



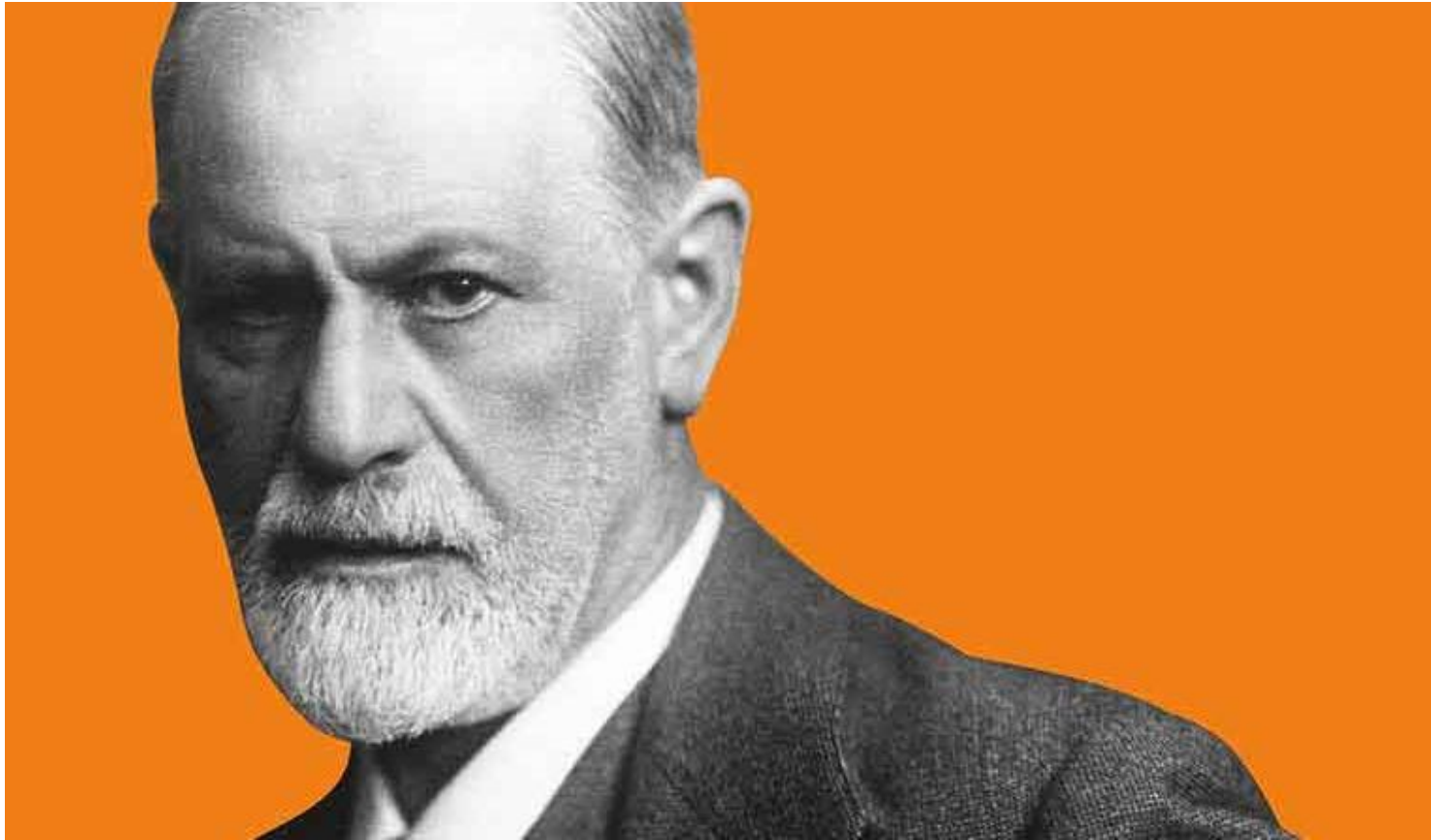
Carolina Hein

Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and
Narrative Cinema

Studienarbeit

The Male Gaze

Laura Mulvey



Psychoanalysis Meets Semiology

- If Semiology the study of signs and their meanings in cultural contexts, then Psychoanalysis is the study of the unconscious and its connection with human motivation and personality.
- Sigmund Freud founder of [psychoanalysis](#) described dreams as the “royal road to the unconscious”, in other words the key to our hidden desires.
- Freud thought of the human personality as consisting of three distinct parts the id, the ego and the super ego.
- Psychoanalytic Film/Media Theory discusses the interplay between these three structures in relation to a subject’s reception and relationship with themes and characters featured in media texts.

Visual Pleasures in Narrative Cinema

– Laura Mulvey 1975

- Psychoanalysis theory used as a "political weapon" to demonstrate how the patriarchal subconscious of society shapes our viewing experience and the production of media texts.
- Media texts are organized along lines that correspond to the cultural subconscious which is essentially patriarchal in nature.
- Mainstream media texts use women in order to provide a pleasurable visual experience for men.
- The narrative of these texts structures its gaze as masculine. The woman is always depicted as the object of the gaze, not the one doing the looking.





Twin Mechanisms

- The first involves the objectification of the image, and the second one the identification with it.
- The first form of pleasure relates to what Freud termed as **scopophilia** or the pleasure derived from subjecting someone to one's gaze.
- The second form of pleasure other which operates alongside the scopophilia is the **identification** with the represented character which is brought about by needs stemming from the Freudian Ego.

Passive Woman/Active Man

- Both mechanism discussed in the previous section, Mulvey says, are gendered.
- Scopophilia in films is a structure which functions on an axis of passive/active with the man always on the active gazing side and the woman on the passive "to-be-looked-at-ness" side.
- This is done in two completing manners, with both the male figure within the diegesis and the camera looking at the woman and directing the viewer's objectifying gaze. the woman in films in meant to be looked at.
- The distinction is also manifested in the structure of the cinematic narrative. Films tend to revolve around a dominant male figure with which the viewer can identify.
- This identification is similar to [Lacan's mirror stage](#) in which the narcissistic fragmented subjected experiences himself a whole and potent in a reflected self image. Methods that produce cinematic realism aid in this mirror-like identification which reinforces the ego.



Starter: Identify how the twin mechanisms are operating in these CSP texts



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the great grooming action of a hair cream from a liquid.

If you haven't been getting all you want from a liquid hair groom, get new Score Liquid. Gives you the great grooming action of a cream. That's because new clear Score Liquid is made by the men who make clear Score Hair Cream. So you get great grooming action. And you also get Score's famous greaseless look, Score's famous masculine scent.

Score Liquid Hair Groom

Score—Three Ways.™ Hair Cream, Spray Deodorant, Liquid Hair Groom.

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The advertisement features a man in a khaki shirt and shorts, holding a rifle, standing in a jungle setting. He is surrounded by several women in similar attire, some of whom are looking at him with admiration. The overall tone is one of rugged masculinity and attraction.

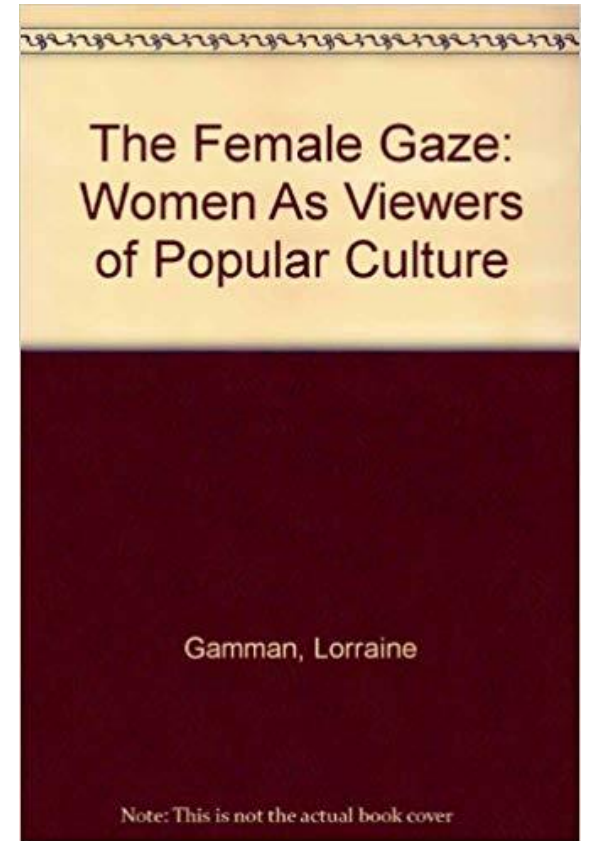
The Paradox

- The female cinematic figure combines attraction with the playing on deep fears of castration.
- The male subconscious has two ways of escaping his fear of castration. One is the demystification of the female figure is the dismantling of her mysteries (in films: the female figure is punished or saved by the male figure).
- The other way to escape fear of being castrated by the woman is through the fetishisation of her (for instance as the glamorous unobtainable star).
- Films, according to Mulvey, attempt to resolve the tension between being attracted to the woman and fearing her, and therefore they provide for the needs of the masculine form of desire.



Criticisms of The Male Gaze

- This theory was criticised for reinforcing heterosexuality.
- Also criticised for assuming a passive, un-negotiating viewer.
- Mulvey was writing about cinema in 1975 (pre sex discrimination act) and while her ideas are still useful, there are arguably now more examples of mainstream female directors and narratives constructed from a woman's viewpoint to counter the arguments in her essay.



The Reversal of the Gaze

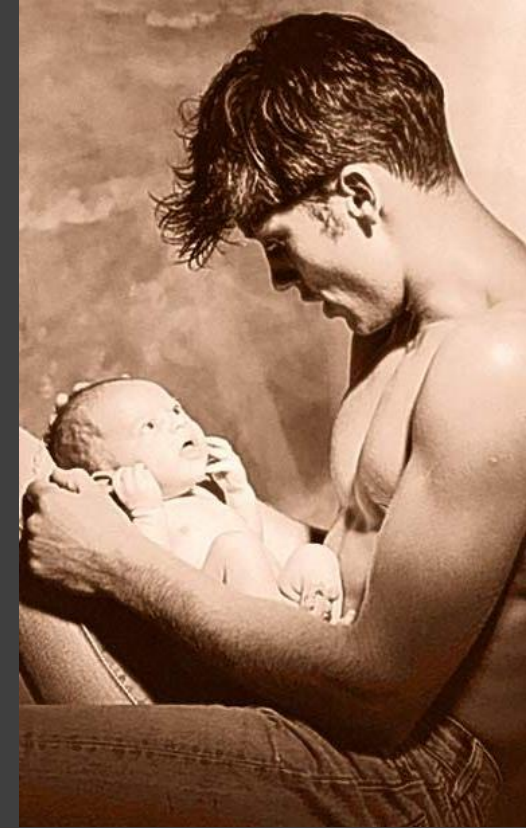
Lorraine Gamman (1991)

- The Female Gaze can be distinguished from that of a male through its displacing of [scopophilic](#) power, not simply the inversion of the male gaze, which creates the possibility of a multiplicity of viewing angles.
- The female gaze cohabits the space occupied by men, rather than being entirely divorced from it.
- The role of the Female Gaze is not to appropriate the traditional male form of "voyeurism;" its purpose is to disrupt the [Phallogentric](#) power of the male gaze by providing for other modes of looking.



Arguments against the Female Gaze as Empowering

- The female gaze – which is masculine by definition, suggests that looking at the male body is less dangerous than the homosexual gaze.
- Narrative and visual techniques lessen the degree of subjection of the male body to the gaze of the female spectatorship:
 - Men stare back at the viewer, looking up or away from the camera, the text accompanying the images personifying male bodies and thus creating characters
 - Men presented as active (e.g. signs of physical activity or labour) and in control, just happening to be looked at, not as posing specifically for being viewed by female or male spectators
 - Male bodies presented like romantic objects, not sexual ones (e.g. Playgirl)



Activity

- Find two examples of media texts, one which appears to deploy the traditional “Male” Gaze and one which uses the newer “Female” Gaze. Explain how these examples use the twin mechanisms of scopophilia and identification to engage with their intended audiences.