interpretable phenomenon, bridging cognitive science with cultural and aesthetic theory.

Importantly, visual slips challenge the assumption of perceptual transparency. Traditional cognitive models often conceptualize attention as either top-down or bottom-up, emphasizing efficiency, salience, and adaptive behavior (Posner, 1980; Theeuwes, 2010). While these models are invaluable for understanding stimulus-response dynamics, they risk overlooking the interpretive significance of perception, particularly in culturally dense and affectively charged environments. The visual slip underscores that perception is always situated, relational, and partially structured by forces outside conscious awareness, including culturally mediated expectations, aesthetic conventions, and emotional investments (Ranci re, 2004; Mirzoeff, 2011).

Finally, recognizing visual slips in digitally mediated environments illuminates broader theoretical implications. As attention becomes increasingly fragmented and externally solicited, the capacity for stable, intentional focus diminishes. In this context, visual slips are not mere anomalies but integral components of perceptual experience, revealing both the fragility of perceptual control and the enduring influence of unconscious, mnemonic, and cultural structures. By attending to these micro-level disruptions, researchers gain access to

the hidden architecture of perception, opening avenues for interdisciplinary investigation across visual studies, cognitive science, media theory, and psychoanalytic inquiry.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has introduced the concept of the visual slip as a theoretical extension of Freudian parapraxis into the domain of visual perception and image theory. By focusing on involuntary deviations of gaze, it has argued that such moments should not be understood merely as perceptual errors or random attentional shifts, but as meaningful events revealing the interplay between conscious intention, unconscious orientation, and culturally mediated perceptual structures.

Integrating insights from psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, and image theory, the study conceptualizes perception as dynamic, unstable, and continuously negotiated. Within this framework, visual slips are seen as points at which attention temporarily exceeds deliberate control, revealing underlying affective, mnemonic, and culturally conditioned patterns. They demonstrate that perception is not a passive reception of stimuli but an active process shaped by multiple intersecting forces, including unconscious tendencies, prior experiences, and social-cultural frameworks.

The primary contribution of this article lies in establishing the visual slip as both an analytical concept and a methodological tool. As an analytical concept, it offers a new lens for understanding how attention and perception operate beyond conscious awareness. As a methodological tool, it provides guidance for empirical research, suggesting that eye-tracking studies, dynamic visual experiments, and qualitative visual analyses can systematically capture moments of involuntary gaze deviation and interpret their significance within broader perceptual and cultural contexts.

Importantly, the visual slip highlights the inseparability of cognition, affect, and culture in contemporary visual environments. Digital media, social networks, and immersive interfaces amplify perceptual instability, making visual slips more frequent and salient. Understanding these phenomena provides insight into how perception is negotiated in complex, mediated, and information-rich environments. It emphasizes that attentional control is fragile and that perception is shaped continuously by unconscious and culturally structured forces. This conceptual framework opens multiple avenues for further research. Empirical studies could investigate the patterns, persistence, and determinants of visual slips in controlled and naturalistic digital contexts. Eye-tracking combined with affective and cognitive analysis can reveal systematic tendencies in involuntary gaze deviations. Artistic and visual research can explore how these moments are perceived, interpreted, and even intentionally incorporated into creative practices. By bridging theoretical, empirical, and aesthetic perspectives, the visual slip encourages interdisciplinary dialogue on perception, attention, and unconscious orientation.

Ultimately, the visual slip provides a nuanced understanding of contemporary visual experience. It demonstrates that seeing is not fully transparent or stable, but a process shaped by the continuous interaction of conscious intention, unconscious processes, and cultural mediation. Attending to these small but significant perceptual disruptions enriches our understanding of cognition, visual culture, and the underlying structures of perception, offering both theoretical insight and practical implications for future research in visual studies, cognitive psychology, and media theory.

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