



## RETURN TO THE BODY: The Vertical Video Format in Social Media

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| KEYWORDS                                                                                 | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| <i>Social Media<br/>Format<br/>Aspect ratio<br/>Cinema<br/>Video<br/>Selfie<br/>Body</i> | <i>This study addresses the popularisation of vertical video formats on social media designed for its use on mobile devices, exploring the implications of this shift. Through a review of the literature, the study links this aesthetic evolution to the one that happened in cinema with the emergence of panoramic formats in the 1950s, as well as to pictorial and photographic portrait formats, in order to connect the rise of the 9:16 aspect ratio in social media with the emergence of selfie culture and the glorification of the body.</i> |

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## 1. Introduction

This study delves into the causes and consequences of the paradigm shift that seems to be taking place due to the popularization of the vertical format in social media videos, an aspect ratio that represents a complete break with traditional (horizontal) film formats, and investigates its compositive and narrative implications, which relate to issues rooted in painting and photography (where portraiture has made use of vertical formats) rather than with what audiovisual media have represented until now.

Specifically, we aim to examine the following hypotheses: firstly, that the advent of the vertical format has precedent in the format changes undergone by cinema and television throughout their history. Secondly, that vertical formats are closely related to social media culture and, specifically, to the filming of the self, and are therefore not suitable for other types of audiovisual images. Thirdly, and for this same reason, that vertical formats are not destined to replace the traditional horizontal aspect ratios determined by the history of cinema and television, but rather to coexist occupying different territories, as the vertical format will continue to be used in the social media ecosystem and the horizontal format will continue to be predominant in film and television.

In recent years, social media and applications created specifically for their use on mobile devices have proliferated. Unlike platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, which can be used on mobile phones but also in personal computers and tablets, social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok favour use on smartphones, and their popularity has led to a significant shift in the predominant audiovisual formats of the Internet. Specifically, the 9:16 video format, which reverses the traditional 16:9 horizontal aspect ratio, has become increasingly popular. This format has been adopted mainly by the community of communicators and influencers, both professional and amateur, especially when filming themselves, using the new verticality for close-up filming of the self. However, despite its popularity, there is a scarcity of academic studies on the aesthetic and social implications of this change (Navarro-Güere, 2023).

Audiovisual language is omnipresent in all aspects of contemporary society, and it is therefore vital to pay attention to its implications (Gómez and Urbizu, 2021), which relate “the aesthetic paradigm and the political community” (Rancière, 2014, p. 14). So, what does a supposed aesthetic revolution with implications of individualism say about the contemporary political community?

However, this is not the first time there has been a paradigm shift in the aspect ratios of the audiovisual image. In the 1950s, the introduction of panoramic formats in cinemas raised questions similar to those we face today. This change allowed for a re-evaluation of the theories about cinematic composition, which had remained unchanged during the first decades of cinema’s existence (Eisenstein, 2014). Therefore, it is in that previous debate and, more broadly, in the trajectory of audiovisual media as a whole, and not just in contemporary social media and semiotic channels, where we can find clues that shed some light on the implications of the new format.

## 2. Design and Method

Formal subject: A comparison between new vertical image formats promoted by social networks and, more specifically, their use on mobile devices, and traditional audiovisual formats and their horizontal aspect ratio. We take an aesthetic approach without neglecting industrial and sociological aspects.

Type of research: a qualitative and documentary meta-analysis of secondary sources, analysing the evolution of formats and aspect ratios in images created for social media.

Hypothesis:

The shift from a horizontal format to a vertical one has implications for the viewer’s reception of the works and, in this case, these implications translate into a shift in focus from the collective or group (cinema in panoramic formats) to the individual (vertical image on social media).

The vertical format is a consequence of the emergence of selfie culture made possible by social media, as this format creates a type of image suitable for representing the self.

The rise of vertical formats and their break with traditional audiovisual image composition standards is not an unprecedented situation, but rather it has precedents in the evolution of formats throughout the history of film and television.

Despite being a historical constant, the horizontal format is not inherent to the audiovisual image, but rather an optional configuration that can be modified.

Vertical format does not pose an immediate threat to horizontal aspect ratios in cinema, but rather is an ideal configuration for a specific medium, the cell phone, and does not accommodate other screens and viewership modes.

Scope of study: We have performed a review of academic and professional literature on pictorial and photographic composition and aspect ratios. We have avoided a rigid temporal delimitation around the years of existence of social networks, turning instead to reflections on previous aspect ratios, mainly in the history of cinema. Therefore, in addition to the necessary review of academic works, texts by painters (Da Vinci, Klee, Kandinsky) and cinematographers (Oseman, Kroll) were also consulted.

Variables of analysis: The concept and expression of the self and formal elements of the image.

Research techniques used: content analysis and qualitative and bibliographic analysis of secondary data.

### 3. Fieldwork and Data Analysis

For the research, we have carried out a literature review, covering the study of traditional formats, as well as the –much scarcer– analysis of vertical formats both on social media and in other external manifestations influenced by them. We have paid attention to the fields of aesthetics, audiovisual language and the history of audiovisual media –particularly cinema– in order to establish which changes in approach, discourse and themes arise from the shift from horizontal to vertical aspect ratios. And, no less importantly, we have examined critical reactions to the last major paradigm shift in the aspect ratio of audiovisual images –the one which happened with the advent of widescreen formats in the 1950s–, in an attempt to ascertain whether the objections raised at that time are comparable to those that are being raised today.

#### 3.1 Page and Screen

On those social media platforms that are primarily audiovisual in nature and designed for their use on mobile devices, the vertical video format, with a 9:16 aspect ratio, has become popular. This format is, actually, just a rotation of 90 degrees of the traditional 16:9 landscape format, which is as common in cell phone screens as in movie theaters and contemporary flat-screen television sets. Although vertical formats have abounded in painting and photography throughout history, this has not been the case with moving pictures. Thus, the traditional distinction between the portrait and landscape formats has been used in recent decades primarily to describe the orientation of pages –for example, in word processors or photo editing software– rather than screens. Traditionally, content intended to be read has favoured a vertical orientation, since an excessive line length makes it difficult to read when shifting the gaze from one line to another, and it is not recommended that each line exceed 75 characters (Salinas and Pons, 2023). At the same time, as we have mentioned, cinema has been traditionally created horizontally, and this has conditioned the formats of other subsequent audiovisual screens, such as television sets and computer monitors. In the field of computing, in 1973 Xerox introduced the Xerox Alto computer, whose most notable feature was a vertical screen (Wadlow, 1981), but this was just an anecdote in a landscape where horizontal formats continued to set the standard.

For its part, the vertical orientation of mobile telephones, standardised since the launch of Apple first iPhone in 2007 (Mensel, 2015) has to do with ergonomic issues (Freitas Amorós, 2019). However, by becoming the new standard, a position that is comfortable for the hand and for the written medium becomes counterintuitive for audiovisual language, where verticality becomes a complete break with the norm.

#### 3.2 Origin and importance of the horizontal format

In audiovisual language, format is the ratio between the width and the height of the frame (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995). The importance of the frame when composing the audiovisual image cannot be overlooked. The choice of format should not be arbitrary, as it will determine all other staging choices. Thus, “this decision should be one of the first made by the filmmaker, and it implies that their thinking must be formulated in geometric and spatial terms” (Gómez and Urbizu, 2021, p. 16). But it is not only

a determining factor in creation, but also in the viewer's reception of the work (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995).

The horizontality of the film format was established in the early days of cinema, when "a fictional world began to be constructed that only had 180 degrees and a horizontal layout" (Gómez and Urbizu, p. 17). Along the same lines, Bordwell and Thompson (1995) point out that it was cinema pioneers such as Dickson, Edison or the Lumière brothers who established horizontal dimensions for the film frame from the outset, in an approximate ratio of 1.5:1. This standard remained largely unchanged until the late 1920s, when the advent of optical sound, which had to be incorporated into celluloid film as a longitudinal strip alongside the picture, forced a change in format. This led to the emergence of an almost square aspect ratio of 1.17:1 (Public Enemy, William A. Wellman, 1931). However, the format that eventually prevailed was the so-called academic format, 1.37:1 –also known as 1.33:1–, which became the new standard for decades, to the extent that when television emerged in the 1950s, it initially adopted the same measurements (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995).

These proportions, always wider than tall, although not excessively so, were intended to make it easier for the audience to read the elements of the frame (Aumont, 2013). Or, as Urbizu and Gómez point out in line with Aumont, "the cinematic blocking thus finds its *raison d'être* in the constant interplay with the viewer's desire to see" (Gómez and Urbizu, 2021, p.24). The academic format is rectangular, but not too much, and that makes it easier to distinguish its geometric centre and therefore to distribute the other elements on screen (Gómez and Urbizu, 2021).

But it was precisely the advent of television what forced the film industry to seek new ways to "fight the small screen of the television with the weapons of spectacle and novelty" (Gubern, 1989, p. 333). Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s appeared the widescreen formats, which had already been experimented with previously: Fox purchased the *hypergonar* anamorphic lens, created in 1925 by Hénri Chrétien, and they registered it under the Cinemascope trademark. This format expanded the standard 1:1.37 format to an aspect ratio of 1:2.55, almost doubling its width. The first film in Cinemascope was *The Robe* (Henry Koster, 1953), and it was soon followed by new panoramic formats patented by the other majors: Cinerama, Vistavision, Todd-AO... Alongside these, and in order to better capture the full width of vast landscapes, became popular the 70 mm film, the same format used today in the IMAX projection system.

These new and extremely horizontal formats were met with widespread criticism, with the films being accused of becoming an empty spectacle, designed to attract a dwindling audience to the movie theaters (Gubern, 1989). Authors such as Rudolf Arnheim pointed out that this change coincided, not only in time but also in its motivations, "with the desire for colour, stereoscopic and sound cinema. It is the desire of people who do not know that the artistic effect is linked to the limitations of the medium and who prefer quantity to quality" (Arnheim, 1990, p. 60). Finally, it was pointed out that the new formats required renovations in movie theaters and, therefore, financial investments (Gubern, 1989). But, fundamentally, critics questioned the suitability of these new aspect ratios for intimate scenes, since the excessive width made it difficult to frame close-ups of the face (Gubern, 1989). However, reservations about this last aspect gradually faded (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995), and critics began to view this evolution of cinema more favourably, even suggesting that:

this widening of the visual panorama was in line with the general evolution of the aesthetics of modern cinema, intended (like the sequence shot) to give greater cohesion and spatial continuity to the narrative, in contrast to the great fragmentation of space in old montage cinema. (Gubern, 1989, p. 334)

Once the initial rejection had been overcome, the necessary aesthetic analysis prevailed. Inevitably, the emphasis was placed on the accentuated horizontality of the new formats (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995), so that traditional compositional techniques had to be adapted. And, in this sense, the use of aspect ratios greater than 1.85:1 has been sustained –although not widespread– from then until the present day, sometimes offering notable artistic rewards, as Gómez and Urbizu point out in their analysis of *Punch-Drunk Love* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2002), shot in 2.39:1 format, and where horizontality is "an essential part of the eloquence of the composition" (Gómez and Urbizu, 2021, p. 236).

In contrast to the early days when, as noted above, panoramic formats emerged as a quest for spectacular effects and were therefore used mainly in certain genres such as westerns and big historical blockbusters, the evolution of cinema in the second half of the 20th century shows that "format is not

automatically dictated by dramatic content. It is a creative choice on the part of the cinematographer and the director" (Ryan, 1993, p. 13). For this reason, even within the same franchise, filmmakers vary the aspect ratio from one film to another, as is the case in the different installments of the Marvel or DC universes (Oseman, 2019).

### **3.3 Vertical formats in social media**

As we have seen, different audiovisual image formats have emerged throughout history, marked or conditioned by technical, expressive or industrial needs, such as the incorporation of soundtracks into celluloid or the rise of cinema as entertainment in contrast to television. Therefore, the emergence of vertical formats can be attributed to similar reasons, in that "necessity generates form" (Kandinsky, 2002, p. 22; cited in Gómez and Urbizu, 2021, p. 367). The aforementioned ergonomics of mobile phones is compounded here by the selfie culture, which seeks at all times to capture the individual body of the speaker (San Pablo Moreno et al., 2019). In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish the selfie from the traditional self-portrait, also because of the aforementioned production constraints: whereas the self-portrait in painting is necessarily linked to the existence of the mirror, the selfie cannot be understood without the cell phone (Ayerbe and Cuenca, 2019), and therefore separated from its screen format. After all, one of the things that distinguishes the selfie from the self-portrait is that the former is intended to be shared "in the virtual public space of social networks and the digital universe" (San Pablo Moreno et al., 2019, p. 223).

On the other hand, the break with tradition in terms of aspect ratios has been made possible by a communication channel such as the Internet, which has its own rules and is constantly changing, and where audiovisual content is not yet subject to any standard of content or format (Cueto, 2007). Although this statement from 2007 remains valid in 2026, more doubtful is the idea that:

given the continued popularity of Hollywood films and the amount of money they generate, phenomena of fleeting popularity such as re-editing of famous titles, amateur films distributed online, and personal videos are nothing more than anecdotal occurrences confined to a very specific consumer space that does not necessarily threaten their (alleged) competitors. (Cueto, 2007, p. 36)

What is is that the advent of the mass media and social media, with their new forms of communication, has sparked some mistrust. As Žižek (2013) points out,

if the modern universe is the universe of bytes, cables, chips and electric current hidden behind the screen, the postmodern universe is the universe of naive trust in the screen that renders irrelevant any examination of 'what lies behind it' (p. 219).

For this reason, the philosopher proposes "adopting a 'conservative' attitude towards cyberspace, like Chaplin's towards sound apparent cinema" (Žižek, 2013, p. 217). In fact, as far as this study is concerned, the fundamental question has to do with the relevance of the visual framework. Does the "naive trust in the screen" mentioned by Žižek make the choice of format irrelevant? This does not seem to be the case, insofar as the aspect ratio is key to achieving a particular compositional effect (Ryan, 1993). As José Luis Guarnier argues, "every aesthetic reveals a metaphysic" and, therefore, "condemning a *mise-en-scène* means nothing other than condemning the ideas that have motivated and shaped it" (Guarnier, 2001, p. 68). In the case of social media, then, challenging or accepting the validity of the vertical format implies challenging or accepting the selfie culture, but also that of transience. This is because the other characteristic feature shared by vertical social media such as Instagram or Snapchat is the ephemeral nature of their content: a transience that detracts from the aesthetic work on images designed to disappear within 24 hours (Armas, 2020). This transience also poses a historiographical problem, insofar as it is impossible to archive the works themselves (Armas, 2020). And therein may lie one of the reasons for the scarcity of academic literature (Navarro-Güere, 2023) on works that emerge in huge quantities but vanish just as quickly.

However, in the face of the mistrust aroused by vertical aspect ratios, it is worth returning to the evolution of formats in classic Hollywood and to the voices that have questioned the hegemony of horizontality, which, although characteristic of cinema, has not reached other forms of image:

We are so used to the image being rectangular that we should remember that this is not necessarily the case. In painting and photography, of course, images have frames of different sizes and shapes [...]. In cinema, the possibilities have been far more limited. (Bordwell and Thomson, 1995, p. 202)

However, despite the universalisation of horizontality in screen formats, there have been various voices defying this standardisation throughout history. While filmmakers such as Abel Gance (with *Napoleon*, 1926) exacerbated the horizontal dimension, Sergéi Eisenstein advocated just the opposite in his 1931 lecture *The Dynamic Square*, where he proposed the creation of an adaptable format: a space that would allow the projection format to vary according to the specific compositional needs of each shot (Eisenstein, 2014). And it was precisely the Soviet filmmaker who alluded to the use of verticality as the motivation for this dynamic square:

for thirty years we have been content to see excluded 50 per cent of composition possibilities, in consequence of the *horizontal shape* of the frame. By the word "excluded" I refer to all the possibilities of *vertical, upright composition*. And instead of using the opportunity afforded by the advent of wide film to break that loathsome upper part of the frame, which for thirty years – me personally for six years – has bent and bound us to a passive horizontalism; we are on the point of emphasizing this horizontalism still more. (Eisenstein, 2014, p. 49)

### 3.4 Back to painting and architecture

Although such radical proposals as Eisenstein's have not found a place in cinema, Bordwell and Thompson's comments on the specificity of the horizontal film format compared to other forms of expression necessarily open the door to looking back at these forms in order to compare them with the vertical uses of imagery on social media. Studies on painting and sculpture already take into account that "man is a vertical animal who builds vertically" (Ghyka, 1977, p. 223). The question that arises here is whether the verticality of traditional pictorial or photographic formats is analogous to that of TikTok or Snapchat formats.

It is true that classical treatises on painting have not been as prolific in their reflections on format as they have been on other aspects of the craft, presumably due to trade secrecy (Criado Pérez, 2011). Despite this, it is clear that rectangular shapes in pictorial canvases have been a constant since ancient times, and the ratio of their sides has traditionally been marked by the golden ratio (Criado Pérez, 2011), which establishes a proportionality of 1.618033... between both sides, and which found its place in the arts as a reflection of a proportionality that is repeatedly found in nature (Ghyka, 1977). However, the vertical or horizontal orientation of this rectangular shape is usually determined by the subject portrayed, with a division into two broad categories: horizontal for landscapes, vertical for portraits.

But for the golden ratio to be applicable to the aspect ratios of cinema, there would have to be a frame of approximately 1:1.61, either vertical or landscape. In other words, closer to 1:1.66 than to 1:1.77, which represents the vertical 9:16 format of the platforms. In sum, the verticality of this new paradigm is much more pronounced than in traditional modes of pictorial portraiture. This is evident in cinematic approaches to 9:16 such as Damien Chazelle's short film *The Stunt Double* (2020), made by the director of *La La Land* (2016) on commission from Apple to promote the iPhone 11 device (Barfield, 2020). 9:16 restricts what can be shown on both sides of the image, enclosing the body and excluding much of the background, in open contradiction to the classical pictorial idea that "the main part of painting is the background of the painted objects" (Da Vinci, 2013, p. 252).

### 3.5 Body, self and intimacy

In short, then, the 9:16 format takes to the extreme an idea that classical painting already incorporated naturally: verticality is not an ideal orientation for landscapes or backgrounds, but it is ideal for showing the body, and therefore perfectly suited to the selfie culture, whether this practice is understood as narcissism or empowerment (Ayerbe and Cuenca, 2019). After all, "the position of the character in the frame seeks to reflect their place in the world" (Gómez and Urbizu, 2021, p. 237), and at the same time "the horizontal-vertical construct is the basic relationship between man and his environment" (Dondis, 1984, p. 36). Vertical framing implies elevating the self and excluding the surrounding context, and this

ties in with Gerard Imbert's idea that, in cinema and other aesthetic manifestations, “the body is central [...] in the construction of identity, even if only as pure appearance, look; hence the need to over-signify its presence” (Imbert, 2010, p. 32).

In recent years, digital environments have given rise to a paradox regarding this centrality. Thus, Žižek (2013) points out how there has been a simultaneous rise in sedentary lifestyles caused by the computerised automation of everyday processes that previously required physical participation, and the emergence of a cult of the body. The selfie culture allows us to reconcile this apparent contradiction, combining the exaltation of the body with the stillness of image production on social media.

Be that as it may, Paul Klee already pointed out that “the orientation in space of the work is effective on the basis of the idea that the work is the mirror image of the self, that is, a vertical mirror image of a standing self or, at least, of an upright self” (Klee, 2023, p. 12), and that, when contemplating a pictorial work, “the vertical self and the work look each other in the eye” (Klee, 2023, p. 13). If the work being contemplated is in turn an audiovisual representation of its own creator, the verticality of the format becomes a direct and almost obligatory consequence.

It is also worth noting here the relationship between the verticality of TikTok or Instagram and the popularisation of tools for blurring or hiding the background in videoconferencing applications such as Skype, Zoom or Teams: when the format remains horizontal, the user is allowed to override this horizontality and, by means of these filters, exclude the context from the image. All this points to the fact that the internet and social media are giving rise to a new idea of privacy (Armas, 2020), which some authors have linked to the indie film genre of home movies, where “the desire for intimate expression in the diary is combined with the exhibitionism inherent in the presence of the camera” (Cueto, 2007, p. 29). In both territories, the intimate-public dichotomy is blurred, calling into question the limits of what can or should be filmed conventionally. “Most of humanity thinks that the private should not be filmed, because it means exposing it to the gaze of others” (Cueto, 2007, p. 29), but it is precisely this exposure that gives meaning to the selfie culture, fundamentally supported by the approval of others in the form of likes, comments and other forms of engagement. As Gérard Imbert points out, this new way of producing images allows us to

explain the exhibition of intimacy, not as a perverse process, but as a way of assuming a new *imago*, of exhibiting an image of oneself that reveals an overcoming of modesty, the decline of the taboo on feeling, the assumption of the invisible part of being. (Imbert, 2013, p. 199)

Thus, it seems clear that the 9:16 format adapts to the needs of users to portray themselves and only themselves, excluding from the frame everything that does not belong to the selfie.

### **3.6 Expanded frame vs. cropped frame**

Finally, it is worth mentioning a recent phenomenon that has combined the rise of the 9:16 format with the advent of generative artificial intelligence technologies. We are referring to the act of modifying existing film scenes (generally from the Hollywood industry) to adapt them to the vertical screen, not by cropping the sides of the shot, but by using AI to add new spaces above and below the original image. Again, although the phenomenon is new, it is not without precedent in the history of traditional cinema and television, as the intervention on a film frame to modify its aspect ratio and thus adapt it to the format of a new device was a common process (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995) from the emergence of television to the arrival of modern widescreen televisions.

In the days of home video on standard-format televisions, the telecine process often modified films shot in widescreen formats to fit the more square aspect ratio of the television. This led to the emergence of processes such as scanning and letterboxing (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995), which cropped the sides of the image, sometimes even dividing a single widescreen shot into two different successive shots showing the left and right sides of the original frame, respectively.

In June 2024, the website Xataka collected a large number of examples of films expanded vertically using generative artificial intelligence (Alcolea, 2024). These examples show that the technique does nothing more than add empty information –what in audiovisual language is called ‘air’– to the top and bottom of the frame. More sky and more ground, leaving the original frame in the centre and thus nullifying the visual tension of the original composition. But in addition, if framing necessarily involves one of the most important decisions in the film-making process (Gómez and Urbizu, 2021), expanding

the frame using AI only serves to negate the filmmaker's decision-making process, including what they had decided to leave out of the frame. This gesture, therefore, openly goes against the notion that “the true ethics of cinema consist of respect for those areas of visibility that are not available, in not wanting to see everything and not forcing the image of what does not want –or does not need–to be seen” (Quintana, 2001, p. 11).

In any case, it should be mentioned that in recent years there has been a certain revitalisation of more square formats –or, in any case, less panoramic ones– also in traditional cinema (Kroll, n.d.). Director of photography Neil Oseman interprets Joss Whedon's decision to shoot *The Avengers* (2012) in 1.85:1 format –as opposed to the usual 2.37:1 of previous Marvel productions– to the verticality of the action in the film's third act, where New York architecture determines a division into different heights (Oseman, 2019). At the same time, director Peyton Reed places his motivation for a similar decision for his film *Ant Man* (2015) in the fact that the main character's superpower, shrinking and enlarging at will, is an eminently vertical physical act (Kaye, 2015). This is not exclusive to Hollywood: some recent examples of even squarer formats include *Ida* (Pawel Pawlikowsky, 2013), *Jauja* (Lisandro Alonso, 2014), *Son of Saul* (Saul Fia, László Nemes, 2015), *American Honey* (Andrea Arnold, 2016), *First Reformed* (Paul Schrader, 2017), all in the academic format of 1.37:1; or *The Lighthouse* (Robert Eggers, 2019), in an even squarer format of 1.19:1. On the fringes of the industry have emerged initiatives such as Vertical Cinema, a travelling programme of short films in the same 9:16 format as social media, but these are mainly experimental and non-narrative pieces (Rodriguez, 2017 and Pattison, 2018). Although these are exceptional examples, and too few to suggest a general trend, they do point to a diversification and plurality of formats, where each of these no longer carries a single meaning (Armas, 2020), and specifically to a rediscovery of the possibilities of vertical composition similar to that advocated by Sergei Eisenstein.

#### 4. Results

Screen format remains a key element in composing audiovisual images. In the field of social media, the ergonomics of mobile phones have dictated a paradigm shift consisting of the verticalisation of formats, moving from the dominance of 16:9 (horizontal) to 9:16, resulting from filming while holding the phone in the same position as when making calls. This new way of capturing and constructing images poses a challenge to the creation of audiovisual images in traditional media –primarily film and television– but it has clear precedents in painting and photography, where the vertical aspect ratio has been used regularly and consistently throughout history. On the other hand, although cinema has opted for horizontal formats since its inception, since the 1920s there have been filmmakers and voices that have questioned the need for this to be the case. Furthermore, the evolution since the 1950s towards panoramic formats such as Cinemascope also shows initially critical reactions to new ways of composing the shot, seen at the time as empty and tending towards mere spectacle.

On the other hand, although parallels can be found in the critical voices that emerged in response to this evolution in cinema, for practical purposes their implications are diametrically opposed to those offered by the 9:16 format, in that panoramic aspect ratios (from 1.85:1 or 16:9 to 2.35:1, which would be approximately equivalent to 21:9) have been accompanied by a tendency to exalt the landscape and the context of the frames to the detriment of the human figure –and part of the criticism they received was due to their supposed inadequacy to portray the intimacy of the close-up– whereas 9:16 produces the opposite effect: a return to the capture of the body and the exclusion of the environment. This trend is also part of the so-called selfie culture, which involves an exaltation of the self as part of the process of identity construction on social media.

Furthermore, cinema itself has not remained immune to these changes. On the one hand, the emergence of the 9:16 format has coincided with a return to less panoramic aspect ratios –although still markedly horizontal– that make greater use of the vertical possibilities of the image. Various experiments have also been carried out with vertical cinema, both from an experimental perspective, such as the Vertical Cinema initiative, and from more mainstream positions, such as Damien Chazelle's short film *The Stunt Double*, although so far these have been isolated initiatives that have not been widely imitated. For their part, social media have made use of generative artificial intelligence to modify

film images by expanding their frames to 9:16 proportions, adding information that did not exist in the original work.

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

Although there is not yet a great amount of academic literature on vertical formats, an analysis of classical compositional theories in painting, photography and film allows us to draw conclusions about their possible implications. The emergence of the 9:16 format is unequivocally linked to social media designed for their use on mobile devices, as well as to selfie culture. This vertical aspect ratio privileges the centrality of the body and empowers the self, but at the same time leaves the context and landscape out of the frame, limiting intimacy to the subject and not to the display of the surrounding environment. Although this is something it has in common with pictorial and photographic portrait formats, the 9:16 proportions are even more vertical, taking to the extreme the idea of the exaltation of the self, which has been seen both as a tendency towards individualism and superficiality in the current social media landscape, and as a new way of constructing digital identity and the relationship with the display of intimacy, now confined to the limits of one's own body.

On the other hand, the use of the 9:16 format linked to generative artificial intelligence to expand film frames and adapt them to the phone screen exert a violent modification on the original works, similar to that exerted for years in telecine processes intended for domestic viewing of cinema on 4:3 televisions. These changes rob the author of the work of the value of their initial and main decisions: format, framing and composition.

The historical dominance of horizontal formats in cinema has not prevented it from being questioned by various theoretical voices such as Bordwell and Thompson or filmmakers such as Eisenstein, who went so far as to propose an image format that could be dynamically adapted to the compositional needs of each specific shot in a film. However, the application of vertical formats outside the mobile ecosystem encounters, as was the case with Eisenstein's dynamic square, difficulties in execution: just as cinemas had to make costly and complicated adaptations to screen films in panoramic formats, a radical overhaul of screens would be necessary to accommodate vertical projections, which is even more complex and expensive than in the previous example due to architectural issues. Therefore, despite occasional experiments with so-called vertical cinema, it is reasonable to assume that vertical and horizontal formats will coexist, applied to radically different fields: 9:16 for social media and videos intended for mobile devices, where the human figure will remain privileged, and a variety of formats with varying degrees of horizontality in the field of cinema.

Finally, this study points to future avenues of research that relate the vertical format and its application to filming the body to the processes of identity construction of the self from the field of psychology.

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