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VISUAL PLEASURE IN FILM THEORY AND PRACTICE: LAURA MULVEY REVISITED.

Kategoria przyjemności wzrokowej w teorii i praktyce filmowej. Wokół koncepcji Laury Mulvey.

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Summary

The presented Ph.D. thesis study tries to gather and categorize the most significant directions of discussion generated by Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" which has become the most influential essay in fields of film studies and visual culture. Written in 1973 and published in magazine Screen in 1975 celebrates fifty years of its prolific "transdiscursive disappointment". Mulvey reveals and challenges the mechanisms of the cinema and its magic in the past and applies psychoanalytic theory as a political weapon, illustrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form. In her work Mulvey uses psychoanalysis to discover how creation of films was dependent on pre-existing patterns ascribed to gender and social formations that have shaped them.

The issues of visual pleasure and the male gaze concept together with psychoanalytic perspective used by Mulvey created an explosive combination that has changed perspective in most areas of humanities. In the heat of debate new paradigms of thought and new paths of polemics were created. Limitations and blind spots of the essay, some claim, brought the visual pleasure and representation of desire to the forefront of cinematic discussion about gender, female gaze and spectatorship, category of erotic spectacle and fetish on screen. (hetero)sexual difference concept, fluid identity construction, as well as invisibility of race, ethnicity, class, and personal experience. Today considered as manifesto, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" often provoked very harsh responses, but all these triggered the re-reading and re-evaluation of heteronormative assumptions proposed by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic model which Mulvey adopts, and in consequence her male gaze theory sparked the creation of gendered gaze theory, queer theory as well as fluid, intersectional models of identification. Rejection of the ideological imperatives of Mulveyian Western white male gaze and heterosexual binary looking relations in filmic theory is presented in photographic work and visual projects of both gay, lesbian or people of colour, who responded directly or indirectly to Mulvey's theoretical assumptions concerning visual pleasure and subjectivity of desire. After fifty years of essay writing, concept of female visual pleasure and female filmic erotic practice has evolved immensely, both theory and practice. Even if the feminist and other filmic theoretical response to "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" provocative categories is very dispersed and difficult to embrace, essay lives its own life as says Mulvey and the polemic around is worldwide known, still discussed, and appreciated. As for the female filmic practice representing desire the field still seems to be less invisible than male, reason being for that it is

often depreciated and not supported enough institutionally, which all works for Mulvey's male gaze theory still being at work.

Streszczenie

Projekt rozprawy doktorskiej zbiera i kategoryzuje najważniejsze kierunki dyskusji wygenerowane przez przełomowy artykuł Laury Mulvey "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", który stał się najbardziej wpływowym esejem w dziedzinie studiów filmowych i kultury wizualnej. Napisany w 1973 roku i opublikowany w czasopiśmie Screen w 1975 roku świętuje swoje pięćdziesięciolecie "transdyskursywnego rozczarowania". Kwestie wizualnej przyjemności i koncepcji męskiego spojrzenia wraz z psychoanalityczną perspektywą zastosowaną przez Mulvey stworzyły wybuchową kombinację, która zmieniła perspektywę myśli humanistycznej. W ogniu debaty powstały nowe paradygmaty myślenia i nowe ścieżki polemiki. Ograniczenia i martwe punkty eseju, jak twierdzą niektórzy, wysunęły wizualną przyjemność i reprezentację pożądania na pierwszy plan filmowej teoretycznej dyskusji o płci, kobiecym spojrzeniu, o kategorii erotycznego spektaklu i fetyszu na ekranie, jak również o (hetero)seksualnej koncepcji różnicy, płynnej konstrukcji tożsamości, a także niewidoczności rasy, pochodzenia etnicznego, klasy i osobistego doświadczenia. Dziś uznawana za manifest, "Przyjemność wizualna i kino narracyjne" często wywoływała bardzo ostre reakcje, co powodowało ponowne odczytywanie i przewartościowywanie heteronormatywnych założeń proponowanych przez freudowski oraz lacanowski model psychoanalityczny, który przyjęła Mulvey. Wszystko to w konsekwencji przyczyniło się do powstania teorii męskiego spojrzenia, które zapoczątkowało teorię genderowego spojrzenia, teorię Queer oraz przyniosło modele analizy spojrzenia oraz identyfikacji w kategoriach płynności i intersekcjonalności. Odrzucenie ideologicznych imperatywów Mulveyowskiego zachodniego białego męskiego spojrzenia i heteroseksualnych binarnych relacji patrzenia w teorii filmowej zostało zaprezentowane w pracach fotograficznych i projektach wizualnych artystów homoseksualnych, jak i osób należących do innych niż biała rasa, które bezpośrednio lub pośrednio odpowiedziały na teoretyczne założenia Mulvey dotyczące przyjemności wizualnej i podmiotowości pożądania. W czasie pięciu dekad, koncepcja kobiecej przyjemności wizualnej i kobiecej filmowej praktyki erotycznej przeszła ogromną ewolucję, zarówno teoretyczną, jak i praktyczną. Nawet jeśli teoretyczne odpowiedzi na prowokacyjne kategorie "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" są bardzo rozproszone, esej żyje własnym życiem jak mówi Mulvey, a polemika wokół niego jest znana na całym świecie, doceniana i wciąż dyskutowana w nowych obszarach, które wychodzą poza kulturę wizualną i filmową. Kobieca praktyka filmowa reprezentująca pożądanie, wciąż jest mało widoczna, z tego powodu, iż często jest deprecjonowana i

niewystarczająco wspierana instytucjonalnie, co wszystko działa na korzyść teorii męskiego spojrzenia Mulvey, która wciąż wydaje się prawdziwa.

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Conclusions

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Introduction

Visual pleasure in philosophy and wider culture of Western humanities can be analysed in various ways. In the thesis presented I focus on the concepts of the *gaze* and the *visual pleasure* that were developed in an essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" written in 1973 by Laura Mulvey, a film theorist and filmmaker. Their lasting polemical and political capital as well as the potential to bring new perspectives of research and analysis in both contemporary culture and historical context, prove their importance and generative power in the fields far beyond the borders of visual culture.

Since the publication of her essay in 1975 in magazine Screen, the gaze itself became the common platform-concept for re-thinking perspectives of gender, race, and politics of power in the whole world, bringing new ideas and values to a wider cultural theory across humanities.

Polemics surrounding Mulvey's iconic manifesto, as it is called nowadays, apply not only to European and American cultural field, being so deeply theoretically involved into questions of visual pleasure and its representation, but also allow to bring new angles of analysis into Latin America, Asia, Afro-American cultures and re-examine postcolonial theories from the point of view of the male gaze concept - today named as the male gaze theory - introduced to culture and politics by Mulvey.

This thesis presents and analyses the influence of the visual pleasure and the inequality of binary gaze paradigm on the mechanisms of consciousness and identity building which have manifested themselves in feminism, art criticism concerning visual culture representations, polemics around aesthetics of sign/semiotics, engagement of depreciated non-binary gender identities into theory, and development of Queer theory.

Also, the idea of passivity of female protagonists and spectators, introduced by Mulvey opened up an intense polemic about masculinization of female spectatorship and uniquely male voyeurism. The male gaze became the ground for a pluralistic model of gender and the political tool for analysis of all contemporary cultural trends. The gaze itself, considered until the mid of 1970s as objective/neutral way of looking in dominant European and male philosophical concepts, lost its credibility with the "male gaze" category introduced in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

The aim of the thesis is presentation of the unique position and the invaluable meaning of Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" for contemporary humanities, which influenced areas of visual culture, feminism, anthropology, art criticism, social studies and anthropology, changing the theoretical humanistic background and bringing new identity formations on all continents.

The subject of the thesis is important both for film and media studies, feminist film theory as well as for other areas of humanistic thought that implemented concepts introduced by Laura Mulvey. The thesis also has a practical dimension since analyses and conclusions included here can serve both educational objectives and become a source of reference and inspiration for institutions and organisations involved in visual production that care about contemporary politics of gender and visual language.

Research problems posed in the thesis are to bring the answers to the following questions:

- how Mulvey's essay influenced film/visual theory and filmic female practice
- how the concept of the "male gaze" changed both the feminist theory and wider humanities by multiplying gender and ethnic theories as well as bringing new concepts of seeing and identity constructions
- how the visual language and ways of looking have changed in the process of polemic raised by Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

The aim of the thesis is realised in a multidimensional way. Apart from analysis of existing literature and internet publications, I use conclusions from participatory observations of discussions during congresses, conferences and academic panels dedicated to gender, identity, film studies. Numerous articles in international publications focusing on the gaze and gender issues as well as data from interviews with female filmmakers, photographers, artists, academics in the field of visual culture and gender studies provided empirical material and verification to the following hypotheses posed in my work:

Hypothesis 1: Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' have become one of the most seminal theoretical works of Western humanities influencing areas of film theory and practice, visual culture, feminism, critical theories as well as black post-colonial studies in the last fifty years.

Hypothesis 2: Concept of Mulveyian male gaze and masculine visual pleasure influenced the radical changes in feminist film and visual theory which re-shaped and created new perspectives of analyses referring and polemising with Mulvey's disproportional gender binary gaze concept, and in consequence all these brought the female gaze to the forefront of contemporary polemics in the field of visual culture.

Hypothesis 3. Non-heteronormative ways of looking and Black/people of colour perspectives of seeing have become important part of discussion about fluidity of the gaze, pleasure, as well as intersectional identity concept which illuminated the dominance of White patriarchal visual politics of power.

It is worth stressing that the research done is the first analysis trying to gather main directions and problems of polemics that raised in various fields of cinema and visual culture, with areas where Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" made its influential presence and impact provoking the most productive critique and creating new trends in cinema.
The thesis opens with a chapter analysing theoretical and filmic works of Laura Mulvey and tracing the importance of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" to contemporary visual culture both in theory and film practice. The aim of the chapter is to prove the hypothesis that the essay, despite being written fifty years ago, is still relevant and provocative in its concepts, brings new perspectives of analyses both in contemporary visual politics and visual culture consumption. The first part points to essay meaning nowadays and influence it has had on various academics, film theorists, art critics and film makers. It presents their reflections, comments and analyses enclosed in special editions of film journals, books, or special events, such as the one at the British Film Institute in London in 2015 commemorating "Visual Pleasure at 40". Examples of academic, filmic, art and visual culture initiatives that evolved from Mulvey's concepts opened up in 1975, closes the analysis of the importance of Mulvey's legacy. Next part of the chapter is dedicated to the history and context of writing the essay, its inspirations and publication in magazine Screen and includes some bibliographical information about Mulvey's life and her further most important publications and film productions. Further part places Mulvey's concepts within frames of psychanalysis, feminism, avant-garde film theory and artistic practice at that time to show their generative value for writing the essay. The first chapter closes with identifying main directions of discussion following the polemics and new paradigms of thought created in the heat of debate, after the essay has become internationally famous.

Chapter two is dedicated to critical responses referring to the concept of Mulveyian dominant male gaze and female cinematic constructions in cinema and in visual culture which were stimulated by essay's categories. The analysis included displays how the language of looking and ways of seeing in European and American philosophy with dominating male perspective have evolved since 1970s and how the gendered gaze notion provoked changes and disagreements in fields of feminism, film, and visual culture, especially in the area of female functioning as a passive cinematic image. Presented research is structured around a discussion rooted in visual semiotics and in a controversy defining and depicting a woman on screen as sign, erotic spectacle, masquerade, or mute fetish. With all their negative symbolic connotations which include passivity, illusionary mythology, fetishism as uniquely male, female masochism, or masquerade which serve to please and satisfy the heterosexual male desire, the issues were heavily re-discussed and brought into light the production of visual grammar. The chapter will also demonstrate how visual pleasure politics have generated the permission to see for women in the last 50 years. The analysis closes with presentation of the filmic active heroine and her desiring gaze which has become a feminist hope for the female image change, illuminating possibilities of conscious manipulation used by the female object that is looked at.

The aim of chapter three is to analyse and prove how male gendered concept of visual pleasure have generated counter discussions about female active gaze, female spectatorship, and female visual production depicting erotic on screen for women's visual pleasure. It starts with presentation of the notion of shame as a "revolutionary feeling" that has been crucial in Western social and cinematic female gaze construction, regardless of race or class. Further it presents the historical disappointment provoked by the Mulveyian psychoanalytic assumption of female looking being treated as passive or enigmatic, as well as adjacent historical censorship of cinematic female visual pleasure which brought the production of masochistic melodrama that served as socially and politically correct genre for female viewers. Subsequently, contrary to Mulvey's assumptions, comes the issue of female spectatorship as active notion, which includes existence of female scopophilia and voyeurism. Representation of female desire and its representation on screen are presented on famous examples of male stars that function as spectacle, sexual object, and fetish for women. Case studies of Valentino, James Bond and Brad Pitt demonstrate the difference in power and agency which masculine heroes never loose, contrary to female heroines. The last section follows various female photographic and cinematic practices focusing on female visual pleasure and touch as a sense overlooked in filmic theories.

This last part follows exemplary female authorship cinematic production of representation of desire by avantgarde and mainstream female directors. It also questions and analyses the sexual difference thorough categories of female non binary gaze in filmic practice, which has become crucial in polemic with Mulvey's paradigms and influenced discussion about female filmic production which cannot be treated as universal heterosexual experience, discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter four focuses on the emergence of counter theory of gay and lesbian homosexual gazes and visual pleasure constructs which function beyond binary spectacle and enter fluid, intersectional field of identification. Critique of Freudian and Lacanian heteronormative psychoanalytic concepts applied by Mulvey generated new readings of visual pleasure and proved its cross-gender mobility. Masculinity as homosexual erotic spectacle on screen is analysed here, as well as phenomenon of detachability and ambivalence of the gaze which proves to be transgressive. Primarily cinematic models of homosexuality culturally exorcized, represented as monstrous and in the frame of camp model are presented here in the frame of theoretical critique concerning the phallic binary gaze assumption. Further, the chapter illustrates the lesbian desire discussed in opposition to categories included in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", with the critique of its cinematic and theoretical invisibility being treated historically as non-normative and non-existent. The chapter closes with illustration of the emergence of Queer theory, coined by Teresa de Lauretis in 1990, which came as direct and indirect result of feminist and other discussions with Mulvey's binary heteronormative notions, concerning representations and narrative constructions of sexual identities. All these had a generative value for visual pleasure being finally analysed as not dependent on heterosexual or homosexual preferences.

Visual pleasure as fluid, in terms of ethnical and interracial identification, is presented in the final chapter. All these proved to be the most transgressive turn in visual production. The analysis goes through the decolonial frames of male and female black nude visual representations. Then, follows the blind spots of Freudian psychoanalysis and imperial gazing produced by Western culture, together with visual responses to its white heteronormativity in image production. The chapter closes with presentation of oppositional black female gaze emergence and first cinematic productions centring around representations of black femininity other that dominating Western male productions which propose the image of black woman as an alluring, exotic and erotic object, or voiceless servant. Thus, racial response to Mulvey's

initial White heterosexual binary division of visual pleasure resulted in development of innovative, fluid concepts that today embrace gendered, racial, and ethnic identity.

The thesis closes with the evaluation of the hypotheses and achievement of goals which focused on the presentation of importance, meaning and influence of Laura Mulvey's essay and filmic practice on film theory and practice in the last five decades. It will be interesting to observe if the tools for analysing the visual pleasure and the gendered gaze concepts in Western cultures can be applied in new areas and directions of research outside the Western world cultures.

Chapter I

The Most Influential Text in Film Studies

1.1. Legacy of Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

No other theorist has advanced considerations of women on the screen more than the British filmmaker and academic Laura Mulvey with her "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"[1], Originally written by her in 1973 and later published in *Screen*, in 1975, nowadays is treated as manifesto and its legacy became invaluable years ago, creating first the breakpoint to the film theory and feminism, and later influencing other areas of contemporary reflection and critical thought. One can think that essay written 45 years ago belongs to a history but still raising quotations and references made to its ideas, or at least the word gaze itself (in almost all fields of academic research) prove that Mulvey's essay has become the foundational text not only on the male gaze in traditional narrative films, and women as the object of that gaze but made the gaze as the main protagonist in contemporary analysis of any Western humanistic thought. Incorporation of the gaze terminology into other scientific areas than humanism makes Mulvey's concept even more interdisciplinary, constantly bringing the new adapted and transformed meanings to it nowadays, often without knowledge that it was Mulvey who brought the gaze concept onto the stage in 1975 with her essay and that the discussion following its issues made the idea word famous.

Mulvey's article itself has become a "radical weapon" which was widely used, quoted, re-defined, questioned and argued for the last forty-five years., bringing new directions to film studies, various forms of feminisms, critical thought, gender concepts and their theories following the gaze differentiation. Mulvey's legacy is priceless and undeniable in Western theoretical and critical circles, she functions as a kind of academic star and celebrity on every continent. Since 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' first appeared in 1975, it has become a crucial and lasting point of reference for filmmakers, feminists, visual culture and art critics, theorists of literature and theatre, post-colonial analytics, black feminist movement, or gender theorists. Mulvey's compelling polemical analysis of visual pleasure has encouraged and provoked others to take positions, she challenged heavily coined but at the same time invisible socio-cultural structures of looking and representation, existing like the ghosts of habituated perspective. As Jane Gallop rites, the first "professor of pleasure" [2] in European philosophy is regarded Roland Barthes since pleasure and desire became central to his theorizing and culminated in his book titled *The Pleasure of the Text* in 1973.[3] However, it was Laura Mulvey

[1] From this moment I will use in the thesis the acronym of the essay title VPNC.
[2] Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, pp. 100 – 106.
[3] Steven Ungar, "The Professor of Desire", *Yale French Studies*, no. 63, 1982, pp. 81–97, *JSTOR*, accessed:

who brought visual pleasure with its connection to gendered looking into lights, provoking multi-dimensional discussion at various levels of Western culture and subsequently other non-Western regions, i.a. Japan where translation of VPNC appeared more than 20 years after its publication, in 1997.[4]

Generative qualities of thoughts provided in her first work about cinema became so powerful and influential that first homage to Mulvey's essay came twenty-fife years later in the year 2000, where in a preface of the book gathering some crucial articles that polemized with VPNC, E. Ann Kaplan, the American film theorist, wrote:

Mulvey work struck a chord so pertinent and provocative that it has remained to this day a site of both appreciation for the insights and contestation and debate about their validity or utility. So, I could produce a book of coherent essays by printing work that debated, argued against, or built out from "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".[5]

Kaplan describes a set of concepts worked and reworked by scholars and comes up with the notion of *difference*: first male/female sexual difference, later gay/straight difference – that is, the difference within female sexuality, later the difference within "gender" (as distinct from sexuality), and finally with differences between women produced by race and ethnicity. She stresses how feminist film research was "very much at forefront of questioning and analyzing differences across all these territories, across all these borders".[6]

Later came magazine *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society* in 2004 with the special edition titled *Beyond the Gaze. Recent Approaches to Film Feminisms* which included Mulvey's essay analyzing the evolution of feminist filmic theory on the background of economic changes in Britain started in 1980s "Looking at the Past from the Present: Rethinking Feminist Film Theory of the 1970s".[7]

Further, thirty years after essay's publication and the discussion following its concepts, in the year 2007, *Camera Obscura. Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* journal made the part of its special issue *Camera Obscura at Thirty*, titled *Camera Obscura's Archive for the Future*,

June 6, 2020, available at: https://doi.org/10.2307/2929833.

[4] Adam Bingham, *Modern Japanese Female Directors*, accessed: April 6, 2023, available at: https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748683734.003.0008

[5] E. Ann Kaplan ed., F*eminism and Film. Oxford Readings in Feminism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, preface V.

[6] Ibidem.

[7] Laura Mulvey, "Looking at the Past from the Present: Rethinking Feminist Film Theory of the 1970s", *Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Special Issue: *Beyond the Gaze. Recent Approaches to Film Feminisms*, eds. Kathleen McHugh and Vivian Sobchack, Vol. 30, No 1, Autumn 2004, accessed: August 12, 2020, available at: https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/421883

dedicated to Mulvey's legacy. American approach towards European filmic thought presented there converged with thirty years of VPNC and *Camera Obscura* itself, founded as a feminist collective in 1970s, was first published in 1976 after a separation form *Woman and Film*. The aim was to create the critical theoretical feminist response to paradoxical tension between the presence of the image of women on the screen in mainstream film and at the same time their absence in the area of filmic production as well as in the emerging discipline of film theory. Parallelly in time to Mulvey's first writings, central to the journal's project were issues of the representation of women in film, together with psychoanalytical inquiries and ideological aspects both in commercial and avant-garde cinema. From the time of publishing that special issue, VPNC has been called *Mulvey's Manifesto,* as Mandy Merck titled her article for that special edition in 2007.

Directions of discussions and other aspects of visual culture have shifted, illuminating interests outside the question of sexual difference which, originally formulated in the 1970s, no longer exists as main focus. *Camera Obscura* magazine today is interested in questions of difference more broadly defined, equally invested in analyses of race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender expression, and generation, as it is in analyses of various genders. Further, in addition to broadening its political and theoretical scope to encompass such concerns, *Camera Obscura* has also enlarged the range of the texts it addresses, moving beyond a consideration of cinema alone to other media formations and institutions like television, photography, digital productions, medical imaging and so on. All these sound like Mulvey's reflections nowadays over the legacy and changes that were produced, according to essay intellectual potential.[8]

Year 2015 was marked by the fortieth anniversary of Laura Mulvey's radical writing and in order to mark this important event, a special celebration entitled *Visual Pleasure at 40* was held at British Film Institute Southbank on the 21st of April 2015. Organizers of "Visual Pleasure at 40" invited to the event and discussion Laura Mulvey and thinkers of various fields who were influenced by her essay's provocative assumptions. John David Rhodes stressed that the purpose of the occasion was to "mediate on the continued resonance and relevance of Mulvey's seminal article"[9] that has not dated together with its ability to cross various borders of contemporary cultural consumption. He reflected on his experiences of lecturing essay's ideas

[8] "Camera Obscura at Thirty: Archiving the Past, Imagining the Future", in *Camera Obscura's Archive for the Future,* pp. 2-26, accessed: August 11, 2020, available at: http://read.dukeupress.edu/camera-obscura/article-pdf/21/1 (61)/400761/CO61_01_Intro.pdf

[9] John Davies Rhodes, "Introduction to *Visual Pleasure at 40",* Screen, 53 4 Winter 2015.

on the critical theory course where he finds teaching the essays throughout the years totally compelling. The reason lies in his constant surprise and the response he is gratified by the way in which the text provides the shock of unfamiliar as well as it delivers surprise, anxiety, intensity, discomfort, and resistance. He wonders how it is possible that essay written forty years ago, which has been already thoroughly celebrated, variously refused, cherished, and laughed out, known, and assimilated still arises so passionate interest in contemporary readers whose own historical moment seems so very different from the moment of the essay's composition and publication. Having this in mind he provides an explanation which is rather sad claiming that despite so many years that separate us from 1975, not *enough* things in socio-cultural thinking and in identification with an image screen have really changed. VPNC being so embedded in time theoretical content of 1970s makes us think and realize what this combination of passion, thought, politics and form might look like. It also provides the dimension of perspective that demonstrates to which extent the look of the camera and the look of the audience were made free and opened to dialectics in the next fifty years timespan. We are still, in a sense, obliged to learn how to become this essay's contemporary readers and how to reinvent its message. Moreover, Rhodes adds:

What will remain forever pertinent, pressing, and poignant about 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', even if we imagine reading it in some future in which radical gender equality has been realized, is the essay's call to remember that the world can and shouldn't be over that it is, and that art – cinema – is a powerful means of imagining how things might be otherwise.[10]

In a contribution that followed the event in BFI Southbank as a form of publication, a group of academics and filmmakers brought their reflection on the meaning that the Mulvey's essay had to them personally. Among others, Tamar Garb, an art historian, writes about the essay historical power and uniqueness in times when it was published, while he was a student, and how it became for him "the most formative articulation of the politization of the visual"[11] he had ever encountered. Until today he finds it the most compelling writing about both the process of looking and the ways in which this act of looking in infused with the set of relationships structuring power and politics. Fundamental was the fact that it opened up questions about the relationship between eroticism and power, spectacle and authority that were totally different from the ideas taught at art academia at 1970s. But the most crucial issue was that essay moved away from the dominant idea that looking was disinterested. He brings the reflection of the

[10] Ibidem.
[11] Tamar Garb, *Visual Pleasure at 40*, Screen Winter 2015, Oxford University Press on behalf of Screen, pp. 473-474.

study of art and its academic aesthetics taught at that time as being divorced from life and from our human construction as sexualized and gender subjects. As no one before Mulvey brought brilliantly and bravely onto agenda the imbrication of our sexual and gender identities in the process of looking. Garb stresses that the essay opened up the possibility of thinking about the operation of power in relation to "high art" in a way that was totally different from John Berger's moralizing style of how objectification and agency are constructed. Thinking psychoanalytically about the multiple positions of the subject to the viewing images was absolutely innovative. Another important historical point of the essay he raises is its position as a totally different feminist gesture of the times both 1970s and later 1980s. Mulvey's concepts politicized and opened the visual pleasure which was so far restricted to male ways of looking, arguing for its radical destruction in its old-fashioned version as a masculine privilege, which does not take into account female gaze and female desire or any other non-heteronormative ways of thinking. It allowed men to become conscious of treatment of women as spectacle and question as well their own position in relation to images viewed. Garb stresses as well that even though the male gaze invented by Mulvey became widely critiqued as a very narrowed category, thanks to this category she was the first one to shake the walls of a monolithic notion of looking and to open up the ways of exploration of our own desire in relation to concepts used by her in VPNC.[12]

Another voice about influence provided by Muley's essay was brought by a filmmaker and screenplay writer Joanna Hogg who claims that when she read Mulvey's essay for the first time in mid-eighties and when she reads its nowadays, its influence has not changed in its inspirational power so much. For her, the essay is "a talisman, it is an object, like a poem"[13] and she reads and treats it this way, like the most inspiring poetry. She claims that the words gathered there, are so powerful and meaningful that the text is not only about engaging the intellect, it exists like instinctive, unconscious influence that triggers the imagination "so that the words act like a window, a mirror or a pool of water, where beyond or below the surface there are many reverberations and ripples that in turn inspire and galvanize me into putting words onto the paper myself".[14] Hogg feels herself "living in the aftermath of Laura's essay"[15] and recalls a scene from her house, when all women were leaving the room to enable the men the serious conversation, and which after reading the essay she decided to include in her film.

[12] Tamar Garb, *Visual Pleasure at 40*…, *op. cit*., pp. 473-474.
[13] Joanna Hogg, *Visual Pleasure at 40,* Screen Winter 2015, pp. 474-475.

[14] Joanna Hogg, *Visual Pleasure at 40,* Screen Winter 2015, pp. 474-475.
[15] Ibidem, p. 474.

She treats the essay like a manifesto and a call to action, the bravery with which Mulvey was discovering her own voice while she was writing is a further inspiration to her. Hogg closes her reflection with conviction that Mulvey's writing created a chain of thought that has not stopped and has not aged at all, and she believes it is even more relevant nowadays.[16]

Position of VPNC in the history of film theory, as one of the most important and most cited texts, was also developed by a filmmaker Isaac Julien who goes back to the 1970s and 1980s pointing out the difference that Mulvey brought with her thinking, even into avant-garde structures of that times. For him the development of ideas concerning the gender of the viewer which were opened up by her in VPNC as well as a term of "fetishistic scopophilia" were the most influential for his filmic work. Mulvey's essay by raising the "question of desire of the viewer, and its relation to desired self and desiring bodies on the screen" opened up the field for gay and queer cinema to establish a parallel aesthetics, which as he says took a while. Taking into consideration his own filmic inspirations, he brings the example of his cinematic realization of *Looking for Langston* (1989) that "strived to connect contemporary black gay culture with its long and ignored history, both within and outside African American communities".[17] He managed to do it thanks to analysis of the gaze that controls what we see and what we know by exploring black male gay culture within the context of the 1980s. What is interesting from artistic and gender perspective of Mulvey's importance for him is the fact that he constantly has learnt form Laura about means of ensuring desirable look of a male protagonist which can be achieved by working closely with a straight woman director of photography, which he did while working on *Looking for Langston* with Nina Kellgren and later as well, on his other films. As Julien gathers his gaze concepts used in *Langston* which all evolved as an inspiration from Mulvey's pioneered conjunction of the question of representation in cinema and ways of looking saturated with erotic desire:

Langston problematizes multiple gazes at once, asking how the white, straight male gaze affects black gay men, how the straight, black male gaze affects black gay men, and so on…'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' really enabled my generation of young black filmmakers and theorists (…) to bring psychoanalytic questions informed by gendered politics to our own developments in the field of racial and postcolonial theory.[18]

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of VPNC at BFI in London academic and writer Emma Wilson finds Mulvey's essay at the heart of feminist film theory enquiry and first flows back to the 30th anniversary event, organized as well by John David Rhodes in London, where she was talking about relations between women in the films. She treated it then as a queer response to Mulvey's

[16] Ibidem, p. 475.
[17] Isaac Julien, *Visual Pleasure at 40*, *op. cit.*, pp. 475-477.
[18] Ibidem, p. 476.

work on female presence in cinema but as well as a reflection about Muley's living presence on the event, the strangeness and brilliance of her critical voice and passionate love of film that generated the political strength infused in her work. As for her, moving through the pleasures of fetishization remains the most interesting aspect of analysis she does constantly with the students. This essay's exploration of overinvestment in the image of the woman on screen, "fetishization of and fascination with faces, glow, gloss, folds and silk" bringing her reflection over her own overinvestments in femininity and generally "investment in the politics of visual pleasure and spectacle".[19]

Laura Mulvey's reflections came as the last one during the event bringing back and illuminating insights of her "ancient essay", as she calls her work from the 1970s. After many references to all presenters and their insightful remarks she closes with the statement that juxtapositions which the essay has made over the forty-five years between "politics and psychoanalysis" now should be added to juxtapositions "art and politics" and "psychoanalysis and representation" to make her believe in essay continued relevance.[20]

Another contribution that took place in 2017, was a *Special Issue on Laura Mulvey* published by *New Review of Film and Television,* which also celebrated the enduring discussion around Mulvey's concepts form 1970's and the new directions of cultural and visual theoretical research trends created by her evolving in time filmic theory and practice. Among others were the articles and reflections on Laura Mulvey, "Mulvey and Trump on *Citizen Kane*" by Eliot Bessette, "Unbound bodies" by Rebecca Bell-Metereau, "The uncanny nature of the cinematic image" by John Belton, "*The House is Black*: Cinema of Ambivalence, Cinema of Delay" by Brian Bergen-Aurand, "Death of Desire" by Cynthia Lucia, "Mulvey as Political Weapon" by Kelli Fuery, "Complicating the Theory of the Male Gaze: Hitchcock's Leading Men" by Colleen Glenn, "From a Faculty Seminar with Laura Mulvey: Reflections on Visual Pleasure" written by Lara Casey or "Mulvey, Patriarchy and Gender: Expression and Disruption in Visual Art" by Lorna Collins.[21]

Another Gaze magazine interviewed Mulvey in 2018 and she was asked if she finds herself engaging differently in VPNC after its 40th anniversary. She admits that a few years ago she really had to come to terms with it again and she found out that:

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[19] Emma Wilson, *Visual Pleasure at 40,* Screen Winter 2015, pp. 479-480.

[20] Ibidem., pp. 481–485.

[21] *Special Issue on Laura Mulvey*, New Review of Film and Television Studies, Volume 15, 2017 – Issue 4 posted October 12, 2017, accessed: August 12, 2020, available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rfts20/15/4 and https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2017.1376877

I was more interested in it as a polemical essay or, as my friend [the academic] Mandy Merck called it, a manifesto, rather than the actual accuracy, or lack of accuracy, of what it says. And, like manifestos or polemics, it's very much a one- or two-idea piece and that, I think, is its power. I see now that I managed to come up with some good turns of phrase that caught the public imagination, that have been re-quoted and recycled in all kinds of ways.[22]

After all these years she thinks about going back to some sides of the essay that have got lost, such as Sternberg content of it, as well as she thinks about the expenditure upon the fetishistic side of it instead the voyeuristic one. She mentions also about the issues that ended up with her publication of *Death 24x a Second* in 2006, namely her interest in stillness and the idea that the pensive spectator is grounded in the voyeuristic spectator of VPNC. The spectacle of the female protagonist does not stop and hold the film for her any longer and she finds the voyeuristic gaze connected no longer to stillness but to the movement as well. At the same time, she thinks that question of the male voyeuristic gaze "and how the cinematic gaze can actually be transformed and rethought"[23] still possesses a connection. She points in the end that over the years after writing the essay questions of race and the invisibility of African American talents and protagonists in Hollywood and about the way how much it was an apartheid cinema were issues, she has been thinking a lot.[24]

Other Mulvey's legacy examples that emerged in the last decades of technological changes and the absorption of visual theory into internet spaces outside the academic field of research are initiatives that evolved from her concepts of representation and visual pleasure. Among others are artistic projects done around female gaze such as *What She Wants. Women Artists Look at Men* photographic exhibition in 1994 in London with a catalogue grasping texts analysing the changes in female western perspective, art exhibitions in Dallas and London gathering *Sex Works in Female Art: Black Sheep Feminism,* which came into light after 50 years of censorship, negation and overlooking, thanks to art curator Alison Gingeras, *Bird's Eye View* an NGO film project transformed after 20 years into *Reclaim the Frame*, now in co-operation with British Film Institute, promoting female gaze in cinema both behind the camera and as a conscious spectatorship. Further came photographic exhibitions exploring various gazes, to mention the latest one *Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography* in London. Finally

[22] *Another Gaze,* conversation with Laura Mulvey, "Suddenly, A Woman Spectator: An Interview with Laura Mulvey", posted August 15, 2018, accessed: May 17, 2022, available at: https://www.anothergaze.com/suddenly-woman-spectator-conversation-interview-feminism-laura-mulvey
[23] Ibidem.
[24] Ibidem.

appeared, different internet projects discussing ways of seeing such as the *Male Gaze Project*, the *Scopophilic Gaze* or *Another Gaze* journal publication promoting female gazes as well as Mary White doctoral research which refers to fields affected by VPNC, to mention Art History, Sociology, Literature, Theatre, History, Anthropology, Music, Lesbian and Gay Studies and Theology.[25]

Legacy discussed above proves lasting relevance of VPNC in contemporary culture. Becoming over the years an exemplar that still remains questioned as well as endlessly generates new paths of conversations not only for film studies and visual theory but wide cultural criticism and gender studies, crossing the boundaries, as mentioned above, into other fields that look at the first glance situated far away from VPNC. The project undertaken provides an example of relationship created between visual theory and practice, and its constant mutual influence or interference, inscribing itself into the map of visual pleasure that has been contested for last fifty years.

1.2. History of the essay writing and its publication in magazine Screen.

The historical and political contexts of writing VPNC are all very significant for many reasons. Mulvey's theoretical progression in the 1970s was anchored in the dysfunctional state of women's representation which she decided to settle in Freudian and Lacanian analysis. Her deep political and intellectual interests were rooted in home atmosphere since all women in her close family circle were very well educated in history and became critical commentators and writers recognized in their academic circles/communities. In the 1960s, after finishing historical studies at Oxford University, she was living in London in an atmosphere of fascination with Hollywood cinema shared with Peter Wollen and other friends. She joined the Women

[25] For example, see BERDINI, P. 'Women under the gaze: A Renaissance Genealogy', *Art History*, Vol 21, No 2, 1998, pp. 565-590; ROSENMAN, E.B. 'Spectacular Women: The 'Mysteries of London' and the female body', *Victorian Studies*, Vol 40, No.1, 1996, p. 31-64; EDMUNDS, S. 'Through a glass darkly: Visions of integrated community in Flannery O'Connor's 'Wise Blood''. *Contemporary Literature*, Vo137, *NoA, 1996,* p.559-585; KLAVER, E. 'Spectatorial Theory in the Age of Media Culture', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 11, *NoA4*, 1995, p.309-321; REEVE, K.K. 'Primal Scenes, Pleyel and Liszt in the Eyes of Berlioz', *Nineteenth Century Music*, Vo118, No.3, 1995, p.211-235.; JACKSON, E. 'Death Drives across Porntopia - Cooper, Denis on the Extremities of Being', *GLQ - A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 1, No.2, 1994, p.143- 161; LEYERLE, B. 'Chrysostom, John on the Gaze and a Term denoting the Subordinated Position of Woman as Spectacle and the Subject of Scrutiny: A new perspective on the writings of Chrysostom on spiritual marriage', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vo11, No.2, 1993, p.159-174 cited in Mary C. White, footnote in *From text to practice: rereading Laura Mulvey's 'Visual pleasure and Narrative cinema' towards a different history of the feminist avant-garde*, accessed: August 19, 2020, available at: https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/From_text_to_practice_rereading_Laura_Mulvey_s_Visual_pleasure_and_narrative_cinema_towards_a_different_history_of_the_feminist_avant-garde/9333161/1

Liberation Movement at the turn of 1969/1970, as already a very well educated and politically conscious person.

Being a part of a Women Liberation Movement Reading Group, Mulvey became interested in a history of and a philosophy of representation. She was acquainted with all crucial at that time feminist discourses of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Michele Monterlay and Helene Cixous as well as male writers and philosophers[26] all of which were in focus of her critical readings. At the beginning of 1970s, she started to cooperate with Claire Johnston[27] and Lynda Myles (the director of Film Festival in Edinburgh) which resulted in incorporating into her perspective works of visual avant-garde female artists at that time, including avant-garde of New American Cinema – standing in opposition to Hollywood commercial productions. Another important influence which became a context of her essay writing, was the relationship with Peter Wollen[28] who, as a historian and a film critic, strongly appreciated the power of theoretical feminist movement as well as usage of its critical tools in revision and changes of political concepts.

The essay VPNC was written in 1973 when she was 32, what she sometimes stresses in interviews, and was firstly presented during her stay with Peter Wollen in Evanston, United States where he was working for Northwestern University. Wollen was invited there by Paddy Wannel, a director of Film and Television School, who knew couple's avant-garde interests and proposed to use the school equipment in summer to make an experimental film. This first cinematic avant-garde Mulvey's adventure with Wollen was entitled *Panthesilea: Queen of the Amazons* and certainly facilitated development of Mulvey's concepts of VPNC. She reflects on those inspirations fifteen years later writing about her filmic intellectual and emotional engagements:

Before I became absorbed in the Women's Movement, I had spent almost a decade absorbed in Hollywood cinema. Although this great, previously unquestioned, and unanalyzed love was put in crisis by the impact of feminism on my thought in the early 1970s, it also had an enormous influence on the development on my critical work and ideas and the debate within film culture […] In my case, the old economy of fascination became displaced, rather than dispersed, into a fascination with the mechanics of cinematic pleasure and voyeurism.[29]

Dedicated to avant-garde and feminism, she comments on the contribution of Hollywood production that brought to general public new concepts and images of a woman and opened new terrains of collective fantasy and popular mythology. This mythology of the feminine

[26] The most important male writers of that time for here were: Engels, Levi-Strauss, Freud, Althusser, and Lacan.
[27] Claire Johnston (1940-1987), one of the most important and influential feminist film theorists at that time.
[28] Peter Wollen, historian, avant-garde critic writer for New Left Review and magazine Screen at that time.
[29] Laura Mulvey, *Introduction to the First Edition* in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Palgrave Macmillan, Second Edition, p. xxxiii

image constructed by male film directors generated a series of ambiguities and dualities of visions in which a woman became a phantasm and a symptom at the same time.

VPNC brought new concepts and new terminology to analyze and understand the new political and filmic philosophy of fascination with its unknown, unconscious areas. To study them, psychoanalytic theory seemed perfectly suitable to approach all these problems connected with collective fantasy and representations of femininity in cinema and the visual pleasure concept dominated the perspective of fantasy and desire as forces of social and cultural relations.[30]

The essay was published two years later in 1975 after Mulvey and Wollen returned from the United States to Great Britain. It was "polemically and without regard for context or nuances of argument" as Mulvey observed later in Screen. After innumerous publications in the following decade, the essay started to live a life of its own, becoming a crucial point of reference and the starting moment of feminist film theory, and which resonates until today in various ways being an echo of Mulvey's work. The essay has become an *object,* according to American scholar Peggy Phelan performative approach, with its network and framework of meanings that are created outside its context.[31] Its publication in Screen in 1975 made four members of editorial board to resign.

Mulvey's essay, however, was not the first but the third one in the field of visual studies. The first one was "The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World, 1970" written for the London Women's Liberation Workshop together with Margarita Jimenez and described the contest (Miss World) as *not* being an erotic exhibition or connection to the "underground world of pornography".[32] The second one, written in 1972 by Mulvey and published in 1973 in *Spare Rib,* challenged: "Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious *or* 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr. Jones?"[33] reflecting on a one-man show of sculptures of Allen Jones held in London in 1970 and entitled *Woman as Furniture.* On the basis of Jones mastery of artistic language of *basic fetishism* and his obsessions revealing artists fears and desires, Mulvey explored the male unconscious in general, castration anxiety and its connection to visual

[30] Ibidem.
[31] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance,* London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 1.
[32] Laura Mulvey, "The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World, 1970" in *Visual and Other Pleasures,* Second Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2009.
[33] Laura Mulvey, "Fears, Fantasies, and the Male Unconscious *or* 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr. Jones?" in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 2nd edition, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2009.

production of fetishistic signs in a male-dominated culture. In the aura of the two previously written essays VPNC written in 1973 seems a natural, subsequent intellectual consequence of contemporary visual trends at that time of feminism of the early 1970s.

1.3. Mulvey's further theoretical works.

Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure

Since VPNC provoked innumerous unexpected responses and criticism, Mulvey next text was a kind of response to various theoretical attacks and was presented during the conference *Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, which was held at the Center for Media Studies SUNY, in Buffalo. It was further published in 1981 in the *Framework* and was structured around reflections on questions she was asked after publication of VPNC. In "Afterthoughts…" she explains the usage of the male third person as the style ironically intended but closing down various paths of inquiry and decides to focus on analysis of a female spectator and responds persistently asked question of passive femininity by recalling Freud's psychoanalytic observations enclosed in *Femininity, Analysis Terminable and Interminable* as well as in his *Creative Writers and Day Dreaming.* Mulvey expands in the paper Freud's concept of "masculinity" in a woman as corresponding to her concept of the "masculinisation" of the spectator's position. Looking for explanation, she goes beyond psychoanalysis and applies a cultural approach with references to Western Greek misogynist mythology and folk narrations in which collective imagination is unconsciously built in narrative texts with male fantasy of ambition and dominance, bringing numerous examples of omnipotent male active, fighting heroes and waiting, passive princesses or goddesses. In her analysis of *Duel in the Sun* (by King Vidor, 1946) Mulvey presents a heroine's crisis of sexual and social identity and her transformation from being an active female active hero to a sexually passive lady and a perfect wife being a sublimation of a concept of femininity that is socially valuable and needed. Further in her text Mulvey goes away from the concept of female trans-sexual identification as a *habit* that easily becomes *second nature* towards Lacanian concept of a woman as a signifier of sexuality suggesting that desire is "given cultural materiality"[34] in narrative texts.

Before Mulvey decided to create a collection of her works and publish them in 1989, VPNC has already gained international fame, both for its applause and criticism, and essay was

[34] Laura Mulvey, *Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by Duel in the Sun* in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.) *Psychoanalysis and Cinema,* Routledge 1990, pp. 24-35.

published in numerous anthologies in Britain and the USA. To answer innumerous controversies that have apprised after its publication, Mulvey decided to expand some crucial notions in *Visual and Other Pleasures* published for the first time in 1989. It was not only the first official response to the heated debate but also a collection of her articles written between 1971 and 1986. This book publication gave her an opportunity to present her most influential essay VPNC, within the historical context and chronology amongst her other writings. After many references, quotations, and counter-critique, VPNC "has acquired a balloon-like, free-floating quality" as Mulvey wrote in the introduction, adding that she hopes that publishing it in her new collection "will not explode it, but bring it back to earth"[35]. She notes that this fifteen-year period of her writing evolved from the Women's Movement and broadened out from a political organization into a more general framework of feminism. The collection brings a kind of documentary quality to Mulvey's writings since she was trying to articulate and catch the interests and ideas that were around in the air, and within the constantly changing theoretical terrain provided by the Women's Movement. In this way, articles collected have preserved the historical link with their historical moment and acknowledgment of intellectual importance of feminist theory by the end of the book.[36] That includes parts such as Boundaries and Thoughts and Afterthoughts, with articles titled "Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience". Mulvey also gets back to melodrama issues directed by Sirk and Fassbinder, and Godard's images of sexuality as well as to a female avant-garde "Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde" written in 1978. Finally, she brings back analysis of myths taking them into and beyond her movie made in 1977 in an article "The Oedipus Myth: Beyond the Riddles of the Sphinx".

Fetishism and Curiosity, the book published for the first time in 1996, brings the new collection of Mulvey's essays containing her writings from the previous five years. She explores there the relationship of European intellectuals' theoretical fascination with Hollywood melodrama as a phenomenon of "magnificent obsession". Then essays begin with analysis of Douglas Sirk cinema, move to Godard's ontological association of female beauty with the cinema and his visions of femininity. She reflects as well over displacement created by censorship that did not take sexuality out of the movies but displaced it with the visual concentrating on woman as signifier of sexuality. Later collection ranges from analyses of Pandora's Box and its topographies of curiosity with its relation to significance of myths and negative iconographies

[35] Laura Mulvey*, Introduction to the First Edition…*, *op. cit.*, pp. xxvi-xxxv.
[36] Ibidem.

of the feminine coded there as an important field to decipher cultural production. There is also an extended engagement with the work of the American Indian artist Jimmie Durham and the feminist abjection artist and photographer Cindy Sherman. Finally, she goes back to Freud, psychoanalysis and history in Citizen Kane, the film language of *Xala* with aspects of importance of African culture and the presentation of film significance to film theory beyond its cultural context and lastly to the story of Oedipus myth within the frame of *Blue Velvet* narration.[37]

Mulvey moved in her theory and reflection beyond the question of spectacle and objectification, to cinema's unique relationship to time which effected in with her next publication of *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* in 2005, which was a project that she had started in the mid 1990s. Stillness versus movement, photography, via Roland Barthes, versus the moving image, were her preoccupations for ten years. Mulvey framed 24 moments of rupture per second as being hunted by death. She had explored over the ten following years various moments of spectatorship that became central at that time for her, how it can be slowed, disrupted, repeated, creating in this way new perspectives of seeing. Her experience with video as a new digital tool that advanced language of cinema became the basis to her research. Mulvey uses the video works by Chris Petit, Jeff Wall, and later turns to classical films she was analyzing before, made by Jean-Luc Godard, Alfred Hitchcock, Roberto Rossellini, or Abbas Kiarostami – looking at them through the lens of disrupted time. As Mulvey told to critic and cultural journalist Ela Bittencourt: "Writing my book on the centennial of cinema, when everyone was talking so much about the death of cinema, I wondered if this new kind of viewing could help us retrieve some of the beauty of film".[38] Considering above, spectatorship in her work became a series of historical adaptations, which are never static and always re-inform the ways how history of film should be re-written. While her essay on visual pleasure was very much an explicit feminist text, *Death 24x a Second* does not deal directly with women. Here Mulvey is concerned generally with a fetishistic spectator regardless of gender and this aspect she sees as bringing more control, stresses Bittencourt.[39]

Visual and Other Pleasures, second edition in 2009 brought again Mulvey's new reflections responding to another twenty years of VPNC its own life, and as Mulvey claims "the book is

[37] Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity. Cinema and the Mind's Eye,* Indiana University Press 1996.
[38] Ela Bittencourt, "The Importance of Laura Mulvey's Feminism in the Age of #MeToo", accessed: August 5, 2020, https://www.frieze.com/article/importance-laura-mulveys-feminism-age-metoo
[39] Ibidem.

symptomatic of feminism's pioneering engagement with this politics of images"[40], and adds about discontinuity aspect: "the form of writing changes, alongside changes taking place in my own life".[41] Two subsequent decades after first edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures* published in 1989, brought political changes that negatively influenced avant-garde production, and also stopped Mulvey making moving images. The height of Thatcher period in the late 1980s brought two essays which were not included in the first edition, and which emerged out of new political context dependent on cuts of the funds for artistic, independent British cinematic production together with its intellectual surroundings: psychoanalytic theory, feminism, avant-garde aesthetics and cinephilia. All these overlapping and varying areas contributed to the politics of representation that was crucial at that time to both theory and practice. Within its thematic consistency of the book, there is also Mulvey's disappointment with the feminist hope for a radical change concerning politics of visual image. The book begins with an experience of Women's Movement activism, the Miss World demonstration, and ends with the Oedipus myth that covers the time passage from activism to academia. It flows from journalistic essays to critical and academic essays and the writing frame and background moves from the publications in *Spare Rib, Screen, Shrew* with Women's Liberation context to catalogues and academic journals since Mulvey academic position dates to 1979 at Bulmershe College. Most essays in collection echoed the era of political optimism with feminist culture which was assumed not only being in progress but also to be the "mainspring of progress". Mulvey's optimism and a confident expectation that feminist politics will bring radical changes to politics of representation start to blur and finish with doubts and disappointment in her unpublished article ending the collection: "Thoughts on the Young Modern Woman of the 1920s and Feminist Film Theory". There she revolves around films made both in Hollywood and in Europe, and "looks at their relevance for feminist film theory"[42], as well as responds to the article written by Miriam Hansen who criticizes her passive female spectator concept by analyzing phenomenon of Rudolf Valentino.

Feminisms published in 2015, was a book project initiated by Anna Backman from University of Amsterdam with the main aim to invite Laura Mulvey to this project as a co-editor and to illuminate half a century debate and new trends in feminism and film theory generated by

[40] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Second Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2009, p. ix.
[41] Ibidem.
[42] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, publisher note, accessed: March 9, 2023, available at: https://www.worldcat.org/title/Visual-and-other-pleasures/oclc/148906824

VPNC. Collection of essays by various authors was to revisit the concepts and controversies that have shaped the field of contemporary film studies, to clarify lines of transmission from the founding texts, their re-interpretations and re-evaluation in which hybridity of feminist filmic theory is based. Since research in the history of film theory developed much in the light of the changes in media devices and viewing practices, the need to clarify and refocus fundamental issues seemed even more important in the context of contemporary media environment, as co-editor Ann Backman Rogers stresses.[43]

The book aims to contribute to the feminist debates by staging notions of diversity, difference and multiplicity engaged with a historical context in the first place. It focuses on new perspectives on the female agencies in television series analysed by Janet McCabe. Examines the extent to which the popular series can be read as a critique of post-feminism, centering on striving for an impossible image of success in the form of "the can-do girl" and its relationship to "cruel optimism" by Anne Backman Rogers. There are reflections over production, circulation, and reception of images of women in an age when the female body is even more dematerialized and digitalized with visual pleasure focusing on Angelina Jolie as a cyborg by William Brown. Theoretical developments in the issue of safe space in feminist pornography are analysed by Ingrid Ryberg as well as important insights are provided by Sophie Mayer on New Queer Feminist Film/Theory with subverts and underscores hegemonic cultures. Publication also addresses new experimentalism and its "nomadic approach" which is done by Janny Chamarette. Finally, there come analyses of the contemporary woman filmmaking provided by Annette Brauerbach, Anette Hastle, Lynne Joyrich, Patricia White and Shawn Willis, which center on feminist film journals that have survived from groundbreaking days of the 1970s to the present enormously contributing to the development of feminist film studies that have centered around VPNC. The collection is closed with dialogues of editors who discuss the recent emergence of women directors in transgressive cinema in France and their focus on the body, corporeality, and the sense of touch with relevance to feminist film theory.[44]

Mulvey's latest book project ***Afterimages. On Cinema, Women and Changing Times*****,** with workshops run by her at Porto/Post/Doc Festival before the publication of it in January 2020**,** returns to feminism again. She drifts there historically both forward and back. It takes a new approach in the era of #MeToo movement **"**as more and more women make cinema, their image

[43] Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers (eds.), *Feminisms. Diversity, Difference, and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, Amsterdam University Press 2015, pp. 10-14.
[44] Ibidem.

on screen is no longer so much part of the circulation of a commodity to be consumed".[45] Yet the reflection is not so simple since the question of women as subjects is still overwhelmingly present and persistent in visual culture and women directors are still of little visibility and appreciation. Mulvey goes back to various questions she was asked over decades, and this time she additionally takes into consideration representations of women in the films made by female directors, instead of women being visualized by male directors.

Summary of Mulvey's writings and thoughts

Laura Mulvey's filmic thought has evolved significantly across the last 50 years, encompassing a wide range of topics, and expanding beyond her initial focus on the male gaze and classical Hollywood cinema. The analysis of the key themes and developments in Mulvey's filmic thought throughout in last five decades involves firstly examination of binary gendered concept of male gaze. Secondly, it refers to critique evolved around passive objectification of women on screen, that according to some critiques was reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics. Mulvey's call for a critical examination of gender representation in film highlighted the passive positioning of women within cinematic narratives and opened the space for visual production of alternative representations which could challenge dominant norms and empower women on screen. Over time, Mulvey incorporated more considerations of historical, political, and post-colonial contexts into her analyses as well as engaged in project involving racial gazing and identity construction from non-white perspective. She also followed in her thought the construction of New Queer Cinema and influence of new technologies on cinema and visual arts, as well as changes generated by new medias in spectatorship construction. Nonetheless, her engagement with psychoanalysis and insufficient female gaze cinematic production and still not well supported distribution of female movies have remained consistent threads throughout her career.

In further works like *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996), she examined the relationship between culture, myths construction, curiosity and fetishisation as masculine rights, filmic notions of colonialism, exoticism, and the male gaze in various films, highlighting the broader socio-political implications of cinematic representation. Mulvey's engagement with filmic thought from the beginning of her writing expanded beyond traditional cinema to include other forms

[45] Ela Bittencourt, "The Importance of Laura Mulvey's Feminism…" *op. cit.*, accessed: March 27, 2020, available at: https://www.frieze.com/article/importance-laura-mulveys-feminism-age-metoo

of visual culture. Later she explored the impact of new media, video art, and interactive installations on the construction of meaning and spectatorship.

Mulvey's book *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006) marked a significant shift in her thinking. She investigated the significance of stillness and movement in cinema and examined how film captures and manipulates time. By analyzing concepts such as freeze-frame, slow motion, and repetition, Mulvey expanded her exploration of temporality in cinema and its impact on narrative and spectatorship.

In more recent years, with the publication of essay collection *Feminisms* referring to Mulvey's legacy, she has engaged with intersectionality and queer theory, broadening her analysis to consider the multiple axes of power and identity with other white and black feminist theorists. She has engaged and examined how other non-binary genders, sexuality, race, and additional social categories intersect and shape representations in film and visual culture. As academic Małgorzata Radkiewicz analyses the evolution of Mulvey's thought, changes and feminists critique lasting form the 1970s brought its revision including especially female gaze perspective which has started to reconstruct the dominant masculine historical narratives and cinematic representations from the point of view of a woman being a subject and an author.[46] As Radkiewicz adds, new concepts of time were also raised by Mulvey who claims today that electronic and digital technologies of image registration bring new potentials to the cinema which is treated as a source of metaphor that enable reflection over our understanding of meanders of history in which female experience before was not visible as being not important.[47] All these, according to Mulvey create a new kind of spectator, and new kind of receptions which allow the viewer to manipulate the rhythm, the direction and content of the plot to create new spaces for analyses of visuality.[48] But what is important concerning the change generated by Mulvey, as Radkiewicz points out, "the gaze overruled the fiction".[49]

However, as Mulvey stressed in 2018, in the interview for *Another Gaze*, her assumptions about the end of Hollywood era were wrong: "At the time, we felt very strongly that Hollywood was finished. If you'd asked me in 1972, I would have said that Hollywood would continue to make

[46] Małgorzata Radkiewicz, *Władczynie spojrzenia. Teoria filmu a praktyka reżyserek i artystek,* korporacja ha!art, Kraków 2010, p. 105.
[47] Ibidem, p. 49.
[48] Małgorzata Radkiewicz, *Władczynie spojrzenia… op. cit.,* p. 105.
[49] Małgorzata Radkiewicz citing *Re-Vision. Essays In Feminist Film Criticism,* eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, Linda Williams, Los Angeles 1984, in *Władczynie spojrzenia… op. cit.,* p. 49.

films, but that it would no longer have the power – either cinematic or industrial – that it had possessed before".[50] Thus, as she reflects back, her predictions from the 1970s, about future Hollywood weakness, have fallen apart. Nevertheless, VPNC still remains a groundbreaking work in feminist film theory, rarely not referred to by visual and film theorists, and still remains a central aspect of Mulvey's legacy even if her current focus on expanded notions of cinema acknowledges the evolving landscape of visual culture, race, other genders, new technologies and its influences on our understanding of moving images.

1.4. Between text and practice - Mulvey 's avant-garde film projects.

Mulvey's visual production has been situated in the second place after VPNC publication and its fame that came in film and visual theory Western circles. But it has to be stressed that it was both her theory development and practice made, that were intertwining together and thanks to this the new meanings and new stimulus were produced mutually. Mulvey's move into filmmaking provides an important context to her thought in the late 1970s, as she stresses herself, and adds that "the collective experience of the Women's Movement was complemented, even overtaken by the collective experience of independent cinema in Britain at that time"[51]

First films Mulvey made in collaboration with Peter Wollen (between 1974-1984) but they are not well known, nor particularly well thought of and this filmic production has always been treated rather separately from her written texts. Only recently came new approaches trying to consider the use of their filmic context and film making activity as the key element of analyses, since films by Mulvey are regarded as less cohesive than her writings. It is also pointed out that many arguments and commentaries included in the essay failed to acknowledge the essay emergence from visual practice. Mulvey and Wollen adopted a cultural counterstrategy that deployed writing texts and making films, and the exploration between both practices was to open up new paths in filmic and critical language. Following above, for Griselda Pollock Mulvey's simultaneous engagement in film practice makes the essay the matrix of practices that address the question of pleasure and engage in a network beyond the purely theoretical and critical area. This becomes a very important point that Mulvey was both a theorist and

[50] *Another Gaze*, conversation with Laura Mulvey, "Suddenly, A Woman Spectator: An Interview with Laura Mulvey", posted August 15, 2018, accessed: May 17, 2022, available: https://www.anothergaze.com/suddenly-woman-spectator-conversation-interview-feminism-laura-mulvey/

[51] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Introduction to the Second Edition, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

practitioner and in order to explicate fully the context and the emergence of the essay VPNC both aspects should be examined.[52]

Filmic Practice

During the 1970s, the space of counter-cinema was like a rough travel, a kind of rite of passage necessary to go through, so as "to come out to the other side". Mulvey and Wollen were introduced into American Avant-garde (New American Cinema) thanks to their London colleagues writing for *Afterimage* magazine.[53] Filmic cooperation with Peter Wollen lasting between 1974-1984, started abroad during their stay in the USA. There was a strong reciprocal influence between Mulvey's writings, and the films directed with Wollen, as she reflects in 1989. From her point of view, "each of the films we made in 1970s responded and extended the problems I was trying to pose in my writing".[54] She wrote about this connection of her texts and period of filmmaking:

In the films, theory and politics could be juxtaposed with narrative and visual poetics, reaching out beyond the limits of the written word and its precision to something that had not yet found a precise means of verbal articulation. The films could confront the questions of film criticism with film itself, debate images with counter-images, intellectual strategies with visual play.[55]

As she reflects again in 2009 about this move into filmmaking was a very important context to her thought at that time. This collective experience of independent counter-cinema in Britain complemented and even overtaken the collective experience of the Women's Movement at that time. All that convergence of feminism, counter-cinema and political created the conditions to become a great, influential movement. The high level of political consciousness in the independent film sector culminated with the formation of the Independent Filmmakers' Association IFA in 1975, where Mulvey and Wollen were both in the board, and to which "feminism made a key contribution" both in terms of actual production with an attempt to create female cinema and in terms of intellectual debate about representation.[56] Mulvey also stresses

[52] Mary C. White, *From Text to Practice: Rereading Laura Mulvey's* 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' *Towards a Different History of the Feminist Avant-garde*, accessed: August 19 2020, available at: https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/From_text_to_practice_rereading_Laura_Mulvey_s_Visual_pleasure_and_narrative_cinema_towards_a_different_history_of_the_feminist_avant-garde/9333161/1

[53] Laura Mulvey, "Unravelling the Puzzle", Interview with Lara Thomson in Kamila Kuc, Lara Thomson (eds.), *Laura Mulvey. Do utraty wzroku. Wybór tekstów*, ha!art-era Nowe Horyzonty, Warszawa-Kraków 2010, pp. 325-327.

[54] Laura Mulvey, Introduction to the First Edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures*, included in the Second Edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Palgrave MacMillan, London 2009, p. xxix.

[55] Ibidem.

[56] Laura Mulvey, Introduction to the Second Edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Palgrave MacMillan, London 2009, p. xxix.

that the presence of women filmmakers in independent cinema production was unproportionally more higher than their presence as filmmakers in mainstream cinema production at that time.[57]

Mulvey cooperation with Peter Wollen brought six film productions: *Panthesilea: Queen of the Amazons* (1974), *Riddles* of *the Sphinx* (1977), *Amy!* (1980), *Crystal Gazing (1982), Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1983) and *The Bad Sister* (1983).

Panthesilea: Queen of the Amazons, the first filmic avant-garde production (1h 39m length), created in Evanston in 1974, brought onto the screen their shared at that time interest in Greek mythology and symbolism. It also has certain links with Mulvey's article "Fear, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious (about art of Allen Jones)". As Mulvey reminds it: "Both the Amazon myth and Allen Jones's collection of pin-ups tell a story of male castration anxiety, how it can be projected on to female image and produces a fascination with phallic femininity".[58] In *Panthesilea* she tries to interpret the myth of the Queen of the Amazons in the context of fierce feminist polemic of the 1970s that referred to heroic position of women in myths. The film is made without an editing, based on experimental, anti-narrative formal tricks such as didactic monologues, collages of pictures, sculptures and comics deconstructing and questioning the myth of femininity as well as the dominant image of female in cinema. The first part presents the actress of pantomime who presents the shortened version of the Kleist's play from 1808 and titled *Panthesilea.* In the second part, Wollen is talking about the myth of Amazon as being an unreachable ideal. The last part presents the previous elements on four different screens and ending with the main actress cleaning her face from make-up and turning directly to the camera.[59]

Riddles of the Sphinx (1977), 1h 32 min movie, followed the publication of VPNC in Screen and "draws on the critical writings and investigations by both filmmakers" and "addresses the position of women in patriarchy through the prism of psychoanalysis.".[60] For Wollen, the impulse for its making was Mulvey's work on voyeurism and spectatorship. But for Mulvey herself it meant much more since it was an attempt "to break away from the polemical and

[57] Laura Mulvey, 'Unravelling the Puzzle…", *op .cit.*, p. 319.
[58] Laura Mulvey, Introduction to the First Edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures*", *op. cit.*, p. xxix.
[59] Lara Thomson, 2010, „Retrospektywa: Laura Mulvey", Archiwum Programowe, Era Nowe Horyzonty 10 ed., accessed: July 7, 2020, available at: https://www.nowehoryzonty.pl/film.do?id=4346
[60] Lucy Reynolds, *Riddles of the Sphinx*, *Screenonline*, accessed: March 19, 2020., available at: https://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/laura_mulvey_and_peter_wollen/riddles_of_the_sphinx.html

iconoclastic spirit"[61] of VPNC and a struggle to find other ways of looking at pleasure on the screen that could challenge her concept of the male gaze through the work of the camera offering an "alternative formal structure through which to consider the images and meanings of female representation in film".[62] It was also a trial to "take an initial step into a positive cinema and to move beyond the negative aesthetics of counter-cinema"[63] to search and propose new images and formal means that depict experiences and feelings that can be representational for women's maternal experiences and feelings. "The film is constructed in three sections and 13 chapters, combining Mulvey's own to-camera readings around the myth of Oedipus's encounter with the Sphinx with a series of very slow 360-degree panning shots encompassing different environments, from the domestic to the professional."[64]

Mulvey describes the moment of *Riddles* creation as probably the highest moment of "Utopian optimism"[65] when the counter-cinema seemed the real filmic future solution. The iconography of the Sphinx and her riddles are important for Mulvey because of motifs that draw together femininity and curiosity.[66] Curiosity as a source of danger, pleasure and knowledge with pleasure derived from desire to know and fulfillment of it was a masculine privilege. Here Mulvey ascribes this possibility of curiosity as a positive drive to femininity. This pleasure of curiosity brings the detective and investigative pattern of narrative - female one.[67] For Mulvey the film was also important from the perspective of woman relationship with the language.[68]

AMY!, a 30-minute film, was influenced by "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure", specifically trying to deal with the narrative fields ascribed to female protagonist in cinema. It is a portrait not in the conventional sense of a heroine Amy Johnson coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of epic solo flight to Australia in 1930 to commemorate it and comment on. Historic documents and relics, metaphors and re-enactments evoke the person. The film having a theoretical background, asks the question "what is a heroine?". It also seeks to display "frustrations from

[61] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other…, op. cit.,* p. xxix.
[62] Lucy Reynolds, *Riddles of the Sphinx, op. cit.*
[63] Ibidem.
[64] Ibidem.
[65] Chris Fennell, *Laura Mulvey remembers shooting avant-garde classic Riddles of the Sphinx*, 17 October 2013, accessed: May 15, 2020, Available at: https://www.bfi.org.uk/interviews/laura-mulvey-riddles-sphinx
[66] Lucy Reynolds, *Riddles of the Sphinx*, *Screenonline*, accessed: March 19, 2020., available at: http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/567526/index.html
[67] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other… op. cit.*, pp. xxxix-xxx.
[68] Daniella Shreir and Dorothy Allen Pickard, "In Conversation with Laura Mulvey. Interview", filmed January 2017, accessed: August 17, 2019, available at: https://www.anothergaze.com/in-conversation-with-laura-mulvey/

which the heroism is born and to which it is condemned".[69] Maya Deren and Gertrude Stein were both formally points of reference as artists state officially in 1980.[70] As Jane Clark wrote "The film is not so much about Amy-the-woman as about the power of representation to fix the meaning of events. Amy becomes a legend that can be consumed, and her actions lose its subversive potential".[71] What Mulvey stresses, heroine fate here is in active relation to the narrative area and she is the one who resist intimidation created by the camera, being no passive female anymore.[72]

Crystal Gazing, a 92-minute movie, was made on the break of 1981/1982 and was a reaction to tensions of the era of Thatcherism with an attempt to prefigure and demonstrate various political and aesthetical issues of that time. Thatcher was elected in 1979 and the film tries to capture very fast changes and implications of its phenomenon that it brought and hit Britain so quickly as they reflect after years, looking back at this production. Mulvey mentions the book *Fabian* written by Eric Kastner and whose action takes place in Berlin in the 1920s, and which was a point of departure for *Crystal Gazing* making. The book describes the passage from the energy and dynamics of Weimar epoch into the feeling of crisis and approaching catastrophe. So, the analogy she felt between the crisis in Britain between the 1970s and 1980s and the previous crisis in the 1920s was conceptualized in the film. It also brings the vision how technologies influence contemporary life and brings a notion of "crystal gazing".[73] For the first time the production flows away from the feminist program which was rooted in utopian politics and radical aesthetic with theory having the key meaning towards Thatcherism that changed political and economic surroundings totally. Thinking in categories of feminism was extremely difficult at that time as they both claim.[74]

Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti was a first essayistic documentary (29 minutes) done by Mulvey and Wollen in 1984, recording the Whitechapel exhibition organized by them in 1983 in London and documenting the catalogue that accompanied the event, to which the text was

[69] Nicolas Helm-Grovas, *Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Theory and Practice, Aesthetics and Politics, 1963-1983*, PhD Media Arts, Royal Holloway, University of London, p. 213-235, accessed: February10, 2022, available at: https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/30904436/2018helm_grovasnphd.pdf

[70] Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, "Statement by the Artists", 1980, accessed: August 23, 2020, available at: https://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/laura_mulvey_and_peter_wollen/amy!.html

[71] Jane Clarke, "AMY! Laura Mulvey and Peter Woolen 1980", *Spare Rib*, August 1980 accessed: August 23, 2020, available at: https://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/laura_mulvey_and_peter_wollen/amy!.html

[72] Laura Mulvey, *Introduction…*, *op. cit.*, p. xxix.

[73] Cristal gazing : the activity of looking at a crystal ball in order to predict the future, accessed: May 7, 2020, available at: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/crystal-gazing

[74] Laura Mulvey, "Unravelling the Puzzle…", *op. cit.*, pp. 335-336.

written as well together by them. The project was to "grasp the idea of curation" and make "almost like a document".[75] After visiting their friend in Mexico in 1979 they were both intrigued by Mexican avant-garde which did not have its roots in the industrial society so at the exhibition prepared in 1983, in the text written to it and in the film following the event they wanted to put into light the female radical art in Mexico which was "hoovering in the air" but not known in Britain at the end of 1970s. They chose to compare two different artists – a painter and a political photographer - with various radical aesthetics through their relationship. After the exhibition, making the film seemed just a logical move forward. They wanted the movie to be simple and raw the same as it was the assumption of their previous of filmic productions. The main assumption was to entwine both artists lives and arts in a way that they stay separated but deeply submerged in the context of post-revolutionary Mexican culture and politics.[76] As Elisa Wouk Almino points out, Mulvey makes sure not to make a focus on Diego Riviera with whom both women were also romantically involved.[77] The film was recently presented in 2022 at the exhibition "Laura Mulvey: revisiting Kahlo/Modotti 40 Years Later" in Zurich with Laura Mulvey being invited to "look back on the exhibition to revisit aims and aesthetic choices behind the curatorial work"[78], as the organisers write.

The Bad Sister (TV movie 1983, running time 93 min) returns to feminism and sexual ambivalence, it looks as if the mythic ideal of femininity with its theoretical and psychoanalytical plots were abandoned here by Mulvey and she decided to move towards and develop the feminine fantasy filed here. The very important point was the change of the medium from 16 mm tape to the video tape which was forced by Chanel 4 that became an independent, experimental, fiercely anti-Thatcher wing of television in 1982, where the film was to be shown. It was a filmic trial to adjust to changes without a radical aesthetics from 1970s, to find new ways and directions of narration to reach wider audience with more populistic divagations about fantasy, in opposition to psychoanalytic theory as Mulvey claims years later. Research of the relation mother-daughter is made here in less rigoristic way, with a kind of distance different to what they were exploring in *Riddles...*[79] By 1980 the political and aesthetic atmosphere was

[75] Daniella Shreir and Dorothy Allen Pickard, "In Conversation with Laura Mulvey…. ", *op. cit.*
[76] Laura Mulvey, "Unravelling the Puzzle…", *op. cit*., pp. 334-335.
[77] Elisa Wouk Almino, "The Art and Friendship of Frieda Kahlo and Tina Modotti in Laura Mulvey Documentary", accessed: August 30, 2020, available at: https://hyperallergic.com/443011/laura-mulvey-frida-kahlo-and-tina-modotti/
[78] Cabaret Voltaire Gallery , "Laura Mulvey: Revisiting Kahlo/Modotti 40 Years Later", Zurich, accessed: May 8, 2023, available at: https://zuercher-museen.ch/en/museums/cabaret-voltaire/archiv/laura-mulvey-revisiting-kahlo-modotti-40-years-later
[79] Elisa Wouk Almino, *The Art and Friendship of Frieda Kahlo…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 337-339.

changed under various pressures, financial cuts for independent cinema and new circumstances of production appeared, before avant-garde was ready to end this journey and the *Bad Sister* was made in these totally new conditions.[80]

Disgraced Monuments (48 mins., video) was a documentary production that was made between 1991-1993 by a Canadian photographer Mark Lewis and Mulvey. It was his first movie and the beginning of filmic adventure, for her it was the last film, which she always stresses. It was Lewis who was taking pictures of the ruined Russian monuments being fascinated by the fact that with moments of political crisis monuments become emblematic and their dismantling by the crowds brings a kind of symbolic meaning with a ritual aspect of the process. He was wondering, and these questions create the plot of the documentary, if these regime monuments should be destroyed or adjusted to another stage of history serving as traces of the past that should be forgotten. But it was Mulvey who suggested making a documentary about it which is the footage of the celebration, broadcast around the world as emblematic of the end of the state, dismantling the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky who was the founder of the infamous Soviet secret police.[81] Filmmakers remind us that history is cyclical since Dzerzhinsky himself was a revolutionary, a part of regime that tore down religious iconography and monuments to czarist rule systematically. As an art historian interviewed in the film notes, "it's easier to struggle with monuments than with concrete reality".[82]

Summary

Even if Mulvey's filmic production is less known than her theoretical work, it seriously demonstrates her engagement with experimental and feminist filmmaking addressing themes of gender, myth, power and desire with an implementation of non-linear storytelling. Her filmic works complement her theoretical contributions, as they embody and explore the concepts and themes central to her scholarly work. Mulvey close collaboration for twenty years with Peter Wollen (1974-1984) on various, described above projects, their individual contributions to film theory and criticism extend beyond their joint filmic productions. Apart from the short film about Marlin Monroe lasting 3 minutes (2000) Mulvey's break in making movies lasts until today. As artist claims the conditions have changed after *Disgraced Monuments* production

[80] Laura Mulvey, Introduction to First Edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures, op. cit.*, p xxix.
[81] Laura Mulvey, "Unravelling the Puzzle…", *op. cit.*, pp. 339-341.
[82] Jennifer Lange, *Laura Mulvey and Mark Lewis. Disgraced Monuments* (1991-1993), accessed: August 19, 2020, available at: https://wexarts.org/film-video/laura-mulvey-and-mark-lewis

with new rules introduced by art galleries and she did not have time to adjust to them being absorbed so much in academic work. But she does not deny the possibility of making a movie based on interviews with people engaged in politics.[83]

1.5. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" main concepts and methodology used.

Since "literature is replete with attempts to summarize" the Mulvey's essay, as Andrew Tudor noted[84], the project undertaken seeks to cast the light over developments and its implications specifically into the field of visual pleasure both in visual theory in practice. That is why it seems necessary to bring a short summary of Mulvey's arguments included in her text without an attempt to offer another textual interpretation.

As it was mentioned before, the essay was the first Mulvey's writing in the field of cinema and film analysis. Given primarily as a paper in the French Department of the University of Wisconsin in the USA in 1973, it diagnosed how Hollywood cinema reinforced pre-existing patriarchal social codes. She incorporated psychoanalytic theory to analyze film and forms of gendered spectatorship to decode and juxtapose the connection of politics of seeing and representations of women. In doing so, she cast men in dynamic roles, women in passive ones applying above to construction of images of women on the screen as well as construction of narration process and camera movements She critiqued traditional cinema's inherent voyeurism, and masculinisation of the spectator looking which influence both male and female ways of looking. Central to her argument is the fact that women's place in cultural symbolic order is cumulated in fetishistic representations that are symptoms of unconscious masculine drives, desires and fears towards femininity. Male visual pleasure is identified via concepts of scopophilia, voyeurism and fetishization all ascribed to erotic pleasure in looking as basic human instinct. All above is applied by Mulvey to analysis of some classic Hollywood films in which an active male spectator looks at the passive, voiceless female star who stops the narrative with her "to-be-looked-at-ness". For Mulvey the filmic convention of creating the looks on the screen, exchanged between film protagonists and with which the spectators identify

[83] Laura Mulvey, "Unravelling the Puzzle…", *op. cit.,* p. 342.
[84] Andrew Tudor, *Decoding Culture: Theory and Method in Cultural Studies,* Sage, London 1999, p. 140.

need deconstruction and intervention into mainstream cinema pleasure codes in order to resist and destroy patriarchy.

Going deeper into Mulvey's polemical concepts, first part of VPNC focuses on the usage of psychoanalytical tools which become applied into unmasking the ways in which film uses the coded stereotypes of sexual difference, these differences unconsciously taken for granted strengthen the collective imagination created by cinema. Her main assumption here is to destroy the visual pleasures created by patriarchal phallocentric system of signs where woman is the central symbol and signifier of sexuality, following the patriarchally constructed idea of feminine symbolic equality to nature (and masculine equality to culture production). She stresses that the idea of a woman and symbolism constructed around her image is the core of the patriarchal system. She brings here into light how the Freud's concepts of masculine fear of castration by a woman who is as a person without a penis and the concept of the memory of lack which transforms a woman into phallic symbol in culture formulate the unconscious patriarchal perception. Nature and anatomy of women are the basis of these social and cultural assumptions creating the clear frames and sharp edges of intellectual sexual difference with female impossibility of constructing the cultural meanings. She brings the phallocentric cultural order with its linguistically constructed oppression and psychoanalytical concepts supporting the systematic lower *status quo* of women in society. Even if the usage of Freudian methodology seemed at that time unacceptable by the feminist film community, she proposes examining its tools as the way to get closer to the roots of female oppression.

In further paragraph she moves into the analysis of changes in Hollywood cinema over the last few decades and finds the unconscious background for its formalized productions and ways of directing. She notes that images produced on the screen become the symptoms having its roots in repeating common unconscious psychical social obsessions and points of view. Adding that the magic of Hollywood cinema was created and flourishes thanks to the ability of manipulation with visual pleasure. Not having rivals in cinematic production until 1960s mainstream cinema was coding erotic field and male fantasies under the visual language of patriarchal system and its dominant rules. The central point becomes the analysis and destruction of this dominant and formalized erotic pleasure production in Hollywood film narrative serving male fantasies and their visual satisfaction. And this satisfaction she wants to attack as the peak point of fiction movies, stepping outside the format to understand the new language of desire.

Following above she seeks the ways to analyze the dominant human pleasure of looking and its fascination with a human/female form. Mulvey brings Freud's term of scopophilia where looking is only for a pleasure sake and the situation of pleasure when we are looked at. Freud described scopophilia as the element of human erotic instinct operating independently outside erogenous zones and stated that it is active instinct in its form developing as well towards its narcistic version in situations when we are looked at or watching ourselves in the mirror. Developing cinematic possibility of satisfying pleasure of looking she moves into scopophilia in its narcistic aspect and its connection with curiosity as well as our cinematic fascination and idealized identification with protagonist. She brings Lacan into analysis of cinema and the process of identification taking place there where we are projecting repressed desires onto the protagonists in the film**.** Citing Lacan's ides about child mirror phase and its idealized identification which brings the formulation of the self-subject and ego construction Mulvey applies this to cinematic identification with the objects/ persons screened, with the cinematic screen serving as a mirror of 'us'/protagonists and satisfying our narcissistic viewing of ourselves. By the similarity of mirror and screen our fascination and identification with the ideal ego is strongly build in and strengthen. This background unconscious structure used by cinema produces ideals and celebrities/stars with whom we identify. Mulvey constates that our erotic instincts and identification processes gain their meaning in symbolic order which articulates our desires. All above in the context of the screen and female image imagined can be pleasurable in form but fearsome in its content bring us back to the masculine castration fear and creates the paradox connected with viewing.

Here she comes to the third part of the essay and the concept of woman as image and man as bearer of the look which is based on inequality of sexes in the area connected to the pleasure of looking. The gaze is divided here for a masculine, dominant and active one that casts its fantasies on the appropriately styled female image which provides erotic and visual pleasures. Women become an erotic spectacle and sexualized objects to be looked at and fulfil male desires. She cites the words of Budd Boetticher who stresses that woman itself does not have a meaning, the only meaning comes from love, fear and the provocation which heroine create. Mulvey also uses Molly Haskell interpretation of diegesis construction where the desiring gaze of the male protagonist and the gaze of male viewer focus on the women from the same perspective, cumulating the tension as it was from the first-time with Marylin Monroe, Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo unreal images constructions. According to above the ruling patriarchal ideologies and hidden psychological constructions the man cannot bear the burden

of being the sexualized object and does not want to look at his own exhibitionist image on the screen. He is the one overwhelmingly ruling the film fantasy, the whole narration, action and creation of woman as passive spectacle, an icon. He is the ideal to identify with as someone powerful, dynamic, active far more than being only male erotic object.

Further she goes into the analysis the masculinisation of gaze constructions and its reasons rooted into male scopophilic pleasure and the satisfaction of expectations. The viewer possesses the dazzling, loaded with erotic spectacle woman in both ways via the male hero and via diegesis, all happening thanks to identification with the male character. At this point Mulvey moves into psychoanalysis and the fear of castration connected to sexual difference and feminine lack of penis which becomes the frame of symbolic order with a woman as a symbolic lack and the Father's law. She points out two ways of escape for masculine unconscious from the fear of castration, first one is researching the woman and disavowing her mystery by her depreciation and punishment both of which are connected with voyeurism and sadism with many other plots as she further presents it on the basis of fetishism in Sternberg films. The other escape is created by making a woman as a fetish object which brings more masculine hope, fantasy, and visual satisfaction than fear. It is called by her a scopophilic fetishism and looks more satisfying since erotic instinct is satisfied with looking itself.

By analyzing Sternberg's *Morocco* with Marlene Dietrich as a star, Mulvey points how much the heroine becomes a fragmented, fetishized perfect product with close shots of all parts of her body which make them the main content of the film narration. As for Hitchcock she claims that he was fascinated with both ways of masculine voyeurism connected with fear of castration and male desires supported by the fetishistic scopophilia as well. She follows Hitchcock fascination with voyeuristic fetishism and erotic obsessions through analysis of three male characters from three films *Vertigo*, *Marnie*, and *Rear Window*. All of them are in powerful positions in symbolic patriarchal order and fighting with their erotic instincts ruling them. Women are always punished for their curiosity and misbehaviors; men are not subjected to the law having money and male power constituted by language and symbolic order.

Mulvey also sought the way for new cinematic narrative solutions and new ways of representations being new options to Hollywood formalized patriarchal production which she hoped can be realized in counter cinema and female avant-garde proposals. For her the 1970s

was a time which ended the Hollywood cinema which was fading away to the past with the beginning of a new era of experimental cinema as a new filmic path and counterproposal.

Summary of the essay contains conclusions about above complex interaction of looks and its pleasures and displeasures delivered by a fiction film which are created through psychoanalytical mechanisms of scopophilic instinct (the pleasure of looking at the other person as an erotic object) and contrary to it drives that form identification processes. Here she stresses again the structure of representation on the screen which is produced according to existing order of patriarchal ideology with a woman as a castrator. To mask this fear of castration the image of a woman invokes voyeuristic and fetishistic mechanisms, changing the ways of looking. and producing the filmic codes and female spectacle to create illusion and satisfaction of male desires. To break this pleasure of the active masculine gaze both as a spectator and voyeuristic recording of the camera she finds solution in radical cinema that has already undertaken trials to blow against the traditional, monolithic film conventions.

Methodology used by Mulvey in VPNC

Mulvey's essay explores the power relationship between the cinematic apparatus, the spectator, and the representation of women on screen. She argues that classical Hollywood cinema operates within a scopophilic framework, where the male viewer is positioned as an active subject with male dominant gaze which permeates patriarchal cultures, and women watch cinema with a man-spectator perspective being reduced on screen to passive, fetishized objects of male visual pleasure. Even if the usage of psychoanalysis was regarded by feminist theory as heavily incorrect at that time and Freud's concepts were considered as profoundly misogynistic, Mulvey decided to apply psychoanalytical terms of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to destroy masculine pleasure governing the cinema. Bringing examples of Hitchcock and Sternberg films she analyses further the ways how camera techniques, narrative structures, and the positioning of the female body on screen contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal norms and power.

Cultural journalist at the 1970s, academic at present and Mulvey's friend - Mandy Merck's analysis of the essay in her dossier during the celebration in British Film Institute in 2015 casts a light over essay's contemporary application to every form of visual culture and at the same time its total lack of conventional academic structure. She stresses its important feminist

manifesto form even if feminist were condemning "the oppressive operations of sexist imagery" used there and the result being condemned by famous male scholar David Bordwell "for its outrageous attempt to excite feeling of liberation".[85] As Merck claims, to the consternation of Mulvey's critics, VPNC is "hyperbolic in its claims, selective in its examples, and largely without page citations or quotes". To re-construct methodological horizon of Mulvey's essay Merck has spent much of her teaching career trying to discover the "missing" footnotes left out by Mulvey. When Merck begun to reconstruct the theoretical archeology of the essay a few years ago an interesting comment was raised. Attempting to see what would happen if the essay was published today, she asked her colleague at Royal Holloway to analyze and estimate VPNC with the mark it would receive today. John Ellis, heading the Media Panel at UK universities and Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) rated it as follows: "Originality: 4. Significance 4. Rigour? [here mulling over a short essay with, in its final published form, no footnotes at all] … ummm… 2". [86] As Merck concludes:

In these days of absurd regulation of higher education by research evaluations and impact assessments, it is wonderful to celebrate a work of criticism that was written, as Laura said, 'from political necessity' and which has created the greatest impact of all.[87]

The consternation is even stronger when we apply Bordwell's concept of the exemplar provided in the same book where he critiques Mulvey and which definition cannot serve better to describe the essay today importance, even without explicit methodology included: "The exemplar instantiates 'what the field is about': if it progressive, it shapes future work; if it has been superseded, it still must be acknowledged, attacked, quarreled with. Essayistic and academic critics write in the shadows of exemplars".[88]

Sigmund Freud traces in VPNC

Fascination and critique of psychoanalytical perspective, both in British feminist film theory and artistic practice in 1960s and 1970s were overwhelming, especially after first translation into English of Lacan's "Mirror Stage" which was published in New Left Review in 1968. So, there is no surprise that Mulvey who belonged to Historical Reading Group in Women's Movement read almost all that Freud wrote. The aim was to read psychoanalysis to find the

[85] David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in Interpretation of Cinema,* Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 207 cited in Mandy Merck, *Visual Pleasure at 40. Dossier,* British Film Institute 2015, p. 478.
[86] Quoted in Mandy Merck, *Visual Pleasure at 40*, British Film Institute, 2015, p. 478 after Mandy Merck, "Mulvey's manifestó", *Camera Obscura,* Vol. 22, No 3, 2007, p. 19.
[87] Mandy Merck, "Dossier. Visual Pleasure at 40", British Film Institute, 2015, p. 478.
[88] David Bordwell, *Making Meaning… op. cit.*, p. 25.

point of departure, discussion or controversy that could be applied to feminist theory and discussion of the concept "woman as image" that was a center of polemics around female representations in culture and art as Mulvey recalls that times.[89]

For Freud scopophilia belongs to basic human erotic instincts but he divides it into an active one – the male active scopophilia and the passive one associated with feminine looking. The origin of definition comes from Greek *skopein 'look at'* + *-philia*[90] which in psychoanalysis is transmitted into sexual pleasure derived chiefly from watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity, later being called voyeurism. The similar definition is given by online dictionary: "Scopophilia as sexual pleasure derived from watching others in a state of nudity, undressing, or engaging in sexual activity. If scopophilia is persistent, the condition is essentially voyeurism. Also called scoptophilia".[91]

After Mulvey, scopophilia enters contemporary visual culture as "literally, the love of looking":

The term refers to the predominantly male gaze of Hollywood cinema, which enjoys objectifying women into mere objects to be looked at (rather than subjects with their own voice and subjectivity). The term, as used in feminist film criticism, is heavily influenced by both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis.[92]

Sigmund Freud for the first time uses the term in *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), where he isolates scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality existing as a drive independently of the subject's erotogenic zones. Mulvey uses the term after Freud in VPNC and applies it to analysis of possible pleasures offered by the cinema, as she writes:

One is scopophilia. There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure at being looked at. Originally, in his Three essays on Sexuality, Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exists as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.[93]

But it needs to be pointed out that this contemporary definition with an adjective "curious" comes with Mulvey's essay publication and in following years she gets back to "curiosity" in her book *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996) as a masculine attribute of the adventurous and curious male character, which traits are culturally forbidden to women. The fact that the term gaze as being male and patriarchally differentiated was introduced to visual culture and psychoanalysis

[89] Laura Mulvey, Interview with Lara Thomson, "Unravelling the Puzzle…". *op. cit.*, pp. 322-323.
[90] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/scopophilia
[91] https://dictionary.apa.org/scopophilia
[92] https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/narratology/terms/scopophilia.html
[93] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", accessed: June 5, 2023, available at: http://www.georgesclaudeguilbert.com/mulvey.pdf

by Mulvey in 1975 is often overlooked and Lacan is treated as the father of the term without appreciating Mulvey's gendered indication. About origins of her concept talked Andy Dwyer in 2012, during International Women's Day event.[94]

As for medical definition, "scopophilia is a desire to look at sexually stimulating scenes especially as a substitute for actual sexual participation"[95] Whereas psychiatry specifies passive scopophilia as deriving pleasure from viewing nude bodies, sexual acts or erotic photographs which is subsequently named voyeurism and treated as its synonym. And active scopophilia, also named scoptophilia, is described as abnormal desire to be seen, especially genitally which is named exhibitionism. However, medical nomenclature does not consider the terms within the sexual difference or gender difference schemes, the only differentiation comes with giving the terms grammatical parts —scopophiliac, *n.* — scopophilic, *adj.* [96]

Summing up, the conjunction of scopophilia, voyeurism and curiosity used firstly by Freud transformed themselves in Mulvey's essay and created a totally new potential regarding the imbalance of gendered gaze with its binary division for an active male gaze and passive female gaze. The influence of VPNC on changes concerning the mere existence of female voyeurism will be discussed further. There is not a footnote in VPNC about Freud's works to support Mulvey's choices since the publication was written with an assumption of an essay form, but references are made in the text itself and she mentions her Freudian inspirations in interviews and further writings.

Mulvey terminology of VPNC and John Berger concepts: similarity and difference.

Concurrence of Mulvey essay with John Berger television series and later subsequent publication of essay "Ways of Seeing" should also be illuminated. Berger's essay and his series done for American television became the basis and point of departure for Art Academies syllabus starting from its first publication in 1973. Berger's "Ways of Seeing" still seem more popular reference at Fine Art Academies than Mulvey's VPNC but as for theory of visual culture and feminism, they often appear nowadays close together in anthologies, i.a. in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* published by Routledge in 2010.

[94] Mandy Merck foot note no 5 in her Dossier during 'Visual Pleasure at 40' celebration at BFI, 2015, p. 478.
[95] https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/scopophilia
[96] https://www.thefreedictionary.com/scopophilia

Berger writes in "Ways of Seeing" that social presence of women is different than masculine high and dominant historically position in society which is embodied by the process of the promise of power. Describing this 'promised power' he brings its economic, social, physical and temperamental aspects which are guaranteed and sufficient in the context of the masculine appearance only. Masculine capability is socially ascribed by societal codes of thinking, so man exercises this power on others as granted.[97] The concurrency in Mulvey and Berger's thoughts and terms appears striking and worth pointing out, here as he constates:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of a woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.[98]

The similarity of thinking with Mulvey is also included in Berger analysis of "woman's self as being split in two" and her continuous attempt to watch herself as if she was constantly accompanied by her own, critical and surveying image of herself. He provides social conditions forming this attitude "from earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually", so the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* create her double identity as a woman.[99] Worth stressing is also the masculine narcistic attitude that Berger supports in his writing concerning female permission to see and permission to female desire, as he states about female nude symbolism as being before anything else a painting of sexual provocation but what is more important according to European tradition of art is the fact that the "woman's sexual passion needs to be minimalized so that the spectator may feel that has a monopoly of such passion". Women are there represented to feed masculine sexual appetite, not to have their own one.[100] The mirror and pleasure become the conjunction area for Mulvey, Lacan and Berger as well, even if used by Berger in the context of female vanity produced by men:

The mirror was often used as a symbol of the vanity of woman. The moralizing, however, was mostly hypocritical. You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting 'Vanity', thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure.[101]

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[97] John Berger, "Ways of Seeing" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, Amelia Jones (ed.), Routledge, New York, 2010, pp. 49-52.
[98] Ibidem, p. 50.
[99] Ibidem, pp. 49-52.
[100] Ibidem, p. 50.
[101] Ibidem, p. 51.

Another similarity comes with the idea of masculinisation of the spectator, which in Berger terms there exists a cultural assumption that always "ideal" spectator is male and the "image of the woman is designed to 'flatter him".[102] There he follows the female representations as objects in arts claiming that contradiction can be stated simply: "on one hand the individualism of the artist, the thinker, the patron, the owner: on the other hand, the person who is the object of their activities – the woman - treated as a thing or an abstraction".[103]

In the analysis comparing both theoretical texts art historian Tamar Grab finds Berger's style of writing as a kind of moralization and existing for centuries in art Western culture patriarchal ways of looking and representing women. Considering Mulvey's polemical approach to the images of women discussed widely at that time Grab constates the re-production of the masculinisation of the process of looking, searching its background with the usage of psychoanalytical theories. As Grab states about her different perspective on both essays:

I did not come to the essay from perspective of film studies; I came to it from looking, particularly for me, I came to it from looking at painting and sculpture, and it opened up the possibility of thinking about the operation of power in relation to fine art – not in John Berger's mode of moralizing dictates about what constituted objectification and agency, but rather in thinking psychoanalytically about the multiple subject positions […]. [104]

The surprising fact comes out, how few analyses in visual culture and film theory reflected about and attempted to compare Berger and Mulvey's lines of thoughts, their convergence but also striking different approaches, as mentioned above by Grab moralizing tone of Berger's article, and analytical tools used by both to carry the polemics or more statement of facts in Berger case. Even if there appeared an attempt in 2018 to make a parallel analysis using both Mulvey and Berger concepts in the article "She's Gazing like the Man": Parallels between Laura Mulvey's and John Berger's Feminist Film Theory in Andy Flickman's She's the Man' written by Julia Sebastien[105], it needs to be noticed that it overlooks or missuses the fact that the term male gaze coined by Mulvey is applied to Berger concepts, who never himself used such terminology and its association with erotic instinct provided by Mulvey from the perspective of psychoanalytical theory. It was Mulvey who introduced and coined the male gaze and gaze itself for the first time in film theory and generally in all the analyses of ways of looking which is not noticed there.

[102] John Berger, "Ways of…", *op. cit.,* p. 51.
[103] Ibidem, p. 52.
[104] Tamar Grab, Dossier in *Visual Pleasure at 40, op. cit.,* p. 473.
[105] Julia Sebastien, "She's Gazing like the Man": Parallels between Laura Mulvey's and John Berger's Feminist Film Theory in Andy Flickman's She's the Man', *The Western Undergraduate Journal of Film Studies,* Volume 7, Issue 1, 2018.

Similarity of Berger's and Mulvey's concepts seem striking, however Mulvey herself has not publicly discussed her knowledge of John Berger's essay "Ways of Seeing', therefore without any explicit statements or evidence from Laura Mulvey herself it is uncertain whether she was aware of Berger's essay or its specific ideas.

1.6. Feminist theory and female erotic art practice as historical background of VPNC.

To outline the meaning of second-wave feminist era, that started in America in the early 1960s and continued throughout 1970s, for writing the Mulvey's essay and its methodological inspirations, Women's Liberation Movement needs to be mentioned again. Theoretical tools that feminist theory took then as an initial stand were connected to the body as a site of struggle which moved beyond the social and legal issues towards sexuality and its representations. As Mulvey recalls "the belief that woman's reality could adequately counter male fantasy was not enough". Feminist Reading Group as well as most feminist writers then, with their aim of female "consciousness rising" and critical reading of dominant philosophical trends, discussed and wrote about the need of social and cultural relations being analysed in terms of fantasy as a force of desire and its materiality. Among other were famous feminist writers and psychanalysists such as Luce Irigaray, Michele Montrelay, Helene Cixous or Claire Johnston. Psychoanalysis became firstly widely criticized by many feminists of second-wave era as a misogynist theory and approach, with Freud as the main enemy, to became later, starting in 1970s with Mulvey's VPNC the main source of methodology with its tools to analyze film and visual culture. For Mulvey, "psychoanalytic theory opened up the possibility of understanding the mechanics of popular mythology and its raw materials: images of sexual difference, instincts and their vicissitudes, primal fantasy".[106]

Semiotics and structuralism played also central role in second-wave feminism opening up the possibilities of understanding how images works as signs and symptoms, patterns of rhetoric, narrative and narration as Mulvey recalls their meaning in the Women's Movement twenty years later. A world whose images and sensations were previously invisible and not grasped, materialized themselves with the language, being decoded, named as objects "like the appearance of invisible ink in front of the flame".[107] That is why semiotics and signs played so important role in feminist deconstruction of representation and its critical approach, bringing

[106] Laura Mulvey, Introduction to the First Edition in *Visual and Other Pleasures, op. cit*., p. xxxiii.
[107] Ibidem. pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

the pressure to juxtapose codes of collective fantasy and interwove them with politics, culture, cinema, and art.

1.6.1. Black-Sheep feminism and feminist approach to pornography and visual pleasure.

Black Sheep Feminism was a group of artists who are the best example how feminism was divided in the second wave and how strongly it differed in the area of looking for both the female body and the male body as well as the rights to visual pleasure itself. In times when it was male fantasy and desire with its fetishistic symptoms as areas to decipher and analyze, on the feminist theoretical main stage artists like Anita Steckel, Betty Tompkins, Joan Semmel, Cosy Fanni Tutti and Marylin Minter were exploring their female ways of seeing and perceiving sexuality, masculinity and female pleasure from producing and looking at the explicitly erotic male nude. Their radical contributions to art history were parallel to feminist theory that together with decoding male symptoms produced in visual culture was trying to avoid female pleasure and desire represented in art by the above artists, both by its omission in analyses and depreciation of its value. As curator Alison M. Gingeras notes, even today the politics of erotic representation and the question of pornography remains one of the most fractious issues within feminist political and artistic circles. She recalls that female artists "who embraced a sex-positive attitude in their work have been systematically excluded from important exhibitions and catalogues devoted to women's art" as well as in many cases were actively subjected to censure in the 1970s. Still nowadays they are largely overlooked within the legacy of feminist art as a whole.[108]

It is worth noticing that at the time when Mulvey wrote her famous essay, women artists mentioned above strayed from the established feminist flock and created Fight Censorship (FC) group in 1973. In a press release given that year, the collective described itself as "women artists who have done, will do, or do some form of sexually explicit art, i.e. political, humorous, erotic, psychological". Semmel, Steckel and their FC colleagues under the banner "Women Artists Join to Fight to Put Sex into Museums and Get Sexism and Puritanism Out" attempted to push sexually explicit artworks done by women for wider acceptance. Scholar Richard Meyer wrote about artists handling with the male body: "they eroticized the male body in ways that conformed neither to heterosexual convention nor to mainstream feminist thought at the time. The art they produced reminds us that sexuality cannot be made to align with politics, including

[108] Alison M. Gingeras, "Black-Sheep Feminist Artists", posted May 26, 2016, accessed: February 17, 2019, available at: www.artnews.com/art-news/news/black-sheep-feminist-artists-4191/

the politics of feminism".[109] In a 2007 interview with Meyer, Semmel said that she was trying to "find an erotic language to which women could respond, one which did not reiterate the male power positions and prevalent fetishizations in conventional pornography and art" [110] and she wanted to develop a visual "language whereby a woman could express her own desires, whatever they might be, without shame or sentimentality".[111]

Many historians view the second-wave feminist era as ending in the early 1980s with feminism disputes around sexuality and pornography which started feminist sex wars and Mulvey's essay was one of the main fuses generating that ferocious discussion about female visual pleasure. But hardly anyone notices the contribution made by these women artists of black-sheep feminism circle who stayed away from the mainstream feminism of the 1960s and 1970s providing essential performative, discursive, and iconographic precedents of contemporary art exploring female visual pleasure, sex-positive terrain in art for women and female sexual agency. As Gingeras finally concludes:

While these women continue to be the black sheep who strayed from the established feminist flock, today they provide essential performative, discursive, and iconographic precedents for a host of contemporary art practices that explore hardcore, sex-positive terrain—from Jeff Koons's "Made in Heaven" series to more recent porn-inspired work by John Currin. Despite being shut out of the mainstream canon of "feminist" art, these four artists represent the unsung matriarchal forebears for those artists who seek to push the limits of body art, political correctness, and (female) sexual agency.[112]

The controversial conference *Towards a Politics of Sexuality*, better known as Barnard Sex Conference, was held at Barnard College (a private women's liberal arts college in New York City) in April 24, 1982 and was a key event often regarded as a starting point of the Feminist Sex Wars of the 1980s. It was an important event in the light of growing movement WAP, Women Against Pornography led by Andrea Dworkin, Susan Brownmiller, and Robin Morgan. Therefore, the aim was as Jane Gould, the director of Women's Center then, noted "to move beyond the debates about violence and pornography and focus on sexuality apart from reproduction".[113] Organized and led by Carole Vance to explore the politics of sexuality and female pleasure the conference was picketed by antipornography groups.[114] Event brought

[109] Richard Meyer, "Hard Targets: Male Bodies, Feminist Art, And the Force of Censorship in the 1970s", accessed: March 25, 2019, available at: https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1098/Butler_Hard_Targets_Male_Bodies.PDF

[110] Alison Gingeras, "Black-Sheep Feminist…", *op. cit.*

[111] Ibidem.

[112] Ibidem.

[113] Jane Gould, *Juggling a memoir of work, family, and feminism,* New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1997.

[114] Heather Love, "Diary of a Conference on Sexuality, 1982", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 17 No. 1, 2011, pp. 49-51. *Project MUSE,* accessed: May 7, 2022, available at: muse.jhu.edu/article/409150.

together a diverse range of feminist perspectives, with some arguing for a more permissive and sex-positive approach to sexuality and pornography, while other critiqued pornography as inherently exploitative and degrading women. Among organisers were feminists Ellen Dubois, Ellen Willis, American cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin, and Heather Love.

Conference divided and conflicted feminism particularly regarding the issue of visual pleasure and depictions of women in pornography.[115] It stimulated a vigorous and heated debate around relationship between visual pleasure, pornography, and women's empowerment which brought these issues to the forefront and encouraged feminists to critically examine their positions and engage in nuanced discussions.

The conference highlightened the deep divisions within feminism itself on the topic of pornography and visual pleasure. Feminists who held differing views disagreed over the question of agency, objectification, and the potential positive impact of pornography on women's liberation. These division continues to this day and continues to shape feminist discourse on sexuality and visual pleasure. It paved the way for the exploration of sex-positive feminism, which argues for the embracing of sexual agency and the celebration of diverse expressions of sexuality. It also brought attention to the intersections of race, class, and sexuality within feminist debates on pornography and visual pleasure.

While the conference did not bring about a definite resolution to the debates surrounding sexuality, visual pleasure, and pornography within feminism, it played a pivotal role in shaping the ongoing cultural and academic discourse and contributed to the diversification of feminist perspectives, and finally prompted further research with deeper analysis of the topic of sexuality and visual representation. [116]

1.7. Female avant-garde practice in 1960s as an inspiration for Mulvey's essay writing.

Examining 1970s avant-garde film making in London and New American Cinema practices from 1960s provide a very important context for Laura Mulvey's theoretical concepts and identify the moments that preceded and were significant for Mulvey's paper VPNC in 1973. Without her knowledge and enthusiastic involvement in avant-garde film culture Mulvey's essay may not have taken the form of a polemic with Hollywood productions and may not have

[115] Alice Echols, "Retrospective: Tangled up in Pleasure and Danger", *Signs. Journal on women and Society*, Vol 42, No 1, Autumn 2016, *Pleasure and Danger: Sexual Freedom and Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*, available at: https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/signs/current, accessed: August 17, 2020.

[116] Material from presentation of research titled "Feminism and Pornography" at the conference held in Cracow at Jagiellonian University in June 2018, titled *Theories and Practices of Looking.*

crystallized such productive historical filmic intersection, as British academic Mary C. White stresses.[117]

There are many traces following Mulvey's theoretical concepts, and some discuss its influence on visual pleasure practice. There are also analyses that trace the theoretical inspirations which became contingent to essay creation and Mulvey's inspiration provided by visual pleasure produced on screen by contemporary American artists working in Britain who challenged "the sexual evasion and euphemism of mainstream cinema"[118], as David Curtis claims. Here he points Carolee Schneemann, Sandy Daley, and Stephen Dwoskin. Generally, Curtis who was one of the founders of London Independent Filmmakers Co-op reflects in his book over the time of 1960s and 1970s, as being a remarkable gap with very little knowledge of American avant-garde visual pioneers exploring sexual liberation which influenced the development of the British film-making scene, even if these movies had a relatively wide circulation at that time in London. "Schneemann herself identified the reason"[119], as he claims, and brings her words recited in a sound tape that accompanied her film (1973-1975) titled *Kitch's Last Meal*:

I met a happy man
A structuralist filmmaker
- but don't call me that – it's something else I do –

he said we are fond of you
you are charming
but don't ask to look at your films
we cannot
there are certain films we cannot look at:
the personal clutter
the persistence of feelings
the hand-touch sensibility
the diaristic indulgence
the painterly mess
the dense gestalt
the primitive techniques
I don't take the advice of men, they only talk to themselves.[120]

As Curtis stresses, until the mid 1970s stern injunctions against representation and "particularly any depiction of women, had taken hold among the Co-op group" with Peter Gidal, an American being its main leader. That is why Dwoskin being the only one of the 1960s Americans who was rooted in Britain at time "had become loner in his pursuits".[121] The same

[117] Mary C. White, *From text to practice: rereading Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure…, op. cit.,* p. 7.
[118] David Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain,* British Film Institute 2007, p. 250.
[119] Ibidem, p. 250.
[120] Transcript in the BAFY Study Collection in Davis Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain,* British Film Institute 2007, p. 251.
[121] David Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film…, op. cit.*, p. 251.

applies to Schneemann[122], her *Fuses* was to shake the walls and rearrange the avant-garde masculine look in filming sexuality in 1960s. It brought strong resistance and condemnation in *Fluxus* that finished with removing her from the movement, but it also became one of the first female movies exploring visual pleasure construction on the screen. Its reality and honesty in pleasure representation for both sexes, without objectifying anybody, being mutual exchange and joy were the Schneemann's filmic counter-response to male dominated avant-garde where she functioned only as a muse. The future brought loads of disappointments both from female film theory, art critical circles and avant-garde writers of that time which pedantically omitted it in their analyses. Schneemann's idea "liberation through transgression" and metaphorical use of the body performance "finds echoes in many of the feminist works of the late 1970s and 1980s"[123] but feminist analysis of her sexually explicit art came in the beginning of the 1980s, more than ten years after *Fuses* was screened in London, when feminism split itself and its pro-sexual direction noticed its value.

Schneemann's self-shot experimental film *Fuses* (1964-1967) lasting 18 mins. is a painted movie-collage with sequences of lovemaking between her and James Tenney, composer - her then partner and great love. As artists wrote about this project:

I wanted to see if the experience of what I saw would have any correspondence to what I felt-- the intimacy of the lovemaking... And I wanted to put into that materiality of film the energies of the body, so that the film itself dissolves and recombines and is transparent and dense-- as one feels during lovemaking... It is different from any pornographic work that you've ever seen-- that's why people are still looking at it! And there's no objectification or fetishization of the woman.[124]

David Curtis is the rare example of Co-op founders and activist who brings into the light evasion of Mulvey's inspiration by Schneemann's *Fuses* proving that the emergence of VPNC from female filmic practices of visual pleasure representation at the time is still very rarely acknowledged. The lack of critical response to her films in Britain was commented by Schneemann herself and illustrates the time delay between the beginnings of filmmaking by female artists and arrival of feminist film theory (marked historically by the Women and Cinema event that was organized during the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1972 mentioned before). Officially Mulvey's own *Panthesilea* (1974) marked the beginning of native British

[122] Carolee Schneemann - multidisciplinary artist. Transformed the definition of art, especially discourse on the body, sexuality, and gender. The history of her work is characterized by research into archaic visual traditions, pleasure wrested from suppressive taboos, the body of the artist in dynamic relationship with the social body – from Carolee Schneemann Bibliography, accessed: January 23, 2017, available at: http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/bio.html

[123] David Curtis, *A History…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-253.

[124] Carolee Schneemann, available at: http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/fuses.html, accessed: March 14, 2017.

female artists filmmaking. Since Schneemann commented later upon Mulvey's omission of *Fuses*[125] as being first explicit film about female visual pleasure, what was widely discussed and critiqued in avant-garde circle in London in 1970s after its screenings. Curtis recalls Schneemann's disappointment:

Fuses was being shown in London, 1968, 1969, through the early 70s when I lived there – as Mulvey began writing her film essays. Mulvey talked to me about the rapture Fuses made in pornography - how important Fuses was as an erotic vision. It was going to change the whole argument and discussion of filmic representation of sexuality and… then she couldn't touch it! Mulvey has never mentioned my films. But perhaps it was a touchstone behind critical theory for Mulvey. We were there at the same moment, in parallel.[126]

Even if feminist film theory in 1970s was just making first steps to mention in the context of the importance of Schneemann Fuses and its omission by Mulvey's in VPNC, the essay could be classified itself from psychoanalytical perspective as female visual pleasure symptom or its displacement, using Freud's categories. It needs to be stressed that not only female artists doing sexually explicit visual art then were "invisible" in theoretical feminist circles, which reason was the theoretical trend against naked female representations. Generally, all female filmic avant-garde practice was systematically omitted which was pointed out by Mary C. White in her analysis and interviews made with Lis Rhodes (member of Independent Filmmakers Co-op) about marginalization of female practice visibility in London avant-garde at that time.[127] Following Mulvey's comments on "utopian optimism" of the 1970s as she reflects herself about that period as well as her faith into counter-cinema which was to bring new visual pleasure perspectives she says that all these was lost in the 1980s together with new politics, cutting funds for experimental cinema in Britain and parallelly explosion of pornography that started another directions of debates about representations of female visual pleasure and female rights to be authors in this field.

1.8. The male gaze as groundbreaking conceptual terminology applied by Mulvey.

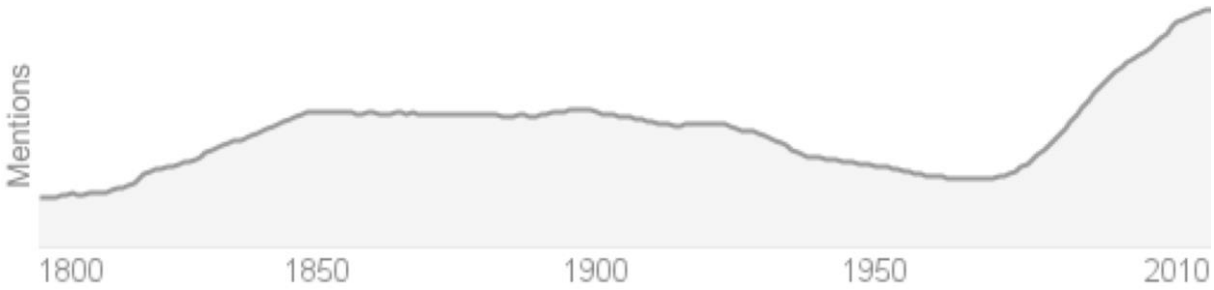
It can be suggested here that the "concept of pleasure in looking" was taken by Mulvey from both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, even if in her later writings appears Rolland Barthes and his pleasure categories applied to the pleasure of the text. "Mirror phase" used by her

[125] David Curtis, *A History… op. cit.*, p. 252.
[126] Carolee Schneemann cited by David Curtis in *A History…*, after note in *Some Films from Tony Morgan* – self-published, c. 1998, in BAFY Study Collection *op. cit.*, p. 252.
[127] Mary C. White, *From Text to Practice: Rereading Laura Mulvey's…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-33.

belongs to Lacan ideas of child psychoanalytical development stage which Mulvey incorporates into considerations of voyeurism. She uses English translation (1968) of Lacan French text, which for the first time uses "the gaze" referring to Lacanian French *le regard* and *fixer*, but what's the most important, she goes further and transforms meaning of gender neutrally Lacanian gaze into *the male gaze* concept which becomes the most controversial and transdiscursive concept of VPNC from that time on.

Generally, following terms used by Mulvey in VPNC, it is easier to outline the methodological, theoretical and female artistic practice inspirations used by her. Only the mentioned concept of *the male gaze* itself has become her unique invention applied for the first time in film theory, specifically its division into the male gaze and female gaze which in various contemporary theories in the Humanistic thought are often used as granted without quoting Mulvey and without knowledge that the concept itself belongs to her. It needs to be stressed that all male philosophers and writers before Mulvey's essay used terms of looking applied to any analyses of ways of seeing, perceiving or representation. In French, as was mentioned before, it was *le regard*, or *fixer* which is closer in meaning to the gaze, in Spanish the term functions as *la mirada*, Italian language has its *vista* and during the conferences in which French philosophy was presented it never happened that research presenting have heard about primary usage of the gaze in other languages than English. Specificity of the word comes historically from Norway and Sweden where *gasen* was associated with a dog staring and following its pray with his eyes, which also can bring a metaphorical meaning to Mulvey's concept of the (male) gaze in culture. Into English it was incorporated in sixteenth century but until 1973 when Mulvey wrote VPNC it was never used in the context of visual culture, film theory or other theoretical fields beyond the mentioned ones.

Its raising fame is presented in a diagram analyzing its popularity, proving that from 2010 the gaze gained its peak and is constantly spreading as a word very frequently used, overshadowing, and entering other languages without having the direct equivalent of the gaze in their vocabulary sets what changes language of looking internationally. As in diagram analyzing the usage of the word *gaze* presented here:



It is worth stressing that widely accessed and popular internet sources misuse nowadays and mistranslate *le regard* (the look) used in French philosophy directly into *the gaze*.[128] Additionally, they often ascribe its modern usage to writes such as Jean Paul Sartre *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Michael Foucault *Discipline and Punish* (1975) or Jacques Derrida and his *The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Come)* (1997).

The term male gaze, as Mulvey recalls, was used only once by her in VPNC[129], but has become later the central reason and issue of critique, bringing in following decades new concepts not only in film and visual studies but in various fields of humanities where it transformed into Male Gaze Theory and has become the key perspective of research, analysis, or disagreement.

2. New paradigms of thought. In the heat of debate.

2.1. Feminist film theory, psychoanalysis, and the crisis of reason.

Within the feminist philosophy as a whole, it was the feminist film theory that has become a confluence of new reflections attributing new meanings through psychoanalysis where Mulvey's concepts "have been massively influential in establishing a psychoanalytical framework in feminist film theory".[130] In this context, it is important to acknowledge the early work of Juliet Mitchell *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* which was published in 1974, a year before

[128] In the context of desire and power, the French term "fixer" used by Lacan in the early papers of the Mirror Stage, who according to prof. Russell Grigg "never used the term gaze himself", refers to someone who has the ability to exert control or influence over others, particularly in relation to their desires or aspirations. So, "fixer" is more often associated with situations where power dynamics come into play, such as in politics, business, or personal relationships. That is the reason why the term "fixer" is closer in meaning to English translation as the "gaze", not as it is often mistakenly translated with the usage of French "le regard" which is "the look" not "the gaze". Suggested and explained in mail correspondence with Lacan's Australian translator, Professor Russell Grigg, January 21, 2021.

[129] Laura Mulvey, Interview with Nina Menkes in documentary *Brainwashed. Sex-Camera-Power,* director Nina Menkes, released March 2022.

[130] Taylor Ashton McGoey, "Toward a Fluid Cinematic Spectatorship and Desire: Revisiting Laura Mulvey's Psychoanalytic Film Theories" (2020). Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 7401. pp. 1-2, accessed: April 7, 2022, available at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/7401.

Mulvey's essay as Taylor Ashton McGoey notes. Mitchell re-evaluates previous feminist criticism surrounding Freudian psychoanalysis as being misogynistic and proposes a new approach that can bring new understanding of psychoanalysis in feminist theory: "psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society but an analysis of one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging this oppression of women, we cannot afford to neglect it [psychoanalysis]".[131] McGoey repeats that the ground-breaking work of Mitchell has helped to "reframe the use of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in early sexuality and gender studies by prioritizing a psychoanalytical model that investigates the formation of masculine and feminine identities as a reflection of patriarchy".[132] He also recalls two other important figures in the feminist theory, Gayle Rubin and a philosopher Luce Irigaray, who both acknowledge that Freud's psychosexual concepts actually had intrinsically feminist implications and claim that it was because of Freud's own patriarchal unconscious that he misinterpreted his own theories of sexuality[133] and put him in a "crisis of reason" situation.

The *crisis of reason*[134] as a concept is associated with feminist theory that acknowledges that dominant systems of knowledge production, such as science, philosophy, and rationality, have been shaped by patriarchal norms and values. These systems tend to prioritize and reinforce masculine perspectives, while marginalizing or excluding the experience and knowledge of women and other marginalized groups. Feminists thinkers argue that this exclusionary approach to reason has resulted in "crisis of reason" because it perpetuates and maintains gender inequalities. They contend that traditional rationality often dismisses or devalues subjective and embodied knowledge, emotions, and experiences that are stereotypically associated with women. Feminists emphasize the need to broaden and diversify our understanding of reason by incorporating different ways of knowing and experiencing the world. They advocate for inclusive and intersectional approach that recognizes the importance of personal narratives, emotions, intuition, and contextual knowledge in shaping our understanding of truth, morality, and social issues. By challenging the narrow definitions of rationality, feminist theorists seek to address the gaps and biases in traditional knowledge production.[135]

[131] Ibidem.
[132] Ibidem.
[133] Ibidem.
[134] Elisabeth Grosz, "Bodies and Knowledges. Feminism and the Crisis of Reason" in *Space, Time, and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies,* Routledge 1995, pp. 25-26.
[135] Ibidem, p. 26.

The *crisis of reason* has threatened to infect various fields of knowledge, but particularly humanities and social sciences, in which the film studies were not immune to its influence and implications either. This crisis has had its methodological and political implications for emergence of new concepts of knowledge and their manifestations, where visual culture and film theory play immensely important role. Considering all these, VPNC turned out to be one of key aims of feminist attack for its psychoanalysis usage but at the same time it has become a challenge to many of the founding presumptions and methodological criteria governing visual knowledge.

Publication of VPNC and issues included there by Mulvey have enhanced enormously the discussion that feminist thought has already started, namely the critique of a phenomenon labelled historically as the "male rationality", "male theory", "male science" or "male philosophy". Arguing, as Toril Moi writes, that "such forms of structured thought are inextricably linked with traditional sexualized – and sexist – categories of dominance and oppression".[136] Science, philosophy, and rationality were constantly evoked by feminist's writers in the 1960s and 1970s re-enacting the Cartesian mind/body split in its most basic methodological assumptions and the subject/object division treated as homologous with the male/female opposition. The male gaze concept, being illuminated in Hollywood cinema by Mulvey, only proved it such a binary dominant structure. Feminist theory at that time mainly applied sociological rather than psychoanalytical methodology - as Mulvey used it against the feminist current - and to which sociological aspect Moi refers in her essay "Patriarchal thought and the drive for knowledge":

Always and everywhere the rational, active, masculine intellect operates on the passive, objectified, feminized body. To be intellectual – to think? – under patriarchy, the argument goes, is willy-nilly to take up a position marked as masculine. If one doesn't, one has an option but to embrace the other side of the tedious series of homologous patriarchal oppositions, where irrationality and thoughtfulness is equated with femininity, the body, object-being, emotionality, and so on.[137]

Yet, the problem was far more complex and referred not only to the way the science, philosophy or community was structured and organised, but also included an individual or a group perception, identification, and expectations. And here, as one of the most provocative, came Mulvey with VPNC concepts of binary gendered visual identification, the male gaze concept

[136] Toril Moi, "Patriarchal thought and the drive for knowledge" in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis,* ed. by Teresa Brennan, Routledge 1993, p. 189.
[137] Toril Moi, "Patriarchal thought…", *op. cit.*, p. 189.

and passivity of a woman represented on the screen, illuminated by her to the extreme in Hollywood cinema.

Historically, gendered gaze, even if not named as such at that time, was already enclosed in the French feminist theory of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre. Daphne Hampson recalls the theoretical heritage of both personalities. Beauvoir, who translated Hegel's master/slave paradigm into the gender polarity of men/woman relationship, called a woman a "slave". Building upon Jean Paul Sartre's insight into false consciousness, she "recognises that the 'slave' sees the world thought the eyes of the one who occupies the subject position, the 'master'".[138] As the first generation of French feminists, she writes that women do not position themselves as Subject and this is the reason why they do not create myths in which "their projects are reflected", and they "still dream through the dreams of men. Gods made by men are the gods they worship".[139] The concept of myth creation and collective fantasy production via mythology was also very important for Mulvey, which she later developed in her further writings and films.

Parallelly to Mulvey's writing of VPNC, and years following its publication and discussion about gendered structure of visual language, the second generation of French theorists, Irigaray and Kristeva, were strongly influenced by the Lacanian psychoanalytic thought as well, "recognizing that our language, which is the 'symbolic' (gendered male), is fundamental to what we are".[140] Here, Hampson draws attention to the fact that women not only have to come into their own dilemma, ceasing to see the world through the eyes of men, but they also lack a place other than a masculine construction of a "woman" in the culture already received.[141] This Lacanian 'lack' of a woman who does not exist in culture as its producer or creator has become a crucial aspect in feminist discussion concerning the crisis of male reason. And Mulvey herself, even if she does not consider this Lacanian concept directly in VPNC, creates a visual-filmic and theoretical variation to this 'lack' conception, by incorporating the notion of representation of a passive woman on screen, which made VPNC join and heavily intensify the ongoing discussion.

[138] Daphne Hampson, "The Sacred, The Feminine and French Feminist Theory" in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis,* ed. by Teresa Brennan, Routledge 1993, pp. 61-62.
[139] Ibidem.
[140] Ibidem.
[141] Daphne Hampson, "The Sacred, The Feminine and French…", *op. cit.,* pp. 61-62.

Since it was a female body that that has become the main theoretical path of critique and re-analyses and theoretical crisis in general, it was the second wave feminism and further polemics in the field of gendered representation, that came to deconstruction of iconography and visuality as something heavily important in visual grammar construction. Mulvey's assumption of woman as a passive object of the male gaze sparked research that re-analyses and challenges sacred passive female images and their connection to female sexuality. As an example can serve intersection of the concepts developed by Griselda Pollock and Victoria Turvey Sauron which move between the sacred and the feminine, referring to Mulvey's theory and films in various ways[142]. Sauron, an art historian who works on Western "visual representation of the ecstatic woman" as an "undefinable figure of the challenge to art and culture posed by female sexuality and subjectivity"[143] questions i.a. Bernini's sculptural installations that hoover between a spiritual and erotic experience. For her, numerous visual representations of embodied feminine subjectivity and sexuality refuse monistic interpretations and instead bring into "view shifting borders between interior and exterior".[144] These contemporary studies of female representation in the 21st century brought the strategic research of the Politics and Ethics of Indexicality and Virtuality – as a "challenging exploration of both the imaginary and the semiotics in relation to embodiment, materiality, sociality and history itself".[145] As Pollock and Sauron explain the notion virtuality:

Virtuality and virtual spaces appear to be the territory of a new media and technologies that are capable of unforeseen fabrications and hence destabilization of our notions of the real, possible, and actual or artificed. (...) We must distinguish between debates about virtualities and materialities and virtualities and indexicalities: the indexical drawn from the semiotics of C.S. Peirce retains its status as a form of meaning-making, a signifying process, in which the relation between signifier and signified has some kind of existential or experiential connection.[146]

Wandering in feminism, done by Pollock, starts with the legacy of Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytical concepts and their influence on anthropology, which appears troublesome but very stimulating at the same time. Their deep resonance can be traced in histories of the social bonds and film, where subjectivity of thoughts, fantasies, and their representations of the feminine and the sacred can be identified.[147]

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[142] Griselda Pollock and Victoria Turvey Sauron, in Editors' Introduction to *The Sacred and The Feminine. Imagination and Sexual Difference,* I.B. Tauris & Co. 2007, pp. 26, 191, 193, 196-7.
[143] Ibidem, p. 1.
[144] Ibidem.
[145] Ibidem.
[146] Griselda Pollock and Victoria Turvey Sauron, *The Sacred and The Feminine…, op. cit.,* p. 1.
[147] Nina Danino, "*Sabat Mater* – A Nameless Place. Film, the Feminine and the Sacred", in *The Sacred and The Feminine. Imagination and Sexual Difference, op. cit.,* pp. 150-157.

The critique of psychoanalysis regarded as a misogynistic perspective also influenced the crisis of male reason, which has resulted in feminist reflection and response not only in film studies and visual culture but generally in what Julia Kristeva describes as "awakening of women in the coming millennium". Feminism has begun to articulate the "profound discontent of the phallocentric-patriarchal in all its myriad forms, with the exclusive occupation of our symbolic and imaginary universes by the Sky-God, the father, the One"[148] as Griselda Pollock puts it. She reflects on life and the meaning "in, of, from the feminine" point of view and its sacred symbolic throughout the history of theology or spirituality to articulate that human societies and their sacred thought systems are today the domain of sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and aesthetics. Thinking within a set of models arising from psychoanalysis at its intersection with feminism and art, Pollock finds exceptionally worth exploring works of Bracha Ettinger and Julia Kristeva who pose their practice on the mentioned, intersectional territory.

According to Pollock there is no going back for feminism and humanity, and everything is to be gained by understanding what forms of ancient and contemporary culture respond to our need for understanding the question of our becoming a human being:

The growing up enjoined upon us since the Enlightenment by Kant and then Freud involves the painful self-realism and disenchantment of adulthood, and hence the move into cultural theory: the space of critical knowledge combined with psychoanalysis as a method of learning about the layers and strata of our own formations that charge our adult worlds with their archaic intensities, anxieties, and fantasies.[149]

The *crisis of reason*, especially evident in present visual culture, and as Elizabeth Grosz's recent re-explorations of the body prove, with the implications of accepting the body and the role it plays in the contemporary production and evaluation of knowledge, can never be underestimated. Working through the meaning of crisis of twentieth-century reason, she echoes an often-voiced anxiety as a "consequence of the historical privileging of the purely conceptual or mental over the corporeal".[150] With the Western knowledge relying on and disavowing the role of the body, the body becomes acknowledged condition of knowledge and sexual specificity of the bodies must be treated as relevant factors. She addresses the "explicit sexualization of knowledge" with the concept of "sexed corporeality" which can help to draw out some of the effects and relations between those who know, and the object known. The

[148] Griselda Pollock, "Sacred Cows: Wandering in feminism, Psychoanalysis and Anthropology" in *The Sacred and the Feminine. Imagination and Sexual Difference, op. cit.,* pp. 41-42.
[149] Ibidem.
[150] Ibidem, p. 25.

fundamental assumption, which has been brought into the question by the *crisis of reason* in humanities and social sciences, is that reason and knowledge based upon it, are "methodologically appropriate" to their object of investigation, the human subject.[151]

Grosz evolved her thought about procedures and tools of socially legitimated knowledge and their growth which are assumed to be conceptually "transparent and neutral as well as unproblematically disposable". "They are tools whose influence or productive contributions can be calculated and distinguished from their objects" as she writes. This proves only the instrumentalization of methods used so far, functioning outside the real connection with life and realistic approaches to knowledge, without positions analysing visual reality and its objects of knowledge. What Grosz stresses is largely instrumental aspect of methodological procedures, saying that methodological values reside in relation to goals, strategies, and ideals, but what is totally missing is their "representative relations to reality".[152] This lack of gendered and imbalanced representative relations referring to reality was one of the main issues that Mulvey raised in VPNC. The question framed by VPNC context "How does this knowledge, this method, this technique, constitute its object?"[153] could not be raised and answered without psychoanalytical tools. "If methods of knowing were indeed transparent and neutral, being mere tools that could be replaced by others"[154] VPNC wouldn't be such a massive provocation. Until VPNC we were assured that knowledges "do not distort, manipulate, or constrain their objects. Instead, they describe and/or explain without loss or residue".[155]

Generally, film was slow, as Kaplan notes, "to gain the entrance in academia as a scholarly subject, there were no psychoanalytic film analyses during the forties when American psychoanalysts initiated the literary approach".[156] First British psychoanalytical approaches in cinema appeared only in the late sixties, moving rapidly through the phases thanks to Mulvey's VPNC and gained more viability in the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, which all added its valuable contribution to the discussion surrounding the male crisis of reason and psychoanalysis being critiqued again as male concept functioning within with patriarchal frames.

[151] Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies and Knowledges…" *op. cit.,* pp. 25-26.
[152] Ibidem.
[153] Ibidem, p. 27.
[154] Ibidem.
[155] Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies and Knowledges…" *op. cit.,* p. 27.
[156] E. Ann Kaplan, "From Plato's Cave to Freud's Screen" in *Cinema and Psychoanalysis,* ed. by E. Ann Kaplan, 1990, pp. 2-9.

The conjunction of cinema and psychoanalysis, and specifically the feminist film theory and its diversity of methods analyzing films with psychoanalytical tools is generally attributed to Lacan, what E. Ann Kaplan finds as common misconception. Given this "journey" from Freud to Lacan, i.e., from Freudian to Lacanian psychoanalysis, Freudian film analyses have not been at the center of film research until Mulvey VPNC. But as Kaplan recalls, part of the US sixties movement felt that neo-Freudianism "had distorted reality" and rejected the Freudian thought a center piece, since Freud was looked upon as responsible for sex-roles oppressive to women. Moreover, there was an anxiety to "establish validity outside the popular Freudian theorizing that reduced all political activities to unresolved Oedipal issues".[157] Thus, Mulvey had a difficult task to base her VPNC concepts of Freud's binary and oppressive – to many at that time – categories.

Thus, the crisis of reason in humanities and film studies has provoked by the critique of the male reason and visual representations of woman's body functioning as passive erotic object for the male gaze and brought the visual theory to the new areas of research and re-analyses of dominant perspectives and notions of representation. Thinking in Grosz's terms, VPNC concepts have become the key-turning points in the history of the crisis of reason in the 20th century, breaking transparent neutrality of ways of looking and bringing psychoanalysis as a critical field for a new gendered methodology and its multi-gendered tools as a *weapon* and a fuse for further analyses of various gazes in visual culture and culture theory in general. The question of adequacy of methods or criteria of evaluation of knowledge as well as the presumption of the transparent neutrality of ways of knowing and ways of looking to the objects investigated, have fallen into ruins in 1975.

2.2. The Gendered Gaze theory

Grammar of visual culture today is enormously based on gendered genealogy of the gaze and its methodology produced by feminism in which Mulvey unquestionably belongs to its key figures. As professor Daniel Chandler, visual anthropologist, has expounded again after many other theorists: "the gaze concept derives from a seminal article VPNC by Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist"[158], pointing out to the fact that it is one of the most widely cited and

[157] E. Ann Kaplan, "From Plato's Cave…", *op. cit.*, pp. 2-9.
[158] Daniel Chandler, "Notes on the Gaze", 30th June 1998, accessed: January 21, 2020, available at: http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/gaze/

anthologized (thought certainly not one of the most accessible) of articles in the whole of contemporary film theory".[159]

Some contemporary film theorists underestimate the role of Mulvey and argue that the gaze concept belongs uniquely to Jacques Lacan. But the facts are different. Lacan himself, as was mentioned before, never used the English term *gaze* but a French word *fixer* in his French writings, since he was not writing in English, as noted by Russell Grigg, one of the most acknowledged Lacan translators in the world.[160] It was the first Jean Roussel's translation of Lacanian "Mirror Phase" and its publication in the New Left Review in London in 1968 that made Lacan's works famous in philosophy and culture of English-speaking world, and from this text Mulvey implemented the issue of the gaze which she transformed into the male gaze concept. This first usage of Lacan's *fixer* which was translated into English as the *gaze* has begun the unexpectable career of the concept in next decades, even if latest translations of the "Mirror Phase" do not use the *gaze* term anymore in English translations.[161]

One of contemporary film theoreticians, Clifford T. Manlove, recalls Mulvey's usage of the *gaze* to examine male pleasure in narrative cinema but at the same time he points to the fact that Lacan's *gaze* is considered to be more primary part of human subjectivity than a patriarchal culture which, even if being so powerful, still functions for Lacan as a secondary manifestation of culture.[162] Today, when the question about the origins of the *gaze* is addressed to associations connected to the New Lacanian School, their members find it so obvious that the gaze is uniquely Lacanian.[163] But, it has to be stressed that the paths of the discourse around the *gaze* concept radically divided after its gendered context introduced by Mulvey in 1975. Lacanian school has made the gaze usage in its own way and the ferocious discussion generated by Mulvey's gendered gaze concept brought totally new discourses and fields of analyses which will be discusses in following parts of this and next chapter.

Even if ways of looking were present and discussed in the male Western philosophy, the gaze itself with its power and erotic possession connotations was not functioning in the philosophy

[159] Ibidem.
[160] Russell Grigg, private mailing correspondence, January 2021.
[161] Richard G. Klein, Freud-Lacanian scholar, former contributing editor for *Lacanian Ink*, former associate editor of the Lacanian journal, *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, comparatist of Freud and Lacan English and German translations and mistranslations, private mailing correspondence 2019, www.freud2lacan.com
[162] Clifford T. Manlove, "Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey", Cinema Journal 46, No 3, Spring 2007, p. 84.
[163] Private mailing correspondence with *Pola Lakanowskie* in Cracow, October 2020 and Richard Klein, Freud and Lacan scholar, October – November 2020.

and film theory until Mulvey exposed its strong erotic, dominant and gendered aspect, binary at that time.

Mulvey's essay may well be considered as a historical document, as she sometimes refers to it herself, especially to the feminist film theory and film studies, with her ideas about the pleasurable and controlling aspects of vision that have been highly influential in several academic disciplines, as Clifford T. Manlove stresses in his article "Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey". He claims that her thesis concerning the patriarchal structure of an active male gaze has "spread its influence far beyond feminist film studies critiquing Alfred Hitchcock and Hollywood movies".[164] Mulvey's project, as he writes, unmasked firstly the power of patriarchy in Hollywood cinema but further gained the importance in broader practice of theory and criticism that can be measured by its inclusion in *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* He brings names included in this comprehensive collection that includes both "Western and non-Western authors, from Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine to Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche to Achebe, Bhabha and hooks".[165]

Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory thanks to its gendered assumption proposed by her has made its way into Western[166] and post-colonial literary studies[167], which were considered the highest culture level. It also stimulated or contributed to development of popular culture[168] and visual studies[169] with visual sociology and visual anthropology as new trends in social sciences[170],

[164] Clifford T. Manlove, "Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative…", *op. cit.,* p. 84.
[165] Ibidem.
[166] Chris Vanderwees, "Complicating Eroticism and the Male Gaze: Feminism and Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye",* in *Studies in 20th and 21st Century Literature,* Vol. 38, Issue 1, Carleton University 2014.
Moslem Zolfagharkhani, "'Gaze' and 'Visuality' in Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice", Lapis Lazuli. An International Literary Journal (LLILJ)* Vol. 2 No 2 Autumn 2012.
[167] Conversation about application of Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory into Contemporary African literary analyses with the Director of African American Center for Literary Studies in New York, Congress of Caribbean Studies Association CSA, Santa Marta, Colombia June 2019.
[168] Ashley McCann and Erica Engstrom, "A lack of Joi: Hegemonic Femininity and the Male Gaze in Blade Runner: 2049, Popular Culture Review 34.1, Spring 2023.
[169] James Elkins, *Visual Worlds*: *Looking, Images, Visual Disciplines,* Chapter 4, "The Gaze" (different forms of the "theory of the gaze"), Oxford 2020. The book contains texts on forms of visual practice in art, science, medicine, the military, law, and other fields. Correspondence with James Elkins, April 2023.
[170] Claire Sisco King, "The Male Gaze and Visual Culture*"* in Marnell Niles Gains, Joan Faber McAlister, Bryant Keith Alexander (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Communication,* Routledge, London 2020,

aesthetics[171], Queer theory[172], post-colonial studies[173], Holocaust studies[174], black/whiteness studies[175], and the critical race theory (CRT)[176]. In most cases the gaze has been used to explain the hierarchical relations of power between two or more groups or, alternatively, between a group and an "object". Nowadays, one can refer to a heterosexual and homosexual gaze, white, black or people of colour/color gaze, imperial gaze[177], or a tourist *gaze.*[178]

Summing up briefly the Gendered Gaze Theory, one must admit that Mulvey's assumption about visual pleasure found in one person gazing at another which can be used to impose or signify male power and dominance, still has the potential for broad applications despite infinite criticism and revisions made by many in film and feminist studies. Mulvey's psychoanalytical concept of the male gaze has been widely adopted by theory and criticism across a variety of fields mentioned above and brought cognitive and pragmatic approaches to film and culture studies since the 1980s. Mulvey's theory of the gendered gaze analyzes an aspect of vision that is powerful and present in cinematic art and the politics of gender but "cannot be measures or counted and thanks to these it has maintained its force"[179], as Manlove claims.

2.3. Breaking the patterns. Reception of VPNC.

VPNC was published in magazine *Screen* together with five other essays. The essays were written by Jacqueline Rose "Writing as Auto-Visualization: Notes on a Scenario and Film of

[171] Michele Bertollini, "Gaze", *International Lexicon of Aesthetics*, Spring 2019, available at: https://doi.org/10.7413/18258630053
[172] Sara Fisher, "Other as Spectacle Woman, Queerness, and the Male Gaze", NC State University, College of Design, May 2020. Available at: https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/bitstream/handle/1840.20/39983/Copy%20of%20FISHER_Other%20as%20Spectacle_revisions.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
Aron Lee Christian, "Are We Killing the Boys Harshly. The Consumption of The Male Gaze In Queer Pages", Master's Thesis, Indiana University, August 2010, available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/46956594.pdf
[173] Gaia Giuliani, "The White Male Gaze in Italian Cine-reportage: Masculinity and Otherness between Colonialism and Decolonization (1960s–1970s)" in Paolo Bertella Farnetti and Cecilia Dau Novelli (eds.) *Images of Colonialism and Decolonialism in the Italian Media,* Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2017.
[174] Stacy Banwell, "Gendered viewing strategies: a critique of Holocaust-related films that eroticize, monsterize and fetishize the female body", *A Journal of Culture and History,* Vol 24, Issue 2, 2018.
[175] Ahmed llmi, "The White Gaze vs. The Black Soul", Vol. 18, No ¾, *Race, Gender and Class Journal,* Publisher Jean Ait Belkhir 2011, pp. 217-229.
Paula Amad, "Visual Riposte: Looking Back at the Return of the Gaze as Postcolonial Theory's Gift to Film Studies", *Cinema Journal,* Vol. 52, No 3 Spring 2013, pp. 49-74, University of Texas Press.
[176] Margaret m. Russell, "Race and the Dominant Gaze: Narratives of Law and Inequality in Popular Film*",* Santa Clara University, School of Law, available at: https://digitalcommons.law.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1301&context=facpubs&httpsredir=1&referer=
[177] E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other. Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze,* Routledge 1997.
[178] John Urry and Jonas Larsen (eds.) *The Tourist Gaze 3.0,* Sage Publications 2011.
[179] Clifford T. Manlove, "Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative…", *op. cit.,* p. 103.

Peter Pan", Raymond Bellour "The Unattainable Text", Edward Braningan "Formal Permutations of the Point-of-view Shot", Edward Buscombe "Notes on Columbia Pictures Corporation 1926-41", and Peter Baster "On the History and Ideology of Film Lightning" and were more pragmatic in character and approach, as Manlove recalls, and presented a "methodological split not only in film studies but in literary textual, and cultural studies more broadly between formal/scientific and critical interpretative approaches".[180]

E. Ann Kaplan who has investigated the historical background of the *New Left Review* at that time, which was a British theoretical new horizon magazine influencing *Screen*, notices that many writers contributing to *Screen* were at the same time authors of the *New Left Review* and all of them male. Recalling a complicated mixture of various kinds of thought in *Screen* based on the intellectual movements in Britain in the wake of May '68, she writes about the dominant strands in film scholarships between 1975 and 1985 which included Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, semiotics, post-structuralism, Russian Formalism, feminism, Althusserian Marxism, and-Brechtian "politics of modernism". As she observes from a different, American perspective, British intellectuals in the mid-1970s came to psychoanalysis with "freshness unattained by prior negative associations that marked the American sixties generation".[181]

From the moment of its publication, VPNC has become a subject of debates and an object of criticism. The first critical note, included in the introduction to *Screen* presenting the essay, came from Ben Brewster – a translator of Christian Metz – who says: "She [Mulvey] argues that the visual pleasures offered by the traditional cinema reflect contradictions inherent in the patriarchal psychical order dominant in our societies and that film theory should expose their mechanisms".[182] This emphasis on Mulvey's "pursuit of social contradictions and mechanisms of visual pleasure"[183] carry an implication and a forecast of more critical responses to Mulvey's statement that there is a gaze at work in all cultural and power relations. Numerous critics tried to delete Mulvey's male gaze concept, depending on whether their object of attack or polemic was film, feminism, or psychoanalysis. Some of them went further seeking not only how to "reject Mulvey's theory of the gaze" [184] but to reject the use of psychoanalysis, feminist film theory, or other interpretative approaches to film as well.

[180] Ibidem, p. 85.
[181] E. Ann Kaplan, "From Plato's Cave to Freud's…", *op. cit.*, pp. 8-11.
[182] Clifford T. Manlove, "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative…", *op. cit.,* p. 85.
[183] Ibidem.
[184] Ibidem.

Application of psychoanalytic theory to film studies became the object of direct and indirect attacks on Mulvey. The first one came from the publishers of Mulvey's essay and enclosed in the issue of the *Screen* published just after the number featuring VPNC. It contained an article co-written by four out of eleven editorial board members who claimed that "the use of psychoanalysis in film studies and in *Screen* particularly was a failure". In their "Statement: Psychoanalysis and Film", Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell, and Christopher Williams considered VPNC a failure on two accounts, first was its "account of women" and second was its "lack of a consistent, interpretive method". What is interesting, as Manlove points out, some of their criticism regarding the use of psychoanalysis in film studies, forecast attacks on its application in literary and film theory which were to come twenty years later with cognitive and pragmatic approaches: Another of the critics, Stephen Heath, argued in 1978 that psychoanalysis "failed to account for the complexities of sexual difference because it is defined in relation to phallus (or its lack) which is ahistorical. Focusing on the same issue of lack resulting from sexual difference, in 1981 Susan Laurie claimed that: "the image of the castrated woman" that Mulvey borrowed from Lacan is a patriarchal, rather than psychical construction.[185] An important statement against application of psychoanalysis by Mulvey was also made in 1982 by D. N. Rodowick who "extended argument on the manifestation of gender difference"[186] which went beyond the mirror-stage polarity. He suggested that the difference outside the mirror may not be analysed by means of psychoanalysis.[187]

Doubts about the usage of psychoanalysis by Mulvey are ironically shared by the cognitive/quantitative intellectuals and Marxists who question its validity and verifiability, rather than historiography as Manlove observes. Stephen Prince, one of the *Post-Theory* contributors, writes about the problem with psychoanalysis: "theories of spectatorship fly well beyond the data (…) about how people watch and interpret films".[188] However, Manlove stresses that it is clear that theories of spectatorship are concerned "not only with how people watch media and what they have to say about it, but also with the social and psychical dimensions of vision and the visible".[189]

[185] Ibidem, p. 87.
[186] Clifford T. Manlove, "Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative…", *op. cit.*, p. 85.
[187] Ibidem.
[188] Ibidem.
[189] Ibidem, pp. 87-88.

Within last forty-five years not only the feminist film critics sought the way to question or redefine Mulvey's focus on three main issues. First problematic assumption was the position of gender in the gaze theory, second the notion of homosexual critique which has become the contra assumption about heterosexuality of the gaze, and finally seeing the gaze as exclusively male pleasure and male voyeurism with its sadistic associations.

The essay also provoked the question about visibility and existence of female aesthetics which was evolved by Silvia Bovenschen asking if "Is There a Feminine Aesthetics?" in 1977.[190] In 1980 Kaja Silverman questioned a definition of male subjectivity and desire for visual pleasure, arguing that Mulvey "leaves unchallenged the notion that for the male subject pleasure involves mastery". Further in 1981, Judith Mayne introduced a new metaphor to describe Mulvey's gaze and compared the gaze to looking through the keyhole, using this to distinguish between male and female ways and space of looking. One of the most important questions, posed in 1980 by Mary Ann Doane, was based on the argument about the role of identification in the gaze. In "Misrecognition and Identity" she writes that "rather than effecting a complete collapse of spectator onto character or film, identification presupposes the security of the modality".[191]
Another set of critical arguments raised by feminists was based on the concern about the role of pleasure in the gaze and was much harsher in their tone. These feminist responses contained a redefinition of the gaze challenged by its heterosexual assumption and focused on binary gaze as assumed in VPNC. Some of critics focused on lesbian spectators or the gay male, while others tried to integrate several sexual objects. The notion of bisexuality and heteronormativity of sexual behaviors, together with the critique of sexual difference as something inborn and "natural" were exposed and criticized parallelly to Mulvey's concepts by French psychoanalyst, who strongly disagreed Freudian and Lacanian concepts of femininity, Luce Irigaray, in 1975 in her book *This Sex Which is Not One*, originally published in French *Ce Sexe Qui N'En Est Pas Un.* Irigaray focuses there on exploring issues of gender, female sexuality, language, and subjectivity within the context of Western philosophy and psychoanalytic theory. As a theorist standing against Lacanian vision of women, her work does intersect with discussions on visual representation and looking focusing in parts on female theorists and psychoanalysts like Maria

[190] Silvia Bovenschen, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetics?", *New German Critique,* No.10, Winter 1977, accessed on: May 10, 2020, available at: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Is-There-a-feminine-Aesthetic-Bovenschen-Weskmueller/d00b7cd17248004f55d0f774a25934e19b03bee3
[191] Mary Ann Doane, "Misrecognition and Identity", *Cine-Tracts* 11, 1980, pp. 25-32.

Klein and Maria Bonaparte who critiqued i.a. Freudian concept of women as "a dark continent".[192]

Later in 1991, Judith Mayne also argued for the need of inclusion and taking into account the female lesbian spectator. In 1983, Steven Neale claimed that a passive, feminine sense of 'to-be looked-at-ness" introduced and described by Mulvey, can be also applied to images of masculinity, "both with regard to heterosexual female and gay identification". Further, in 1998, Robert Samuels used this argument by applying explicitly Lacanian theory to propose two perspectives, first about the unconscious being primarily homosexual rather than heterosexual, and second claiming that when consciousness is repressed and replaced consciously with the heterosexual vision of the result is "bi-textuality" in film and culture.[193]
The third issue feminists explored was the question of voyeurism, the fetish as masculine, and pleasure as not exclusively heterosexual experience – masculine or feminine. For example, in 1984 Gaylyn Studlar argued that Mulvey did not consider the masochistic and unpleasant dimension of the male spectator and Gertrude Koch opted for phenomenological theory of the gaze because "focus on pleasure invites reliance on psychoanalytic theory".[194]

Almost fifty years after its publication VPNC still occupies a central place as a key text in Film, Media and Gender Studies reading and referential lists. Since it is also widely appreciated as a pivotal essay in the Humanities and disciplines such as Art History, Literature, Theatre, History, Music, Lesbian and Gay Studies, Queer Studies, Post-colonial Studies, and Theology. It is enclosed in numerous anthologies and, to mention only a few, these are: *Women and Cinema,* New York 1977; Kay, K., Peary, G. (eds.); *Popular Film and Television,* Bennett, T. et al (eds.) British Film Institute, 1981; Wallis, B. (ed.) *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* New York, The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984; Mast, G Cohen, M. (ed.), *Film Theory and Criticism,* 3rd ed. New York, Oxford 1985; Nichols, B. (ed.), *Movies and Methods,* Vol. II. Berkeley, 1985; *Feminism and Film Theory,* 1988 published by Routledge, London and New York.[195] We also find numerous publications and articles, like: by Leyerle, B. "Chrysostom, John on the Gaze and a Term denoting the Subordinated Position of Woman as Spectacle and

[192] Luce Irigaray, *Sex Which Is Not One,* translated by Catherine Porter, (French publication 1977) Cornell University Press, New York 1985.
[193] Clifford T. Manlove, *Visual "Drive" and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey,* Cinema Journal 46, No 3, Spring 2007, p. 86.
[194] Silvia Bovenschen, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetics*?", op. cit.*
195 Mary C. White, "From text to Practice: Rereading Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' towards a different history of the feminist avant-garde", Loughborough University, April 2007, p. 8.

the Subject of scrutiny: A new perspective on the writings on Chrysostom on spiritual marriage", Journal of early Christian Studies, Vol 1, No.2, 1993; Jackson, E. "Death Drives across Porntopia – Cooper Denis on the Extremities of Being", GLQ – A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, Vol 1, No.2, 1994, Rosenman, e. B. "Spectacular Women: The 'Mysteries of London' and the female body' in Victorian Studies, Vol 40, No. 1, 1996; Edmunds, S. "Through a glass darkly: Visions of integrated community in Flannery O'Connor's 'Wise Blood'", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol 37, No.4, 1996; Klaver, E. "Spectatorial Theory in the Age of Media Culture", *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 11, No.44, 1995; Reeve, K. K. "Primal Scenes, Pleyel and Liszt in the Eyes of Berlioz", *Nineteenth Century Music*, Vol 18, No.3, 1995; Berdini, P. "Women under the gaze: a Renaissance Genealogy" in *Art History*, Vol 21, No 4, 1998.[196]

All these responses to Mulvey's essay present the main concepts that were formed thanks to reception and critique of its content in the field of female symbolic representations on the screen.

2.4. Main directions of polemic generated by Mulvey's essay VPNC.

Using Mulvey's favorite myth, VPNC has become a kind of mythological Pandora's box itself, invoking and opening up all possible traces of curiosity, critique, condemnation as well as admiration to its political courage, challenging concepts, and incisive critical intelligence. The essay opened up and still stimulates the evolution and transformation of the gaze concept and its influence on visual arts and critical culture studies. The analysis will include the display how the language of looking and ways of seeing in European and American philosophy, with dominant male perspective, have evolved since 1970s and how the gaze concept was absorbed in fields of feminism, film, and visual culture. One of the main directions of polemic evolved in the area of visual pleasure politics which generated the feminist response around the female permission to see, to desire and to fantasise in the last 50 years. The psychoanalytical approach in feminist film theory will be followed in its evolution and exploration of pleasure concepts. The analysis will be structured around a discussion rooted in semiotics and in a controversy defining and representing a woman as a sign and a spectacle on the screen. Further will be discussed points of view arguing with the issue of female passivity and its negative connotations which include repetitive in cinema illusionary mythology of collective fantasy or the concept of woman as masquerade and transvestite. The crucial point of discussion also came with the

[196] Ibidem, pp. 8-9.

area of theorizing pornography in 1980s when feminism divided itself ferociously on the grounds of visual pleasure and its representations.

Later will come the focus on the way how the horizon of all contemporary visual culture has changed and influenced the contested lens of Western female authorship in visual pleasure across years following the essay publication. Taking into consideration European and American female visual pleasure avant-garde filmmakers and photographers as well as visual pleasure representations in female pornography trials and will be illustrated by works of female directors shooting visual pleasure as examples of Western failures in mainstream narrative cinema. One of the directions was as well countercriticism around the issue of fetishism as being masculine that will be analysed by including concepts of female spectatorship, feminine fetishistic and erotic gaze and a man functioning as a spectacle or a constructed myth.

The important discussion path evolved in 1980s after the introduction of Black gaze and post-colonial visual pleasure codes analyses serving with time as the mostly used perspectives to analyse identity concepts evolved around visual politics of Western power. Questioning and analysing difference through these categories has become crucial in new areas of gender studies other than its initial heterosexual binary division and resulted in new concepts and constructions of identity, race, and ethnicity, taking the gaze analysis as the main methodological perspective. The aim of it will be to analyse and prove how identity concepts have changed and opened up new areas of discussions around the gaze categories introduced by Mulvey. The research will focus on the emergence of ways of looking and visual pleasure constructs in non-binary looking gender identities such as lesbian gaze, male ga(y)ze, queer gaze and man as queer spectacle. It will also depict the process of emergence of the Oppositional gaze which aimed at the "decolonisation" of camera and white masculine spectatorship ruling the visual codes. Analysis included here will present the Black female theories and visual pleasure practices as strategies of construction of the Black female spectatorship, deconstructions of female myths, unmasking the rooted post-colonial gaze and creation of new positive representations with black female sexual agency. Future of visual (pleasure) theories and proposals of seeing differently with a matrixial gaze concept as an exemplary proposal will close the analysis.

Summary

Laura Mulvey's essay VPNC has received in decades following its publication lots of criticism mainly for usage of psychoanalysis itself, its narrow binary focus on the male gaze, exclusion of possibility of active female spectatorship, and omission of considerations involving visual pleasures of other than non-binary genders, race or alternative perspectives and experiences of viewers. Additionally, Mulvey emphasis on the objectification of women and woman being treated as a man-spectator watching the movies, as perspective absorbed culturally, has been criticised for its point of view disregarding female agency and active participation of female viewers. All these issues have become subjects of debates arguing "limited and exclusionary" complexities "overlooked", as many critics claimed accusing Mulvey's VPNC. Generative values of her "manifesto", as it is treated from today perspective, brought numerous points of polemics within this transdiscursive disappointment around female gaze, other genders and representations in cinema and visual arts which generated i.a. gendered gaze theory and Queer theory, which will be discussed in following chapters.

VPNC and heated debate, which concepts of the essay provoked in fields of film and visual culture studies, overshadowed Mulvey's filmic practice and her further critical writings, in which she has engaged and responded to constantly repeated questions and accusations during last fifty years. Even if she claims herself that little has changed in mainstream cinema since her essay was published and female gaze in filmic productions is still relatively little visible because of various reasons dependent on production and distribution systems[197], the debate provoked by her VPNC concepts has become worldwide famous and brought irreversible changes to critical film studies and humanistic thought in general.

[197] Laura Mulvey, Interview with a director Nina Menkes in her documentary *Brainwashed. Sex-Camera-Power*, released March 2022.

CHAPTER II

Critical Perspectives for Mulveyian male gaze

2.1. The critique of the male gaze and male visual pleasure concept

This part of the thesis serves to verify a hypothesis claiming that a concept of male gaze and visual pleasure influenced film theory, visual culture, art criticism in the field of visual semiotics. It has become questioned and prompted controversies especially among those who claimed that the gaze itself is not a gendered issue but a cultural one. The chapter presents the critique of ways in which the female dominant representations in cinema were constructed regarding the male gaze and its visual pleasure. It evolves around re-evaluation of a woman who has been functioning long on screen as passive sign and object of desire to fulfil male desires and unconscious fantasies, as well as its fetishistic and masochistic symbolics. Further is analysed the concept of a woman cinematically constructed as a spectacle, with masquerade and transvestic aspects to please the male gaze.

The critique of the male gaze concept has been focused on the counter assumption about male gaze that does not have to objectify women, even if they are presented as visual pleasure. The second point against Mulvey's postulation connected to the masculinization of female spectator was supposition that women do not have to and often do not identify with the male gaze. The third issue concerned, was the accusation about cinematic possibility of the active female gaze existence, which Mulvey only marked as a hope in the end of the essay opening the space for future female avant-garde directors. Finally, the last important direction of critique went into polemics with the Mulvey's statement about the power possessed by a man while watching a woman, which proved wrong in cinematic examples where women are active and manipulate the male gaze by using their sexual potential, as in the case of *Basic Instinct* which is presented as a counter-concept to the dominant and narrative ruling male gaze, and which has become a kind of a feminist hope for female image change.

Women's movement and feminist film theorists ongoing concern was the re-evaluation of culture in which women were socialized and educated. Feminist critics found it extremely important to analyse "sexual politics" paying attention not so much to the content but to the process of "how meaning is produced". As Ann Kaplan points out, feminism was very unusual in its combination of the theoretical and the ideological, being influenced by semiology, sociological approach and stressing the links between the cinema and psychoanalytical process. Even if many feminist critics primarily were harshly against the Freudian and Lacanian theory, which were treated then as patriarchal inventions, they all finally agreed that psychoanalysis

can serve as a very useful critical tool. So Mulvey's VPNC using psychoanalysis as weapon, has become a kind of trans-historical generalisation about human gendered-psyche process, which was very difficult to prove since the means for verification of such generalisations did not exist. In 1970s Britain psychoanalysis became the main tool for explanation of needs, desires, and male-female positioning reflected in films, among which Mulvey's male gaze concept based on application of Freudian and Lacanian patriarchal categories provoked infinite feminist contestations and has continued to be so until today.[198]

American scholar E. Ann Kaplan was the first one to ask "if the gaze is necessarily male for reasons inherent in the structure of language, the unconscious, symbolic systems, and thus all social structures".[199] She found it important to consider whether we could "structure things so that women own the gaze" and if so, can it be possible that "women want to own the gaze and what does it mean to be a female spectator? "[200] Asking such questions within the framework of psychoanalysis made it possible to find the fissures and gaps through which women could be inserted into a male-dominated historical and filmic discourse as active participants of culture and spectatorship. Kaplan finds this way as a beginning of personal change and the first step towards society changes.[201]

2.2. Symbolic and gendered critique of cinematic female constructions

2.2.1. A Woman as passive sign and object of desire

This part presents selected aspects of discourse in feminist film and visual theory that evolved from categories introduced by Laura Mulvey in VPNC and focused on passive female images and myths about femininity that were dominant in Hollywood film productions and visual culture in general.

Female representations that have become the aim of the discourse in feminism treated a woman as a sign, a passive image, a voiceless spectacle, a masquerade, a transvestite, a masochist, or a sadist. VPNC also had an impact on a discourse about motherhood, its images, and interpretations, or about a monstrous woman with fears built around a myth that a woman is evil by nature.

[198] E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the gaze male?" in *Women and Film. Both Sides of The Camera,* Routledge London and New York 2000, pp. 23-25.
[199] Ibidem.
[200] Ibidem, pp. 24-25.
[201] Ibidem, p. 25.

In the beginning of 1980s together with Barnard Sex Conference in New York[202], there came feminist sex wars around pornography, provoked directly and indirectly by Mulvey's illumination of masculine visual pleasure production. Her idea of the male gaze as possessive and dominant, echoes in the feminist sex wars around pornography and in visual representations productions, which brought the radical split in feminism since 1980s. With development of technology, there appeared new female figures like cyborg women, which sometimes related to Blackness and a concept of a black woman as a cyborg, which appeared in the Black Feminism theory of cinema.[203]

Myths of women adopted and multiplied in the cinema have become one of the main feminist fields of exploration since the 1970s. The first one to ask, "what we are left with, if we accept that the development of female stereotyped was not a conscious strategy of Hollywood dream machine?" was Claire Johnston. In 1973 she recalled Panofsky's detection of the primitive stereotyping which was characteristic for the early cinema and could be useful for discerning the ways in which myths of women operated, and posed more questions asking why "the image of man underwent rapid differentiation, while the primitive stereotyping of woman remained with some modifications."[204] One of possible explanations she finds in the origins of iconography and stereotyping in cinema and considers it as justified in terms of practical necessity since the audience at that time had a lot of difficulties with deciphering what appeared on the screen. Fixed iconography was introduced to help understanding and provide basic facts to comprehend the narrative. But at the same time Johnston observes: "iconography as a specific kind of sign or rather cluster of signs" was based on conventions within the Hollywood genres and for this reason became largely responsible for stereotyping of women in the commercial cinema. Another aspect of stereotype noted by Johnston was the role men and women play in the films, their values and importance attributed by society. The difference between male and female roles reflects not only sexist ideology but also "inherited" position of a woman as carrying no meaning as well as the fact that a man is always placed inside a history, and woman outside as *ahistoric* and eternal. That image was carried over for decades and the main visible modification done to women on screen was in terms of clothes and fashion, not the values or meaning connected to character or achievements.[205]

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[202] Barnard Conference on Sexuality is referred in more detailed way later in following Chapters.

[203] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto. Science, Technology, and the Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" in The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader, ed. Amelia Jones, Routledge, New York 2010.

[204] Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" in *Feminism and Film,* ed. by E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press 2000, p. 22.

[205] Ibidem, pp. 22-23.

In 1981, another film feminist thinker, Mary Ann Doane said that there were "no images for her or of her" at that time and recalled words of Peter Gidal about relationship between film making practice and the feminist concerns of the 1980s:

In terms of feminist struggle specifically, I have had a vehement refusal over the last decade, with one or two minor aberrations, to allow images of women into my own films at all, since I do not see how those images can be separated from the dominant meanings. The ultra-left aspect of this may be nihilistic as well, which may be a critique of my position because it does not see much hope for representations for women, but I do not see how, to take the main example I gave round about 1969 before any knowledge on my part of, say, semiotics, there is any possibility of using the image of a naked woman – at that time I did not have it clarified to the point of any image of a woman – other than in an absolutely sexist and politically repressive patriarchal way in this conjuncture.[206]

As Doane claims, a woman can define itself only in negative terms and a female body is associated only with the problematic issues or placed within quotation marks. The concept of natural sexual difference carries the ideological complicity and makes it impossible to return to an "unwritten body", the concept discussed very often in feminism of last decades. Contemporary film making is focused on decoding and deconstructing the images rooted. Yet, this does not necessarily aim at seeing the female body differently but at exposing "the habitual meanings and values attached to femininity as cultural construction."[207]

The myths governing the cinema are no different from those governing other cultural products, says Johnston, adding that in general they "relate to a standard value system informing all cultural systems in a given society". Myths use icons, but the icon becomes its weakest point because the mythology associated with them can be used both for and against. A myth of a woman, being a form of discourse, represents mechanisms of how women have been used in cinema. It transmits and transforms the ideology of sexism and makes it invisible. The mythic qualities of stereotypes become easily detachable and visible and can be used for referring to ideological tradition and to provide a critique in feminist film theory, pointing out to a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, where a woman is "what she represents for man". [208]

Johnston claims that despite the enormous emphasis on displaying a woman as a spectacle, which will be discussed later, a woman as a woman in the cinema is largely absent. She brings sociological analyses, which were based on the empirical studies of motifs and roles of women as the central figures in the narrative, with the main notions oscillating around:

[206] Pater Gidal cited in Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body" in *Feminism and Film,* ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press 2000, p. 87.
[207] Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body" in *Feminism and Film,* ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press 2000, p. 87.
[208] Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Cinema as…", *op. cit.,* p. 24.

career/home/motherhood/sexuality. All these produce an impression of realism, or as she calls it the "law of verisimilitude in the cinema" which is precisely responsible for the repression of representation and image of a woman as a woman, as well as the celebration of her non-existence. Johnston recalls the idea of the female star, mentioning the critics of Sternberg's *Morocco* gathered around *Cahiers du Cinema,* who described the cinematic system in operation: "in order that the man remains within the center of the universe in a text which focuses on the image of woman, the author is forced to repress the idea of woman as a social and sexual being. (…) The woman as a sign, then becomes the pseudo-center of the film discourse". It becomes merely the trace of her exclusion and repression.[209]

Johnston also makes critical notes about the *auteur theory* that was to subvert existing myths but eventually reinforced the female mythology and have become 'an oppressive theory making the director a superstar as if film-making were a one-man show'. She recalls first editorial of *Women and Film,* where editors expressed quite clearly their critique of the overall tendency to idolize the personality of the male director. Andrew Sarris became the major target of the attack for his derogatory treatment of women directors in *The American Cinema* and gave a clear indication of his sexism. Development of the *auteur theory* brought an important intervention in film criticism and polemics aroused around it stripped off its normative aspects of classification based on films made by a masculine director and presentation of women on the screen as sexual objects. As stresses the director Nina Menkes, lots of films at that time were called "masterpieces mainly for showing Brigitte Bardot buttocks in very long takes" and "still male commentators were asking Godard why the takes were not even longer".[210] Taking such perspective that sets a woman in the frame of a stereotypical image and a cinematic sign used by male directors proves their unconscious desires being projected on the screen in the *auteurs way*. Making use of findings and insights in the *auteur theory* critiqued by feminists theorists, it is possible to see the usage of myths of woman and even if an image of a woman gets different meanings within each author's work, it follows and copies all the time the cultural schemes encoded in the "collective fantasy", as Mulvey pointed out in VPNC. What Peter Wollen calls the "force of the author's preoccupations", including the obsessions about women, is generated by the psychoanalytic history of the author, as concludes Claire Johnson, adding that this "organized network of obsessions is outside the scope of the author's choice".[211]

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[209] Ibidem, p. 25.

[210] Nina Menkes, director comments the sexualization of women on screen in cinema by male directors, *Brainwashed. Sex-Camera-Power,* documentary by Nina Menkes, released March 2022.

[211] Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Cinema as Counter-Cinema…", *op. cit.,* pp. 26-27.

For feminist criticism of the cinema, specially the one coming from the background of Women's Movement, the issues of realism working against the rooted, idealistic female mythology and its cinematic repetition within the visual sign scheme or its repeated negative iconography of a female as an evil or a monster, were in a total opposition to the real woman. The Hollywood films represented the fictional codes of patriarchal culture producing macho heroes and subordinated, meaningless, and objectified women. The divergence of a female real world in fictional production was analysed in uncountable ways. As Christine Gledhill stresses, the "realism embraces such cultural values as 'real life', 'truth' or 'credibility', and genre production holds negative connotations such as an 'illusion', a 'myth', 'conventionality', and 'stereotypes'".[212]

If we apply above considerations about realism to an ideology, understood in Althusser's terms as a "system of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and a role within a given society", we come to masking and displacing meanings that push circulation of ideas, conventional wisdom, or common-sense understandings. Ideology, defined as a system of representations that possesses a material organizational force in society, enters the film theory with its role of art as a practice developed specifically for the purposes of aesthetic representation and a star system of dream production, while not having much connection with a representation of the female reality in everyday life.[213]

A woman as a sign, in terms of images presented in films, has become an important part of the work produced by feminists reflecting on women stereotypes, stories about women, and types of roles women play in films. "A woman as a fully human form have completely been left out of film (…) That is, from the very beginning they were present but not in characterizations any self-respecting person could identify with"[214] Yet, as Elisabeth Cowie observes, there is a double problem in addressing women and film, first is "the production of a woman as a category"[215] and second understanding a "film as a signifying system".[216] Analyses of films done by feminists classify a "woman as an unproblematic category"[217], which ich is constituted through categories already defined by a society and reflected in films: as a mother, a housewife,

[212] Christine Gledhill, "*Klute 1*: Film Noir and Feminist Criticism" in *Feminism and Film,* ed. E. Ann Kaplan, BFI Publishing 1986, p. 67.
[213] Christine Gledhill, "*Klute 1*: Film Noir…", *op. cit.*, p. 70.
[214] Elisabeth Cowie, "Woman as Sign" in *Feminism and Film,* BFI Publishing 1986, p. 48.
[215] Ibidem.
[216] Ibidem.
[217] Ibidem.

a sexual partner, a sexual object, a second-class worker. Another, this time a religious female icon and an illusory myth coined in the collective fantasy is the one of Saint Marry in Catholic Church reproducing harmful and unrealistic icon based on a female immaculate purity and an eternal virginity (consequently producing male and female unconscious desires).

A woman is generally positioned as the secondary to men in practices of society. Cowie compares social definitions of women's roles that are regarded as the "lived practice" with a film that is "merely a representation". In this comparison a woman is treated as a category and an effect produced by political and economic practices, later distorted, and reproduced by a film. This practice has ideological effects, particularly on "the definitions of women in society, the images of women, masking or reinforcing those definitions".[218]

Cowie notes the development within the theory of cinema in *Screen* special issue, which argued that film is not simply a reflection of other practices in society. Instead, she finds a film as a system of signs that "produces meaning through the articulation of signifying elements". That is, the film produces definitions of its elements by which they obtain their meanings and are understood as objects of desire, a spectacle, a masquerade, a fetish, a *femme fatale*, a monster, or a Saint, to quote a few. But again, asks Cowie, what happens with a woman and the political project of feminism that questioned the representation of a woman as a passive object functioning against active men representations. We come to the object of a woman in a film, which is assumed already to have a definition and to have a meaning which was already produced outside of the system of representation of the film. So, a woman functions in film as a sign already defined by society. When it comes to specific definitions of women, the film excludes a woman from being a part of a production process, both as the signifier and the signified in the cinematic system.[219] Hence struggle for definitions of women is placed outside the cinematic system thus the film remains simply the site of the fight of *representations of those definitions,* to be subverted or replaced by other progressive representations. Cowie argues that a film as a system of representation is the very point of production of definitions and values connected to the image presented, neither independent or unique, nor simply reducible to other practices that define the position of women in society.[220]

[218] Elisabeth Cowie, "Woman as Sign" in *Feminism and Film, op. cit.,* p. 48.
[219] Elisabeth Cowie, "Woman as Sign...", *op. cit.,* p. 48.
[220] Ibidem, p. 49.

2.2.2. **A Woman as spectacle.**

An image of a woman presented as spectacle in the cinema was widely discussed and criticized in the feminist film theory and visual culture generally, after Mulvey published her essay in *Screen.* As it was written in the first chapter of this thesis, the idea of a woman presented in arts was to satisfy masculine desire and pleasure. The woman in art has always served to fulfill masculine pleasure of looking, said Berger but it was Mulvey who independently of Berger transferred this idea into cinematic level, and developed autonomously, without knowing his concept, the gendered idea. of the male gaze and its sexual, patriarchal, and psychoanalytical connotations.

In an essay "Film and the Masquerade" (1982) Mary Ann Doane recalls Freud's lecture on "Femininity" and his remarks related to importance and elusiveness of the topic: "Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity" and quotes his memorable statement, "to those of you who are women this will not apply – you are yourself the problem…".[221] Depicted in the cinema, the Freud's woman becomes an invocation of a hieroglyphic language, as Doane observes:

The woman, the enigma, the hieroglyphic, the picture, the image – the metonymic chain connects with another: the cinema, the theatre of pictures, a writing in images of the woman but not for *her. For her* is *the problem. (...) In this sense, the hieroglyphic, like the woman, harbors a mastery, an inaccessible through desirable otherness*.[222]

A spectacle as an "iconic system of representation" fits perfectly into the logography of cinema, it cannot disconnect itself from the "real", from the concrete. It also lacks the distance necessary to have a second look and to make generalizations. The woman as a spectacle is defined by this insufficiency. Doane insists on the correspondence between certain theories of the image and theories of femininity allocating the woman in a "special place in cinematic representation while denying her access to that system"[223] and placing female spectator position as screen.[224]

As Doane points out, a woman's relation to the camera and the scopic regime exist in a different mode from that of a male. Noel Burch, a film director, recalls the early silent cinema with its repeated inscription of scenarios of voyeurism which conceived a spectator's viewing pleasure in terms of the Peeping Tom, reduplicating the spectator's position in relation to the woman as

[221] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising Female Spectator" in *Feminism and Film* ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, p. 418.
[222] Ibidem, p. 419.
[223] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade…", *op. cit.,* p. 419.
[224] Ibidem, p. 421.

a screen and a spectacle. The image orchestrates the gaze and its limits as well as its pleasure in transgression.[225]

The spectacle is produced of the woman's beauty, her very desirability and becomes a function of specific practices of imaging such as framing, camera movement, light, or angle. Thus, a woman becomes – as Doane refers to Laura Mulvey – "more closely associated with the surface of the image than its illusory depths, its constructed three-dimensional space which the man is destined to inhabit and hence control".[226] A spectacle applicable to the camera, according to her, makes a woman not only an image of desire but a desirous image as well, the one which cinephile can cherish and embrace. Thus, to "have" a cinema, according to Doane, is to "have" a woman[227] which develops Mulvey's concept of a woman being presented as an object to be possessed by the male gaze.

Lack of distance and proximity in relation to the image become key factors in a female cinematic spectacle creation. Doane claims that it is more important than dichotomy of activity and passivity proposed by Mulvey in VPNC, and she develops the idea of process, in which a woman is socially constructed differently in relation to the process of looking. Doane presents how this lack of distance between seeing and understanding, the mode of judging "in a flash", constructs the female over-identification.

She refers to the most precise analysis of a voyeuristic desire, as she claims, which was provided by Christian Metz, who defines (masculine) voyeurism as a type of meta-desire and provides a hierarchy of senses which are measured in terms of a distance.[228] Those senses which depend on contact are treated as "minor" arts: culinary arts, art of perfumes, whereas most valuable and acceptable arts are based on the distance, as Metz claims. The voyeur, according to him, needs a gap which "represents for him the very distance between desire and its object"[229] – a woman as spectacle. What distinguishes a cinema from a painting, a theatre, or an opera, is reduplication of the lack which stimulates desire. The image of a woman as spectacle implies both control of the image and its loss as a real woman. As Doane writes: "it is precisely this opposition between proximity and distance, control of the image and its loss, which locates the possibilities of

[225] Ibidem.
[226] Ibidem.
[227] Ibidem.
[228] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade…", *op. cit.,* p. 422.
[229] Ibidem.

spectatorship within the problematic of sexual difference. For the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image – she *is* the image".[230] So, for a female spectator she is the image herself that demands constant becoming – even if considered in terms of the narcissism which is produced by men themselves or described as a "feminine specificity" theorized in terms of special proximity, not distance.[231] It thus plays to negate the very distance specified by Metz as the essential necessity of voyeurism.[232]

According to an anthropologist and a philosopher Helene Cixous, "men are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body".[233] This theme of the female body with the overwhelming presence-to-itself was also advanced by Sarah Kofman and Michele Monterlay. Kofman elaborates the Freudian scenario of a passage from senses to reason as a subject's passage from a mother to a father with nostalgia and longing for senses and the mother. Similarly, Monterlay claims, that while a male displaces the first object of desire – the mother, the female itself becomes the object of desire with all anxiety tied to the presence of her body. This female body functioning so close and in excess to women, must be repressed, and symbolized, with all these preventing a woman "from assuming the position similar to the men in relation to signifying systems" [234] especially regarding representations of the body.

This exclusion from a signifying system was raised by Kaja Silverman who refers and develops Mulvey's concept of female spectacle in her book *The Acoustic Mirror* [235] , where she combines an extended critical reflection and examination of sound and voice in cinema with a concept of woman as voiceless spectacle. This kind of declaration is for Silverman one of results and kind of shift of masculine castration fear which moves the focus from the "outside" to the "inside" of women. Such transfer, as she claims, is effected through masculine "investigation" and "reveals" that female subject needs to be punished and treated with a maximum distance. Female narrative silence makes it possible by organizing absences and representations of lack, which seem to disavow "existential lack" for Silverman: "Mulvey locates the moment of loos inside the narrative (…) proposes, in other words, that "impression of reality" with which

[230] Ibidem, p. 423.
[231] Ibidem, p. 424.
[232] Ibidem, p. 423.
[233] Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", *New French Feminism,* p. 257.
[234] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade….", *op. cit.,* p. 424.
[235] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror. The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1988.

dominant cinema compensates for the absent real and effaces its own status as discourse, relies upon a restaging of the drama loss".[236]

As Silverman stresses, female silence in narrative brings pleasure of neutralization of castration anxiety: "her obedience to the male voice is what "proves" its power".[237] And illuminates this pleasure of neutralization in the striking difference of narrative formulation:

The most important of these differences is that Mulvey's viewer, unlike that presumed by Metz, Comolli, Oudart, and Dayan, occupies a specifically masculine position. This viewer – whether in fact a man or a woman – identifies with the look of the male protagonist, experiencing with him the anxiety of castration and the pleasure of neutralization.[238]

But she also stresses that Mulvey and all mentioned theorists of cinema have all identified "cinema's discursive function with the visual axis, converting the question, 'Who (or what) is speaking?' into the query, 'Who (or what) is looking?'. She stresses that this reformulated query produces a surprisingly uniform response "the answer that it is the camera whose look enunciates the film, and which consequently corresponds most closely to Benveniste's speaking subject" which Silverman has tried to constate, developing the phenomenon of female castration in cinematic language, and further bringing examples of the constitution of female subjectivity in cinema, i.a. examining Mulvey's movie *Riddles of the Sphinx*.[239]

One of the most convincing challenges against seeing cinematic pleasure as male and raising the issue of female voyeurism appeared in the 1980s with Jane Gaines article "Women and Representation: Can We Enjoy Alternative Pleasure".[240] She brings the "lesbian as spectator" perspective that shifted all the premises of feminist film theory centered on male voyeurism, making it inadequate in the context of female-female level of fantasies which confused contemporary film theory:

A true recognition of lesbianism would seriously challenge the concept of women as inevitable objects of exchange between men, or as fixed in an eternal trap of "sexual difference" based on heterosexuality. Feminist theory that sees all women on the screen only as objects of male desire — including by implication, lesbians — is inadequate.[241]

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[236] Ibidem, p. 29.
[237] Ibidem, pp. 28-32.
[238] Ibidem, p. 29.
[239] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror…, op. cit*., p. 200, 187-234.
[240] Jane Gaines, "Women and Representation: Can We Enjoy Alternative Pleasure?", in Patricia Erens, *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism,* Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 75-92, *Project MUSE*, accessed: March 14 2023, available at: muse.jhu.edu/book/84780
[241] Ibidem.

Other important voices against binary looking and rereading of psychoanalysis as a theory of sexuality and binary sexual difference, as well as lesbians being treated as vulnerable and "exotic" spectacle for heterosexual men, were influential analysis of Teresa de Lauretis "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" (1988) and *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994), Judith Mayne "Dorothy Arzner and Lesbian Looks" (1991), Elisabeth Grosz "Lesbian Fetishism" and "Refiguring Lesbian Desire" (1995), or "Locating the Lesbian Hand in Barbara Hammer's Early Works" by Brodie Crellin. With time the field evolved into wider anthologies including analyses of transgressive lesbian cinema production like *New Queer Cinema* by Ruby Rich[242], *Oblicza Kina Queer* and *Refleksje zza kamery. Reżyserki o kinie i formie filmowej* by Małgorzata Radkiewicz[243] or *Lesbian Cinema After Queer Theory* by Clara Brandbury-Rance.[244]

Similarly, the critique of the binary gaze evolved into homosexual analyses of the ways of looking bringing questions of gay spectators and new terms such as male ga(y)ze in film production and gay representation category raised by Omar Daou. What is more, evolution of Queer theory having its genealogy in feminist film theory based on of the gaze construction has brought non-binary options of seeing with analysis focused on other genders and queer spectacle which will be discussed in further chapters.

2.2.3. A Woman as a masquerade and a transvestite

Clothes make the man, some say. The transvestite wears clothes that signify a sexual difference. For a woman this different sexuality allows a mastery in the image and the very possibility of connecting the gaze to the desire. This desire exactly, defines the difference of a woman functioning as a transvestite and a man who is perceived by society as comical, not desired in transvestite clothes, even if the term transvestitism itself is more often associated culturally and visually with masculine transformations and performances. Probably this difference in reception (desire and cosmism) can explain the easiness with which women slip into male clothing in cinema and real life and become desired which expands the idea of a woman as a desired spectacle. A woman seems to be more bisexual than a man, as points out Mary Ann

[242] B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut,* Duke University Press, New York 2013.
[243] Małgorzata Radkiewicz, „Transgresyjne kino lesbijskie" pp. 156-193 in *Oblicza Kina Queer,* korporacja ha!art, Kraków 2014 and *Refleksje zza kamery. Reżyserki o kinie i formie filmowej,* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego and Fundacja Okonakino and Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, Kraków-Warszawa 2021.
[244] Clara Brandbury-Rance, *Lesbian Cinema After Queer Theory,* Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2019.

Doane after Freud and Cixous. The facility of the transformation of women into men is demonstrated in various film scenes, taking Katherine Hepburn role in Cukor's *Adam's Rib.* A scene when Hepburn asks a jury to imagine the reversal sex roles of three main characters involved in the case is followed by shots in which they are dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex. The sequence is marked by facility that characterizes transformation of two women into men, while in case of men resistance to do so is evident. Male transvestism becomes an occasion for laughter, while transvestism of a female brings another occasion for desire[245] which situates them in totally different discourses. Masculinity is locked in a sexual identity, while the female can play and pretend that she is the Other. Female transvestism could be fully controlled and natural: "it is understandable that women would want to be men, for everyone wants to be elsewhere than in the feminine position".[246]

The concept of female as a transvestite on screen was developed shortly as well by Mulvey herself later in her writings in 1981 in where she refers to trans-sex identification in "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'". Here she revolves again around Freudian concepts of femininity focusing on more details and how they function as a series of transformation of female characters in filmic narrative being reproduced not accordingly to psychoanalysis but to Western culturally reproduced narrative closures.[247] As she summed up narrative grammar and female trans-sex identification: "All these suggests that, as desire is given cultural materiality in a text, for women (from childhood onwards) trans-sex identification is a *habit* that very easily becomes *second nature.* However, this Nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes".[248] Exactly to these words refers Doane a year later expanding Mulvey's concept of female spectatorship and female image in her article "Film and the Masquerade…" discussed above. She adds, after citing Mulvey's above words that "Transvestite wears clothes which signify a different sexuality, a sexuality which, for women, allows a mastery over the image and the very possibility of attaching the gaze to desire. Clothes make the man, as they say".[249] Various theorists critiqued later this short Mulvey's reference to her primarily assumptions about women in cinema as being perfunctory and not bringing specifically new insights to the discussion. The usage by

[245] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade….", *op. cit.,* p. 425.
[246] Ibidem.
[247] Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'", in Laura Mulvey *Visual and Other Pleasures,* 2nd. Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2009, pp. 34-35.
[248] Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure…'", *op. cit.,* p. 35.
[249] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade….", *op. cit.,* p. 426.

Mulvey the general term of *transvestite clothes* was treated as too general statement trying to avoid detailed entrance into analysis of other genders representation or spectatorship like female and masculine homosexuality or Queerness in cinema. Such accusations last until today[250], but one cannot deny that Mulvey's concept of masculinization of female perspective as a spectator in mainstream cinema lasts, despite the theoretical critique and generative paths which VPNC brought in this field.

There seems to be one step from a female transvestism to a female masquerade as the production of excess of femininity in the cinema. But female masquerade[251] functions differently and is not as inverted as transvestism because it constitutes a response to the femininity itself which is constructed culturally as a mask or a decorative layer concealing a non-identity. The first to theorize the concept was a British psychanalyst Joan Riviere [252] and for her the masquerade of femininity becomes a kind of "reaction-formation against the female trans-sex identification, her transvestism". Riviere analyses a woman who after assuming the position of the subject of discourse rather than being its object, felt compelled to compensate this "theft" of masculinity by exaggerated gestures of feminine flirtation:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the masquerade. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference, whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.[253]

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[250] Taylor Ashton McGoey, *Toward a Fluid Cinematic Spectatorship…, op. cit.*

[251] Masquerade perceived contemporary is regarded as exaggerated investment in clothes, make-up, jewelry, as well as over-excessive expressions and manipulative demonstrations of emotions or weakness to achieve goals, attract attention or provoke desire. However, as an artist Anna Malinowska claims, both female masquerade and transvestism has become so "natural" behaviors in contemporary culture and in films that are today perceived as normal and are not visible anymore. She points to the difference of time giving the example of 18th century French Versailles and King Luis XVI where extravagant masquerade both of men and women was functioning as a standard, luxurious dream, and aspiration to all. Artist stresses how 20th century, with its technological, economical, and capitalist market changes, brough unification and simplification of the look. Additionally, new Western cultural and visual codes erased masculine forms of masquerade functioning in previous centuries as a positive, desired phenomenon connected to creativity, vitality, and power.
It is also worth stressing that the word itself in Polish language has only negative or ironical connotations, the joy of fantasy and unrestricted imagination connected to masquerade disappeared.

[252] Joan Hodgson Riviere was a British psychoanalyst (1883-1962) who was also an early translator of Freud into English, her paper "Womanliness as a masquerade" published in 1929 was very often referred in feminists film studies. Riviere's paper is of particular interest and importance since it *erases the distinction between genuine womanliness and masquerade. It also raises the question of 'the essential nature of fully developed femininity', a question lurking everywhere in the controversy, yet never properly addressed. (…) Both masquerade and womanliness are used as a device for avoiding anxiety, Riviere argues. They should therefore not be seen as primary modes of sexual enjoyment.*
Accessed on: May 25, 2023, available at: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429474675-13/womanliness-masquerade-joan-riviere

[253] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade….", *op. cit.*, p. 427.

Womanliness in these terms becomes a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade as a pompous femininity show, as a female spectacle in Mulvey's terms, holds it at a distance. To patriarchal positioning, the masquerade's resistance would be a denial of production of femininity as imagined, as closeness, as presence-to-itself. Masquerade involves a relocation of femininity, the recovery, or stimulation of the missing gap or distance created. To masquerade is to "manufacture a lack" in the form of a specific distance between oneself and the image produced. In analysis of the structure of hysteria, a female masquerade becomes an anti-hysterical tool because it works to separate the female object from the Other and a woman herself. Monterlay argues, "the woman uses her body as a disguise."[254] The masquerade enforces a representation and is created by a hyperbolization of the accessories of femininity. As Sylvia Bovenschen writes, giving an example of Marlene Dietrich, "we are watching a woman demonstrate the representation of a woman's body."[255] This type of masquerade, as an excess of femininity, is associated with the *femme fatal* and transvestitism as well, regarded by men as incarnate of evil, what Monterlay explains: "It is this evil which scandalizes whenever woman plays out her sex in order to evade the world and the law. Each time she subverts a law or the world which relies on the predominantly masculine structure of the look."[256] Thus, a masquerade as a type of representation carries a threat and dismantles masculine system of viewing. As for the female spectatorship, to assume the mask is to see in a different way. It affects defamiliarization of the female iconography in the cinema, for both masculine and female spectators, and by repetition of the female image as a constant masquerade confuses the masculine structure of the look and makes a female icon only the trace of her exclusion and repression of a real woman representations.[257]

The concept of female masquerade and transvestism was widely discussed in feminist theory in following decades and various critical voices were raised against exclusion of men being represented as spectacle in cinema, but never functioning as a masquerade which "manufactures a lack". What needs to be stressed as for analysis of masculine representations, the term masquerade was not applied, probably for the fact that today the word itself is often used with negative connotations. Masculine spectacle, on contrary, both as a term and phenomenon,

[254] Michele Monterlay, "Inquiry into femininity*" mlf,* No. 1 1978, p. 93 in Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade….", *op. cit.,* p. 427.
[255] Sylvia Bovenschen, "Is there a Feminine Aesthetics?", *New German Critique,* No 10 Winter 1977, p. 129.
[256] Michele Monterlay, "Inquiry…", *op. cit.,* p. 427.
[257] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade….", *op. cit.,* p. 427.

carries in film and visual culture positive connotations like power, strength and never ceasing agency which will be discussed in following chapters.

2.2.4. A Woman as a fetish and furniture

Fetishism and the idea of a woman as a fetish in the cinema and the visual arts has been a subject of intensive polemics on the female representation and image analyses since 1970s. As Roland Barthes writes, a fetish is a body in representation, a substitute of the complex and unfixable significance of the living body.

The idea of fetish is Freudian from the European point of view. Fetish itself was brought to Europe in the sixteenth century by Portuguese colonizers from Western Africa who had *fetisso* in the rituals. Freud himself, being fascinated by rituals of the West Coast of Africa and sacred objects infused with sexuality and a cult of a penis, implemented all these into his theory of sexuality and psychoanalytical principles. That was a starting point of fetish career in various fields of the European and Western culture.

As Amelia Jones points out, the dominance and the primacy of fetish theory in identity-related discourses with its deep binary logic of the *self*, started in the arts in the 1970s and took hold onward 1990s when it in-filtered ways of thinking beyond fetishism's binaries to consider other potential ways of "seeing differently."[258]

Laura Mulvey played one of the most important roles in this discussion bringing the idea of fetishistic representations of women in the arts and the cinema in her numerous writings. Amelia Jones refers to her articles about fetishism, finding them most influential essays addressing fetishism in the Western culture: "Her model, nuanced by colleagues in film studies, cultural studies, and art history from Mary Ann Doane to Griselda Pollock came to dominate feminist visual theory (and arguably visual theory) from the mid-1970s through the 1980s and into the 1990s."[259] As Mulvey writes about woman used as fetish in one of her first critical articles about art and (in)famous then British pop artist Allen Jones:

Women used, women subjugated, women on display: Allen Jones [does] … not miss a trick … Allen Jones gives vital clues, not only to the way he sees women, but to the place they occupy in the male

[258] Amelia Jones, "Fetishizing the Gaze and the Anamorphic Perversion" in *Seeing Differently*, pp. 63-64.
[259] Ibidem, pp. 68-69.

unconscious in general. … The language which he speaks is the language of fetishism … fetishistic obsession reveals the meaning behind popular images of women.[260]

Mulvey's first article addressing fetishism in visual arts opens with: "Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious" which was a response to a scandalous exhibition in London at that time, made by a famous but at same time detested by feminists, pop artist, Allen Jones who entitled the exhibition: "Woman as Furniture"[261]. In this essay, later in "Visual Pleasure…" and finally in her book "Fetishism and Curiosity", Mulvey draws on the model of fetishism articulated by Sigmund Freud in "The Medusa's Head" (1922) and "Fetishism" (1927), aiming at setting categories for a "strategic critique of sexist images of women" which Allen Jones and his art was a primarily critical inspiration.[262] As Doane points out after Mulvey, a woman as a woman is totally absent in Jones's work. The fetishistic image of portrayed women relates to the male narcissism: "a woman represents not herself, but by a process of displacement, the male phallus". Thus, as in case of images of women as a spectacle, a woman as a woman is largely absent, and becomes an empty fetishistic sign satisfying and soothing male obsessions and fears.[263]

All fetishism, as Freud noticed, is a phallic replacement, a projection of male narcissistic fantasy. Mulvey exemplified the fetishism of women through the work of Allen Jones, where the female body is turned into a phallus or into a horrifying "lack" of penis. The visual fetishism projects onto actual women or representations of women its sexualized fantasies contributing to male pleasure. Mulvey ends her essay arguing that the Western visual culture produces a common structure where a "true exhibit is always the phallus. Women are simply the scenery onto which men project their narcissistic fantasies" and calls for action "The time has come for us to take over the show and exhibit our own fears and fantasies."[264]

A woman, as Mulvey develops later in "Visual Pleasure", becomes thus a bearer, not a maker of the meaning in the Western culture and Western fetishism. She personifies and becomes the

[260] Laura Mulvey, "Fears, Fantasies, and the Male Unconscious. You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You Mr. Jones?", *Spare Rib*, February 1973, reprinted in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Laura Mulvey Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd edition, New York 2009. pp. 6-13.

[261] Allen Jones, still surprisingly and controversially a major figure in British Pop Art, as stresses Laura Mulvey today. His provocatively erotic sculptures of women caused protests, uproar, and feminist critique in the 1970s but did not stop Jones from pursuing his favorite subject of woman's body as erotic object and fetish which is presented in works that mix painting and sculpture. Eric Troncy, "Allen Jones's provocative women", posted 28 May 2020 Accessed: June 5, 2023, available at: https://www.numero.com/en/art/allen-jones-sex-women-provocation-seventies-painter-sculptures-viewpoint-eric-troncy-kate-mos

[262] Amelia Jones, "Fetishizing the Gaze and the Anamorphic Perversion" in *Seeing Differently*, p. 68.

[263] Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" in *Feminism and Film*, Oxford 2000, p. 25.

[264] Laura Mulvey, "Fears, Fantasies, and the Male Unconscious….", *op. cit.*, pp. 6-13.

projection of male anxiety of castration. Always assumed to be white and "ideal" in her desirable femininity. This model set onward the structure fixed in space and time, primarily without any ethnic connotations or links. Rooted deeply in binary thinking in the 1970s, it became a scheme with which feminist theorists could first identify and then reverse or overturn through a critical analysis of fetishistic structures of beauty and pleasure feminist artists, writers and filmmakers.[265]

The star system in cinema has become dependent on the fetishization of female characters. A lot of film work focused on the unreal and alienating dreams, producing collective fantasy of phallocentrism constituted by the male privilege in the film industry with the male-dominated structures and hierarchy.

Mulvey's approach to a female body representation was widely acclaimed across the Euro-American art criticism and the feminist visual theory and important for its optimistic call for women artists and filmmakers to take the show over. Tackling fetishism became the main goal together with strategies of bringing into light the stereotypical representations of female images and forms, whether it was through critical practices of mocking the image or textual disruption.[266]

Until today, there have not been sufficient critical polemics about the de-fetishized nature of woman as well as about constant lack of production or rather constant invisibility of women's cinema screening female fantasies and desires.[267] As Jones notes:

The influence of this polemic – its empowerment of at least two generations of women artists and filmmakers – cannot be overestimated in assessing the development of feminist art theory and practice. Emboldened by Mulvey's concept of taking fetishism directly, either reiterating it in such an exaggerated way that it would fall apart, or reversing its binary, a handful of women artists became art world success in art centers such as New York.[268]

From the contemporary perspective we can talk about a confluence of fetishisms. Fetishism became *fetishized* in the feminist visual theory starting from the 1970s and going forward through the 1990s. But fetishism itself, as a binary – self/other model of understanding relations in the world was central for several decades to critical identity politics, which in turn influenced the visual art theory and practice. Its central position was generated by the rise of the women

[265] Amelia Jones, "Fetishizing the Gaze and the Anamorphic Perversion" in *Seeing Differently. A History and Theory of identification and the Visual Arts*, Routledge 2012, p. 69.
[266] Amelia Jones, "Fetishizing the Gaze…", *op. cit*., p. 69.
[267] Ibidem.
[268] Ibidem.

rights movement and increasing number of artists searching for new strategies to make visible the objectification of women, people of color, and later queers. Long history of Euro-American and Latin American visual culture with artists trying to de-objectify themselves and imagine themselves as having the right to create art from their own perspective, proves something else that "only embodying the fears and desires of the subject in power", as Amelia Jones argues with Mulvey's assumption.[269]

Various important feminist theoreticians, from Emily Apter to Linda Williams and Abigail Solomon-Godeau have developed a feminist critique based on the psychoanalytic model of fetishism, which forecast sexuality and gender as the main aspects of identification and objectification. The models presented by Williams and Solomon-Godeau explore the "intersectionality of fetishism with other aspects of identification", though neither address racial, ethnic or class fetishism to any degree as Jones points out, regarding sexual fetishism as "always already racial fetishism". Amelia Jones also stresses that class in every case is "fully involved in the objectification of the bodies at hand" since the structures of commodity capitalism influence the circulation of these images on the art market. Emily Apter explains the phenomenon a growing class of European consumers to whom fetishism motivates and justifies a range of social oppression from the "banal sexism of everyday life" through "aesthetic idealism" to the "Euro-centric voyeurism of 'other-collecting'."[270] So, all levels of fetishization are at play as Jones finally stresses, and all values according to Karl Marx rebuilt on fantasy and desire rather than on inherent qualities.[271]

In case of Mulvey, she makes it clear that the feminist visual theory invested in psychoanalytical theories of fetishism, which served then as the perfect model for critique and explanation why women had been systematically objectified in the Western art since Renaissance. Freud's model, which proposes a biologically determined as a superior male body to a biologically determined as an inferior female body, became an obvious provocation to the feminists. But paradoxically, feminists found this model as a compelling one and probably the only compelling model through which there came explanations of obsessive representation of the female body in Western art as a fetishized object. Filtered through the sophisticated re-readings of Jacques Lacan, Freud's model delivered an ideal explanatory structure to work on, criticize and

[269] Ibidem, p. 71.
[270] Amelia Jones, "Fetishizing the Gaze…", *op. cit*., p. 74.
[271] Ibidem, pp. 74-80.

understand the position of women functioning as visual objects in the history of Euro-American film and art.[272]

2.2.5. A Woman as masochist

According to Freud, sadism and masochism are the most common and important of the perversions.[273] Sadism is active by nature while masochism is passive. The roots of sadism lie in aggressiveness and desire to control and subjugate the other, especially featured by a male. It corresponds to a sexual instinct where the need to control is independent of erogenous zones, supplanting the sex drive. Masochism occurs in situations where satisfaction is conditioned by suffering of the sexual object, either physically or mentally. However, if masochism is sadism turned upon the subject's self, then the self also becomes a sexual object. The self and the other are therefore blurred. The most remarkable feature of this perversion, says Freud, is that its active and passive forms are habitually found together in the same individual: "A sadist is always at the same time a masochist", says Freud, and these 'perversions' may be due to the bisexuality of humans.[274]

As for Mulvey, who used Freud's idea of sadism in analysis of film narration and spectatorship, she focused on films of Sternberg and Hitchcock to illustrate contradictions and ambiguities of "the look" oscillating between the fetishistic scopophilia and the active sadistic voyeurism. The female figure in their films bears a connotation of fear and "the look" continually circles around but at the same time disavows her, creating a threat of castration and discomfort rooted in a sexual difference. Developing the idea of this mechanism she writes:

Thus, the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: […] investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery, counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object or else … turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence over-evaluation, the cult of the female star).[275]

For Mulvey voyeurism is associated with sadism that demands a story, and in which pleasure lies in "ascertaining guilt (…) asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through

[272] Ibidem, pp. 71-80.
[273] http://faculty.arts.ubc.ca/pmahon/scopophilia.html
[274] http://faculty.arts.ubc.ca/pmahon/scopophilia.html
[275] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in The *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Amelia Jones 2nd ed. Routledge 2010, pp. 57-65.

punishment or forgiveness"[276] whereas "fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object and can exist outside linear time while the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone." By using works of Hitchcock and Sternberg, "both of whom take the look at the content or the subject matter of many of their films", Mulvey explains the contradictions and ambiguities, claiming that Hitchcock being more complex, goes more into the investigative side of voyeurism and uses both mechanisms, while Sternberg "produces the ultimate fetish" where complications of a plot revolve around misunderstanding, rather than usage of a conflict. As she writes "the most important absence is that of the controlling male gaze within the screen scene." The highest point of emotional drama and the most typical is the presence of Marlene Dietrich with her supreme erotic appearance and meaning, which takes place in the absence of the men, whom she loves. So, Sternberg displays more the erotic impact of a spectacle for the audience, in which a male hero misunderstands the situation and does not see what is happening.[277]

For Hitchcock, as Mulvey writes, the male hero sees exactly what the audience does, and he shots to portray the tensions and contradictions experienced by the spectator. However, Hitchcock builds fascination with an image through scopophilic eroticism and uses the process of identification associated with socially constructed moral correctness and the recognition of this established morality to show its perverted side. His heroes are always exemplary of the symbolic order and the law, to take the example of a policeman in Vertigo who is a dominant male character possessing money and power, but his erotic drives lead him into conceded situations. The woman in Hitchcock films becomes the object of both powers, firstly the sadistic drive to subjugate another person and secondly to subjugate the active, sadistic voyeuristic male gaze. Yet always, a man is positioned on the right side of the law, and a woman is set on the wrong side, usually with the guilt attributed, which calls for her "punishment and saving."[278]

Since VPNC focused on the pleasure in male gazing, male voyeurism, scopophillia and sadism which placed women as objectified spectacles to be viewed, to be looked at, so female protagonists were functioning as the source of masculine visual pleasure deprived the right to look back, to return the gaze, or without the right to desire on its own terms. This perspective of sadistic cinematic patriarchal male gazing has brought the unexpected and numerous

[276] Ibidem.
[277] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure…", *op. cit.*, p. 63.
[278] Ibidem, pp. 57-65.

responses in a feminist theory, and its rejection has taken over feminist studies to a *vampiric* degree as Camille Paglia states. The "victim" model, as she stresses, brought enormous range of analyses which referred to the female spectator and a female gaze as a new, wider concept in the context of feminine agency. In an interview about the male gaze and Hitchcock (2013) she claims:

I've been very vocal about my opposition to the simplistic theory of 'the male gaze' that is associated with Laura Mulvey and that she herself has moved somewhat away from) and that has taken over feminist film studies to a vampiric degree in the last 25 years. The idea that a man looking at or a director filming a beautiful woman makes her an object, makes her passive beneath the male gaze which seeks control over woman by turning her into mere matter, into "meat" – I think was utter nonsense from the start. It was formulated by people who knew nothing about the history of painting, the history of fine art.[279]

The concept of male gaze as being misogynistic, especially in Hitchcock films analysis, Paglia rejects totally and treats it as absurd. According to her, the discussion is about a director who created most magnetic and beautiful images of women which have ever been depicted in films. Calling Hitchcock *nakedly misogynistic* she finds as an absurd and recalls great female protagonists as Grace Kelly in *To Catch a Thief,* fabulous Janet Leigh or Kim Novak in *Vertigo*. Paglia also considers stressing the negative misogyny in Hitchcock as a wrong strategy, reminding that all great artists were fascinated with goddess-like figures of women that carried ambivalence. For her, the imagination of late twentieth-century cinema was dominated by images of women that Hitchcock created, with endless imitations until day.[280]

One of the counter voices questioning Mulvey's assumptions was that of film academic Gaylyn Studlar. Her dissertation, "Visual pleasure and the Masochistic Aesthetics: The von Sternberg/Dietrich Paramount Cycle" was awarded by the University of Southern California the 1984 Graduate Dissertation Award. Referring to Mulvey's essay she wrote an article for the "Quarterly Review of Film Studies" in 1984, entitled "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema". In her study Studlar-offers an alternative model to the discourse that presented voyeurism allied with sadism, the male controlling the gaze as the only position of a spectator's pleasure, and finally a polarized notion of sexual difference with the female regarded as the *lack*. Studlar examines the masochistic aesthetics in film and develops theoretical perspectives

[279] Camille Paglia, "Camille Paglia on Hitchcock, misogyny and the male gaze" available at: http://jaiarjun.blogspot.com/2013/09/camille-paglia-on-hitchcock-misogyny.html, accessed: August 21, 2020.
[280] Ibidem.

of cinematic pleasure regarding five critical issues, which are: the female defined as the *lack*, the male gaze defined by control, the cause and function of fetishism and disavowal, the dream screen and finally the identification with the opposite sex.[281]

The alternative model proposed by her derives from Gilles Deleuze's *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* where he uses a psychoanalytic-literary approach to the novels of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch to challenge basic Freudian concepts. He employs sado-masochistic duality and etiology of masochism as a kind of response to a castration fear. Studlar considers masochism a phenomenology of experience that goes far beyond the limited definition of a perverse sexuality. She claims that the "masochistic aesthetic extends beyond purely clinical realm into the arena of artistic form, language, and production of pleasure through a text."[282] She is also pointing, that the governing sadistic fantasy as expressed in Sade's work, positions the father "beyond the laws" and negates the mother as positioned outside the meaning in culture and laws. Masoch's world is in contrast centered around idealizing and mystical exaltation of love that punishes a woman. In the masochistic scenario a woman must experience cruelty in love to fulfill her role in the scheme. Following Deleuze, Studlar notes that "the paradox of the masochistic alliance in Masoch's work is the subversion of the expected patriarchal positions of power/powerlessness, master/slave, with the ultimate paradox being the slave's (the male's) willingness to confer power to the female".[283]

Comparing Deleuze Masoch's and Sade's discourses Studlar writes:

Even when Sade chooses a woman as "heroine", she still acts out the criminally misogynistic impulse that is not satisfied with merely objectifying or demystifying women but must destroy it. In the masochistic text, the female is not one of countless number of discarded objects, but an idealized, powerful figure, both dangerous and comforting. Fetishization, fantasy, and idealizing disavowal replace the frenzied Sadian destruction of the female.[284]

Continuing this line of reasoning, she writes (after Roland Barthes) that formal structures of the masochistic aesthetics such as fantasy, disavowal, fetishism, and suspense, overlap with the primary structures linked to the self-abasement and pre-Oedipal desire revealed in the work of Masoch as a formal and narrative pattern, which enable classic cinema to produce visual pleasure.[285]

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[281] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema", *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Fall 1984, p. 268.
[282] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures…", *op. cit.*, p. 271.
[283] Ibidem.
[284] Ibidem.
[285] Ibidem, p. 268.

Studlar concludes saying that taking into consideration the relationship of cinematic pleasure with masochism, sexual difference, process of identification, representation of a female in films, models presented by Deleuze offer a radical alternative to Freudian assumptions that have been adopted by most psychoanalytic film theory:

The "masochistic model" rejects a stance that emphasizes the phallic phase and the pleasure of control or mastery, and therefore offers an alternative to strict Freudian models that have proven to be a "dead end" for feminist- psychoanalytic theory. In trying to come to terms with patriarchal society and the cinema as a construct of that society, current discourse has often inadvertently reduced the psychoanalytic complexity of spectatorship through a regressive phallocentrism that ignores a wide range of psychological influences on visual pleasure.[286]

Additionally, Freudian assumption made masochism and sadism as having complementary status, while Studlar claims that ego activity of sadism and masochism are completely different. For Deleuze, it is the mother who is the primary determinant in the structure of the masochistic fantasy and in the etiology of perversion. So, mother being both, a love object and a controlling agent for the helpless child is viewed as an ambivalent figure during the infancy and creates paradoxical pain/pleasure structure of masochism. Questioning Mulvey's analysis she suggests that:

Masochism subverts traditional psychoanalytic notions regarding the origins of human desire and the mother's and father's roles in the child's psychic development. A theory of masochism that emphasizes pre-Oedipal conflicts and pleasures invites consideration of responses to film by spectators of both sexes that may conflict with conscious cultural assumption about sexual difference and gender identity.[287]

Deleuze's theory of masochistic desire suggests the mother as the main and primary figure of identification and power, which challenges the idea of male visual pleasure as centered around control and which never identifies with a submission to the female. [288]

2.3. Feminist hope for female cinematic image change. *Basic Instinct* exemplary.

The release of *Basic Instinct* as erotic thriller (1992) with the narration including strong, independent, and sexually conscious and dangerous female protagonist-became a feminist hope for female image production in the 1990s. It was the most expensive script in history, with 3 million US$ paid to Joe Eszterhas, and brought allegations of homophobia and misogyny Thomas Austin exploring its controversial gendering in *Daily Mirror* says that "celebrated its anti(heroine) as a female role model" and "the champion of a new lust for sexual freedom" [289].

[286] Ibidem, p. 269.
[287] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures…", *op. cit.*, p. 270.
[288] Ibidem.
[289] Thomas Austin, "Gendered (dis) pleasures. Basic Instinct and female viewers", *Journal of Popular British Cinema* N2, 1999, p. 4.

Critical reception to the movie was extremely divided. The image of an intelligent bisexual millionairess, a famous writer, independent and dangerous was also regarded as an "offensive male fantasy or heterosexist assault on 'other' sexualities" or a way of pathologising women as some publications accused *Basic Instinct*. While *Screen International* labelled it according to Austin "a slick package of sex and violence", other talking points were female aggression and various forms of sexual 'deviance', including female bisexuality, lesbianism and bondage.[290] Such sexual content was labeled in the media as being "excessive for a mainstream Hollywood product on the grounds of both its explicitness and its 'kinky' elements" as Austin sums up.

A man as a sexual predator, a millionaire and an intelligent kind of monster without remorse has been present as a norm in various film representations but its female variant on the screen has evoked infinite comments and critical reactions characterized as the "gender specific". Media reports, frequently highlighted the film's content as a 'male' attraction or a "fantasy about misguided women who need a proper screw, or a bargain of two women at once who get their kicks out of performing for a man"[291] labeled as pornographic or soft porn. But as Austin notes, *Basic Instinct* and Sharon Stone's role was not always read as a "male" entertainment which left female pleasures impossible or problematic. Female pleasures, fantasy and desire were constructed in *Basic Instinct* according to some female expectations. Significance of Catherine character was given in *Daily Mirror* essay entitled "Woman: The Sexual Tiger. As Austin reflects:

The film provided the opportunity to discuss women's sexual assertiveness and their novel status as consumers in a sexual marketplace offering "sell-out male strip shows", the Femidom contraceptive, and the soft-porn magazine. For women Catherine stood as a sign of these changing norms, a representative of the desiring new woman of the 1990s.[292]

Basic Instinct shows Catherine/Stone as a very attractive women-writer in designer clothes, displaying nakedness, enjoying sports car and her luxurious beach house, being socially and economically independent. All these images were a source of visual pleasure not only for masculine spectators, both straight and gay, but also for women. Catherine is not only a sex object, or an image to enjoy. On the contrary she is autonomous and active, a desiring woman in sexual relations who initiates and controls sex with Nick/Douglas or her female lover Roxy. The bestselling novelist, with inheritance of US$ 100 million. She murders people with an

[290] Thomas Austin, "Gendered (dis) pleasures…", *op. cit.,* p.7.
[291] Thomas Austin after feminist magazine *Harpies and Quines,* in "Gendered (dis) pleasures. Basic Instinct and female viewers", *Journal of Popular British Cinema* N2, 1999, p. 8.
[292] Ibidem.

icepick (which is not resolved however in the plot) and treats the inquiries of police (the masculine authority) with a calm satisfaction and contempt. It was more Catherine's self-sufficiency, self-consciousness, intelligence, courage, and aggression than her body and outfits, which appealed to many women, as Austin finds in his female audience research project, and which he regards as a broader demand for a social and financial empowerment of women. He quotes a 22-year-old drama student description of Catherine: "a babe, rich, cool, - and what every woman wants to be… open minded and dangerous – she always gets what she wants! MAD + BAD". [293]

A degree to which the female character on the screen speaks to female dreams, provokes female visual pleasure and fantasies in life can be found in a description of Catherine, who took part in Austin's research:

[Catherine] had power – she was intelligent, successful, wealthy, and incredibly beautiful – she oozed sex appeal and charisma. She intimidated men – she was dangerous. I found her very attractive… She does what many women only fantasize about. I admire her… after watching the film I craved sex.[294]

By some *Basic Instinct* was interpreted as a cautionary tale addressed to men with a demonstration of women's strength:

Women can be dangerous without being insane. Push us far and we could all become like Catherine!... I hope Catherine was the murderer because she was ruthlessly killing men for her money and knew exactly what she was doing –[women] should be rational and intelligent like most male film serial killers.[295]

Tracing the discussion about female visual pleasure, Robert Battistini makes an important analysis of the visual pleasure category introduced by Mulvey. In his article "*Basic Instinct*: Revisionist Hard-On, Hollywood Trash, or Feminist Hope", he claims that the real power of the movie lies within the female (Catherine Tramell) as bisexual, which was then a subversion of the most basic mechanisms of patriarchal assumptions. According to him, "*Basic Instinct* may be one of the most "politically incorrect" movies of the p.c. age" and the film itself "points towards strategies that could seriously undermine the oppression with which political correctness is supposedly concerned".[296] Even if he states that such a movie is hardly a place where one would look for threats to traditional strategies of visual pleasure, he decides to read

[293] Thomas Austin, "Gendered (dis) pleasures…", *op. cit.*, p. 11.
[294] Ibidem, p.12.
[295] Ibidem, p. 13.
[296] Robert Battistini, "*Basic Instinct*: Revisionist Hard-On, Hollywood Trash, or Feminist Hope", *Cinefocus*, Vol 2 No 2, Spring 1992, p. 38.

Basic Instinct through Laura Mulvey's essay on the subject. He suggests that the film denies the strategies of looking that she proposes, both voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia. He demonstrates that Catherine/Stone does not function as a traditional fetish, and that *Basic Instinct* was made deliberately ambiguous "whether or not its detective ever gets to "devalue, punish, or save" the "guilty object" (Mulvey, section III, C.1). After this demonstration, as he continues, reading *Basic Instinct* hopefully will not be so trivial, and visual pleasure here comes at the price, which the gazing male may not be willing to pay.[297]

He makes a review of Mulvey's assumptions in VPNC recalling the "unconscious of patriarchal society" that structures the film form by creating a destructive male response to the simultaneous threat and allure of women. This male unconscious has developed two "avenues of escape" from this threat (castration anxiety), and Battistini researches both. The first one which lies in investigation and demystification of women, followed by "devaluation, punishment, or saving the guilty object" and corresponds to narcissistic look. And the second strategy which, according to Mulvey is "making the woman reassuring rather than dangerous" via turning her into fetish on the screen, corresponds to scopophilic and fetishistic look fulfilling the gazer's sexual libido by "using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight".[298] After analyses of dominating, violent sexual scenes performed by Catherine, Battistini claims that she is hardly being fetishized in terms of the devices that Mulvey refers to, taking Marlene Dietrich as an example. He stresses arrogance and scornful characters of both female characters in the film Catherine and Roxy, as well as Tramell's extreme impertinence towards the official masculine power structures, and asserting her main concerns for personal space, sex, and control of the confrontational situations. The male voyeur cannot function if the object of the gaze is aware of him, the woman has to be a passive recipient of his gaze, disassociated from her mind – which all is broken by Tramell here, "she uses the allure her body as a weapon".[299] And final difficulty in taking Tramell as a fetish, according to Battistini, is her repeated violence and somehow monstrous character, for not *having any emotional need for men.* As he writes: "A woman possessing such a fascination with (and intimate knowledge of) violence is difficult to imagine as passive "to-be-looked-ness" but etherealness, he admits that Catherine is really no-different than the classic *famme fatale.* Applying Mulvey's investigative

[297] Robert Battistini, *"Basic Instinct*: Revisionist…", *op. cit.,* p. 38.
[298] Ibidem.
[299] Ibidem, p. 39.

strategy, Battistini concludes that, Tramell has neither set herself up to being demystified nor punished.

He underlines that Nick's pursuit of Catherine as his visual pleasure has led him into troubles and it is a woman here that plays the game of the patriarch. What he points out as a difference is the fact that she does not need to control Nick to compensate any kind of anxiety of hers, her concerns are not legalistic or systematic subjugation of men. "I don't make any rules Nick, I go with the flow" he quotes her, proving her liability to her own desires. According to Battistini, *Basic Instinct* is one of the most important films in gendered readings of bisexual feminine desire as well as in female visual pleasure, the strong reverse female gaze and empowered female image investigation:

Tramell does suggests a means of feminine empowerment that is distinct from the traditional strategies of masculine subjugation. And in this film, these "other" strategies make a mockery of the investigating, gazing male. Those who see this film as no more than a "dirty little thrill" either aren't watching very carefully, or are willing to accept a vulnerable, emasculated, and ignorant gaze. If so, then Basic Instinct suggest a poetics of male desire quite different from Mulvey's.[300]

2.3. Summary

Critical responses, stimulated heavily by essay's categories, were referring i.a. to the concept of Mulveyian male gaze assumed as dominant and producing female images and narrative constructions in cinema and in visual culture for its pleasure. The analysis provided displays how the language of looking and ways of seeing in European and American philosophy, with its dominating male perspective in knowledge production, have evolved since 1970s. It presents how the binary and unbalanced gaze notion, introduced by VPNC, has provoked changes and disagreements in fields of feminism, film, and visual culture, especially in the area of female functioning as a passive cinematic image. Carried research has been structured around a discussion rooted in visual semiotics and in a controversy defining and depicting a woman on screen as passive sign, erotic spectacle, masquerade, or mute fetish. With all their negative symbolic connotations which include passivity, illusionary mythology, fetishism as uniquely male, female masochism, masquerade, or transvestitism, which serve to please and satisfy the heterosexual male desire, the issues were heavily re-discussed and brought into light by feminist scrutinised analyses of the production of visual grammar. The chapter closes with presentation

[300] Robert Battistini, *"Basic Instinct*: Revisionist…", *op. cit.,* p. 43.

of the movie *Basic Instinct* as exemplary of the filmic active heroine, her desiring gaze and female sexual agency, which has become a feminist hope for the female image change, illuminating possibilities of conscious manipulation used by the female object that is looked at.

CHAPTER III

Female Visual Pleasure in Spectatorship and Practice of Cinema and Arts

3.1. Shame as a revolutionary feeling in female perspective

The concept of the female gaze itself advanced as one of main counter-categories to Mulvey's political notion of a *male gaze* and has become widely discussed and researched not only in film and media studies. Mulvey's analysis of a patriarchal Hollywood male pleasure of looking in which women are passive recipients without the right to their own desire expressed or represented, stimulated the radical critique first in the visual erotic arts created by women and later by the feminist film theorists.

Since the term female gaze today evokes a complex body of theory and critique, here I will focus on manifestation of female sexual drive rooted in psychoanalytic gaze concept that reflects Freudian mechanisms of male voyeurism and exhibitionism in which women as producers of visual pleasure representations are asymmetrically excluded. The discussion in visual culture and cinema on authority subjectivity, thanks to Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure…" started to incorporate the trope of female desire. As Geetha Ramanathan observes in his article "Desire and Female Subjectivity":

The imposition of male desire in film has left little room for female desire to be articulated. Female desire, whether authorial, diegetic or spectatorial, has been articulated either as fantasms of the male imagery, or is underwritten by a male desire which conflates the image of women with desire itself. The cinematic apparatus colludes to institutionalise male trajectories of desire.[301]

He recalls conclusions of Linda Williams who summarises the complex relationship between looking and desire of a female as a spectator, and a female in the diegesis: "in the classical narrative cinema to see is to desire", but as she observes what is crucial here is that good female heroes in the cinema were often unresponsive or severely punished for their desire as was presented in previous chapter. Worth mentioning here are famous words about cinema and desire of Slavoj Žižek who claims that "cinema is the ultimate pervert art: it does not give you what you desire - it tells you how to desire". This quote is very interesting because Žižek, as a famous psychoanalytic and Lacanian gaze commentator, has never analyzed the female gaze or desire and ignored gendered pleasure. According to Ramanathan, this denial of authority granted to a male spectator, results from the fact that: "the female spectator and her diegetic

[301] Geetha Ramanathan, "Desire and Female Subjectivity" in *Feminist Autheurs: Reading Women's Films,* Wallflower Press, 2007, p. 141.

stand-up cannot have the pleasure of being desiring subject in this framework that limits female desiring subjectivity".[302]

Main reasons for this female exclusion, as it was stated earlier in the thesis lie in the fear of female imaging, fantasy, and representations of visual pleasure or desire. When they finally came into lights and were presented on screens during the time of sexual revolution and female avant-garde visual art production in 1960s and 1970s, they became the aim of ferocious attacks and critique, not only of male artists, art, or film critics but also of the feminism itself. Shame, innocence, and theatricality embedded in social perception code of female spectatorship, infantile representations of sexuality re-produced in cinema and female production of explicit sexuality were to stand on severe guard of a social order for the next decades. Che Guevara words seem to articulate its very essence the best: a "shame as a revolutionary feeling".[303]

Freud argued that shame has an especially close relationship with scopophilia and recent survey in this little-explored field reflect on the meaning of shame and sexuality in the context related to sexual difference. An English scholar, Claire Pajaczkowska suggests that in post-Freudian discourses "shame is of considerable significance and interest both in visual culture and psychoanalysis" while "literature of shame is small".[304] For her, images of gendering shame are fascinating and revealing, with the shame being attributed to men and women differently. The cultural version of shame is assigned to femininity and passivity in which "seeing is the agency of shaming, whereas being seen is the condition for modesty or being seen as shameful".[305] The study of visual culture, especially from the female gaze perspective, enabled psychoanalysts to reconsider the significance of sight, visual fantasy and sexual representations through female experiences that have remained unvoiced and inarticulate. As Pajaczkowska suggests, the "confluence of shame, sexuality and vision may be said to lie at the heart of contemporary psychoanalytic project". [306]

Pajaczkowska also gives an example of representation of gender difference within a *culture of shame* and male honour made by Salaman Rushdie in *Shame* (1995) where the hero, Omar Khayyam, raised in isolation, is forbidden by his three 'mothers' to feel shame as it is an

[302] Geetha Ramanathan, „Desire and Female Subjectivity" in *Feminist Autheurs: Reading Women's Films,* Wallflower Press, 2007, p.141. (BFI)
[303] Claire Pajaczkowska and Ivan Ward, *Shame, Sexuality, Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture*, Routledge 2008, pp. 14-15.
[304] Ibidem.
[305] Ibidem, p. 9.
[306] Ibidem, pp. 4-5.

emotion he should never experience. When he asks: "what does it feel like?", he gets mother's answer: "It makes women feel like to cry and die (…) but men, it makes them go wild".[307] In Western terms we can say that shame brings women to cry and die in the form of famous Freudian female hysteria symptom or in modern psychoanalytical terms as sublimation of desire. All these as Ramanathan says: makes women in cinema "viewed as desire itself" more often than as the "site of desire"[308] which is culturally repressed and for decades treated as abnormal. The representation of female sexuality which is needed to balance the dominance of male desire on screen which will be discussed further.

Acclaimed American gender scholar, Teresa de Lauretis writes about the urgency to 'historicise' desire, which in the female context of culturally banned looking stigmatizing female gazing back, takes up more important meaning. Since visual culture has "played the central role bringing terror into the western culture of spectatorship" [309] it is female gaze that is shamed by a complex social emotion embedded into Western female sexuality and "matriphobic" culture from the early childhood. The aim of this chapter is to historicise and illuminate the most significant changes in contemporary cinema that female representation of desire and its reception underwent, all in response or being an inspiration to Mulvey concept of male dominant visual pleasure.

3.2. The enigma of the female gaze as criticism of its psychoanalytical disavowal

In most popular representations in film, television, press, and narratives long after Hollywood era analysed by Mulvey, the prevailing conclusion is that "men look, and women are looked at" with the gaze which is always controlling and judging. A struggle over meaning especially in this area is central, as Lorraine Gamman claims explaining why we should write about women looking at men or women looking at each other. Patriarchal relations of looking and its shift from a male dominant perspective creating ready coded representations of women, thanks to Mulvey's VPNC, have become widely discussed and questioned in visual culture of last decades. If there was not the male gaze introduced in 1975, there would not be the female gaze concept, as the most intensely debated perspective in contemporary culture.[310]

[307] Ibidem.
[308] Geetha Ramanathan, "Desire and Female Subjectivity…", *op. cit.,* p. 142.
[309] Ibidem, p. 16.
[310] Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds.), *The Female Gaze. Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, The Women's Press, London 1988, p. 1.

Radical strategies for change of the patriarchal model: "men act, women are acted upon"[311] can be apocalyptic in this need for social revolution and often equate with terrorism, but what should be carried in mind, as Gamman stresses, is the fact that we cannot isolate this change "from the economic, which determines in the last instance".[312] Examples of radical feminist rebellion were to: stop having relations with men, return to the pre-Oedipal "imaginary", deconstruct the text, grammaticise the sentence or smash the state.[313]

Studying feminist theories and issues around the problem of the gaze and the female as a viewer and a spectator, which was described by psychanalytical methodology, one can encounter more complex theoretical issues that psychoanalysis has brought into light. These new theoretical approaches in the feminist community resulted in polarisation of feminist film area. First round-table discussion in 1978, with women voicing their displeasure with theories of the gaze based on Lacanian assumptions, came with a critique as being destructive in reifying women in a childlike, infantile position exactly as patriarchy wanted to see them. For Julia LeSage the "Lacanian framework establishes a discourse which is totally male"[314] *w*ith a woman being treated as a lack both in symbolic and in culture production.[315] Feminist writer Lorraine Gamman claims that feminism can enter the mainstream culture through forms of visual pleasure which has always had political implications and women should be visually presented as the ones in control of their own sexuality which, after Mulvey, became the first political demand. Examination of various aspects of female autonomy and control have found expressions in popular genres "without falling into a simple reversal of gender roles".[316]

But first representations of female erotic heterosexual gaze, highly controversial and censored until recently, were made by female artists already in the 1960s, a decade before Mulvey's article and before the female gaze theory appeared on the horizon. It must be stressed that even if the issue of images of women and their visual representations were widely discussed in the second wave of feminism, Mulvey with VPNC interrupted those feminist debates as Mary Ann Doane compares it to the film scene which stops and breaks the flow of the action. In 2017,

[311] Ibidem.
[312] Ibidem.
[313] Ibidem.
[314] E. Ann Kaplan, "'Is the gaze male?'…", *op. cit.,* p. 32.
[315] Ibidem.
[316] Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds.), *The Female Gaze…", op. cit.,* p. 4.

after her 50 years of cinephile friendship with Mulvey, she recalls the scene with Marylin Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* where Monroe is sitting at the table with lots of people talking and suddenly, leans back and says "I just *love* conversation" disrupting the narrative totally. This moment of Monroe breaking the conversation brings unexpected results which for Doane are parallel to Mulvey's intervention who is *breaking the conversation* in visual culture with results that destroy mainstream visual pleasure in film. The scene has stuck in her memory because of the truth she found in it, and in the dialogical aspect of conversation that instead the engagement in a disjointed monologue, Mulvey "grasped the slippage from topic to topic and made a condensed, pinpointing metonymic slide which was foregrounded as crucial, exorbitant, and hilarious in film theory".[317] As Doane stresses the "essay marked a decisive moment away from the 'images of women in film' discourse that had dominated early feminist film theory".[318] Yet, it seemed that it was the article "to argue against and to prove wrong", as she says, and "precisely because of its enormous impact and rigorous systematicity"[319] it provoked unexpected resistance, opening various forms of problematics and making the notion of female gaze and femininity in general, less enigmatic.

Asking if the gaze is male, Kaplan gathers stereotypes that are culturally embedded in the femininity as a social construct and in the female gaze notion, where a woman functions as: an irrational mystery, an enigma, earth connected, a sexualised passive object, a devil, a nature, a seduction, a changeable phenomenon, or a monster and a threat. The goal of her critical study was to unveil the female power instead of weakness and to force our gaze to analyse patriarchal voyeurism that evokes responses and information about women as spectators. Kaplan also recalls Ruby Rich who objected to theories which eliminate women from the audience and the screen, advocating criticism and asking, "how we can move beyond our placing, rather than just analysing it".[320]

Some analyses asserting the female need for identification with strong female images on the screen which measure dissatisfaction with current feminist theories of the male gaze in 1970s and new theoretical feminist film claim that new representations destroy both the male viewer's

[317] Mary Ann Doane, "Conversation/Memory. Reflections on Laura Mulvey", New Review of Film and Television Studies, Vol. 15, No. 4. 425-430, Routledge 2017, pp. 426-427, accessed on: 19th November 2020, available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2017.1376881
[318] Ibidem.
[319] Ibidem.
[320] E. Ann Kaplan, "'Is the gaze male?'…", *op. cit.*, p. 32.

pleasure and the female pleasure. Whatever "a strong woman" image can mean, it is usually male construct and often exaggerated form of independent femininity which fall into binary gender stereotyping to reassure male dominance. As Kaplan notices after Julia Kristeva, "it is impossible to know what the "feminine" might be, outside the male constructs and while we must reserve the category "women" for social demands and publicity".[321] By the word "woman" Kristeva means "that which is not represented, that which is unspoken, that which is left out of meanings and ideologies".[322] That is why femininity in general and female gaze in specific are considered passive and treated in culture and philosophy as enigma or something that does not exist, with avoidance of naming these uncomfortable concepts in patriarchal schemes.

More contemporary explanations of the term female gaze are proposed by Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday in Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication and are divided in three sections, where the first one refers to feminist response to Mulvey:

A term coined by feminists in response to the claims made by Mulvey that the conventions established in classical Hollywood films required all spectators, regardless of their sex, to identify with the male protagonist and to adopt the controlling male gaze around which such films were held to be structured. 'The female gaze' thus marked out neglected territory. For many, the term alludes to the right of women to adopt the active and objectifying gaze that has traditionally and stereotypically been associated with males, undermining the dominant cultural alignment of masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity.[323]

Another definition which was proposed as a consequence of response that went outside film studies and visual culture, is based on the social understanding of female looking and perceiving:

The ways in which women and girls look at other females, at males, and at things in the world. This concerns the kinds of looking involved, and how these may be related to identification, objectification, subjectivity, and the performance and construction of gender.

The third one comes as *the gendered attention anticipated in visual and audiovisual texts addressed to female viewers*.[324]

According to the feminist theory, the female gaze as a term refers to the gaze at three levels: a character within the film, an individual filming of an artistic work by a female director, and finally a gaze of a female spectator. More often than gender, contemporary analyses of the gaze

[321] E. Ann Kaplan, "'Is the gaze male?'…", *op. cit.*, p. 32.
[322] Ibidem, p. 33.
[323] Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, Female Gaze in *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* published online, available at: https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095814800 Oxford University Press 2011.
[324] Ibidem.

highlight an issue of representing women as subjects having agency. Some male directors create films and visual arts which are infused heavily with a female gaze perspective as in the case of Pedro Almodóvar who has been recently analysed from this perspective.[325]

The silence around female spectatorship and female gaze as passive phenomenon pinpointed by Mulvey, was also a case of analysis and critique by Lahcen Haddad. In his article "A Visual Pleasure of their Own: A Critique of Laura Mulvey" he responds to Mulvey's deconstruction of phallocentrism in cinema in terms of a paradox structuring it. He claims that revealing the cracks and contradictions of patriarchal ideology is not the paradox since phallocentrism cannot exist independently of a woman-as-difference. It is this difference, for Haddad, with which a woman as a signifier motivates in its semiotic sense the functioning of phallocentrism. He agrees that women are alienated and marginalised in the symbolic order, law and language and we can add to this index the female alienation from the ownership of the gaze. For him, a woman, in spite of being the threat and the lack, motivates functioning of phallocentrism and finds Mulvey cinematic interpretation of Sphinx-like women in *The Riddles of the Sphinx* as a representation of the margins of the patriarchal system which are effect of both the order of the system and an index of female resistance and female threat to the forces of the system.[326] Haddad claims that it is more of demystification and revelation of "the structure of male desire under patriarchal bourgeois order which is scopophilic and rapist in essence, than it is a demystification of woman as mystery".[327] He refers to Laura Mulvey and her analytical process of "mystifying" women and demystification of the male and the female gaze which he finds reducing:

Laura Mulvey is aware of the fact that the mystery and the process of demystification are constructs/ideological effects of bourgeois cinema. Yet her postulating of demystification as an actual "avenue of escape from [the] castration anxiety" not only essentialises women by "mystifying" her but reduces the historical and political significance of demystification, which is an index of patriarchal recuperation of difference, to a mere hermeneutic play of absence and presence, enigma and solution.[328]

He stresses that a woman as a spectator can deconstruct the meaning and shake the satisfaction of a male gaze inherent to the structure of patriarchal film and as a female figure, she is *no less*

[325] Gutierrez-Albilla, Julian. *Aesthetics, Ethics and Trauma in the Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar*, Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
[326] Lahcen Haddad, "A Visual Pleasure of their Own: A Critique of Laura Mulvey", *Cinefocus* Vol.2, No 2 Spring 1992, p. 33.
[327] Ibidem.
[328] Lahcen Haddad, "A Visual Pleasure of their Own…", *op. cit.,* p. 33.

semantically active. He disagrees with Mulvey on feminine passivity and female significance of silence in film:

It is true, that she is, in the words of Mulvey, the "signifier of the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions" but she is no less a "maker of meaning" for being so through her silence, through her disruption of the predicative mode that characterises men's inherently patriarchal language, she creates meaning. Silence, especially feminine silence, disrupts sequentiality, the narrativity of language. [329]

According to him, this silence creates a vertical space, a non-linear mode of semiosis, a fraction of meaning on the margins of patriarchal discourse and "shakes the linguistic command that Mulvey thinks allows the male character in patriarchal cinema to reduce 'the silent image of women' to meaninglessness".[330] Feminine silence decentres the male homogenic subject which for Mulvey is unified and unproblematically monolithic through the notion of "the active power of the erotic look"[331], as points Haddad.

The "agent of difference" that structures the unconscious of patriarchal society is a woman, and to fight the unconscious does not act to find ways to escape and transcendent forms of female representations but to foreground and activate its differentiality[332] that female gaze activation and exploration can bring. What he finds important is the need of disruption of male gaze and position it within kind of otherness as female gaze was positioned so far. For Haddad female gaze should provoke the deconstruction of the masculine "naturalness of the point of view of the camera" as well as deconstruction of female fetishization by men. He agrees that this cinematic fetish production process is linked to the psychic process that produces male anxieties and fear of castration. He proposes the cinematic "activation of a certain resistance of the male body to fetishization".[333] An alternative female cinema and different nature of desire can be possible, as concludes Haddad, "only after one explored the patriarchal unconscious illusion of homogeneity"[334] of meanings. Only by deepening its tensions, its fissures, and its contradictions we can foreground the radical and irreducible otherness of women and the female gaze with the differential nature of desire.

[329] Ibidem, p. 35.
[330] Ibidem.
[331] Ibidem.
[332] Ibidem, p. 36.
[333] Lahcen Haddad, "A Visual Pleasure of Their Own…", *op. cit.*, p. 35.
[334] Ibidem, p. 36.

3.3. Female Spectatorship

This part of the chapter presents the most important theoretical film feminist responses to the female gaze described by Mulvey as passive and masculinized and fitting the patriarchal standards of looking and male sexual fantasies. Culturally produced expectations towards representations of femininity outlined by her in the context of cinematic production and lack of counterbalance in female gaze and female voyeurism production by women directors or artists, opened the discussion not only about the gendered gaze but also about the racial aspect of ways of seeing. Even though female spectatorship eventually became a separate issue of reflection, it was the male voyeurism which was discussed widely and went through the process of normalization, whereas the female one is still struggling to be recognized as existing and not being deviant. This part will close with presentation of a man as an image and an erotic object of a female gaze, and a male body as a fetish for female viewers.

What we see as spectators "reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretations of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle"[335], says Mulvey and these words provoke a long-lasting debate. Before her publication of VPNC in film and studies there was no discussion about binary nor gender divided spectatorship, the race, or racist ways of seeing did not have the right to exist as the reason and knowledge production were treated as being created universally by white male. Thus, most visual and artistic production until 1970 s was to satisfy male spectator, as Berger notes in his "Ways of Seeing".

The *gendered gaze* theory introduced by Mulvey was to provoke the discussion about the gaze that is not only a male gaze perspective or a masculinized one and to break patriarchal codes about the women and the rules imposed. It started with the polemics about binary concept of gazing positioning a female as an active viewer and an active producer of arts and visual culture. Visual pleasure which was to satisfy women's needs in cinema and visual arts were censored and criticized from the early 1970 both by male film theorists and feminists at that time. Even if Hollywood movies were produced to attract female spectators, films for women were made on purpose in an infantile way, in accordance with the American Hays Code of censoring female gaze and filming erotics to "protect" women. As Francois Truffaut said, 60 years of cinematic lies in sexuality made this area so artificial that it was difficult to create new representations that would be close to the real erotic life.

[335] Virginia Bonner, "Notes on Mulvey", posted 2007, accessed: February22, 2022, available at: http://www.virginiabonner.com/courses/cms4320/readings/mulveystudyguide.html

3.3.1. Man as image, erotic object, and visual pleasure.

The female gaze and ways of looking based on Freudian binary active/passive model, were introduced by Mulvey into the cinematic theory. The assumption of female passive and masculinized looking provoked contra-responses that have influenced not only feminist but all visual theory until today. One of the first voices to question the Mulvey's assumptions "which are central to new developments"[336] about the gaze in the cinema was that of Ann Kaplan who was asking if its "possible to structure things so that women own the gaze? (…) [and if] "women want to own the gaze, if it were possible?".[337]The most important question posed by her in the context of a man as a spectacle and an erotic object, was: "Can there be such a thing as the female subject of desire?" since behind this question "lie the larger issues concerning female desire and female subjectivity".[338]

Kaplan brings Julia LeSage objections to the theoretical feminist film trends that challenge both the Lacanian criticism as being "destructive in reifying women in a childlike position"[339] with passivity of the female gaze and female desire incorporated by Mulvey and the usage of the Lacanian framework by feminist film critics that established "a discourse which is totally male".[340] She points, that Arbuthnot and Seneca "pinpoint a central and little discussed issue" of female visual pleasure and active gaze, with stressing the need for feminist film that could satisfy female "craving for pleasure*".* By stressing it, she notes as well that "Mulvey was aware of the way feminist films as counter-cinema would deny pleasure, but she argued that this denial was a necessary prerequisite for freedom and did not go into the problem involved".[341] Analyzing films in the 1970 and 1980s, she notices the fact that some male stars were made the objects of the female gaze and pleasure. But the difference she notes is the fact that:

Traditionally male stars did not necessarily (or even primarily) derive their glamour from their looks or their sexuality, but from the power they were able to wield within the filmic world in which they functioned (i.e John Wayne); these men as Laura Mulvey has shown, became ego ideals for the man in the audience, corresponding to the image in the mirror, who was more in control of motor coordination than the young child looking in. 'The male figure', Mulvey notes, 'is free to command the stage… of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action'.

The positioning of male body as an erotic object, a spectacle, and a fetish to serve as visual pleasure and satisfy female viewers remains problematic, invokes objections, and is treated in

[336] E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze male?" *in Women and Film. Both Sides of the Camera,* Routledge 1983, p. 120.
[337] Ibidem.
[338] Ibidem.
[339] Ibidem, p. 123.
[340] Ibidem.
[341] Ibidem, p. 124.

terms of a scandal. On the other hand, a producer knows perfectly how to create a male star to attract female audiences, nonetheless it is always restricted the male nudity codes. The female photographic trials of such representations, crossing the codes of the male nude representation disappear quickly from public exhibitions and critique circles, which will be discussed further.

Mulvey got back to the idea of fetishism again in 1996 in her book *Fetishism and Curiosity,* where she researches the fetishized female body and ability of the cinema to materialize both fantasy and the forms of encrypment that affect images of femininity and its fetishization.[342] Based on the opposition to Mulvey's concept of the passive female gaze, a new perspective of visual anthropology appears in an analysis of Brian McNair, who claims that the look infused with sexuality transformed itself from "the thing" that men are doing to women, into a part of post-feminist sexual culture, where players are both genders, men and women.[343] He notices that men, differently to the iconoclasm thesis, are not the intellectual class separated from the influence of images, including masculine ones. He claims that among the myths fixed in various media and sexual theories, there prevails a strong conviction about women as unique who are treated as objects and screened according to stereotypes of patriarchal culture. The criticism of this objectification, as he points out (with Mulvey being the pioneer), is often associated with the assumption that men are not used to being looked at with the sexualized gaze. McNair brings examples contrary to such supposition, like Rudolf Valentino, Cary Grant, Clark Gable, Marlon Brando, and other male cinematic sex symbols "breaking the women's hearts" in the past and nowadays, which makes a feminine and a masculine ideal image and spectacle as equal.[344]

3.3.2.1. Historical perspective for male nude

A female gaze in culture as discussed before has long been considered as passive or enigmatic and having its roots in the Freudian psychoanalytic assumptions. The enigma of a female gaze and the enigma of female looking at a male nude as an erotic object has always been connected to the religious ban on female erotic fantasies, desires and imagination and continues being censored in European culture until today. The female gaze with its erotic connotations is often described in Freud's terms as a *dark continent* to be discovered and interpreted in visual culture, which feminism critiqued numerously. Yet, the female erotic art has also been problematic for

[342] Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and BFI Publishing, London 1996, preface xi-xv.
[343] Brian McNair, „Sex, demokratyzacja pożądanie i media, czyli kultura obnażania", in *Antropologia wizualna*, PAN 2012, p. 234.
[344] Brian McNair, „Sex, demokratyzacja pożądanie…", *op. cit.,* p. 297.

feminism itself and a female gaze and a male nude representations created by women artist have been subject to censorship and condemnation since the times of sexual revolution that brought more freedom of erotic visual production for a male artist and producer but not for women ones. The explanation of this phenomena can be found in an introduction to a discussion between Paweł Leszkowicz, an art historian, and Dorota Nieznalska, a visual artist, talking about the male nude and visual pleasure/unpleasure it generates:

The male nude is an erotic and politically undermined area. The full male nude remains controversial and repressed. The paradoxical status of the male nude lies in the fact that it is both a symbol of power and opposition to it. It is a very official genre - a public sculpture, and at the same time an intimate, obscene, and often censored object. That is why male nudes manifest both nationalist pride and anarchist protest, painful nakedness, and sensual pleasure.[345]

A male nude has an enormous potential and influence on politics of power. Phallus itself in patriarchal culture does not function as a masculine anatomical part but as a symbol of its culture centred around masculinity which accommodates the ideas of patriarchy as Paweł Leszkowicz explains the difference between phallus and penis with their sacrum and profane connotations.[346] In prehistoric iconography phallus was representing fertility, creativity, forces of nature that were reborn continuously, and symbolised the masculine weapon with which men could rule others and nature. The phallic cult in arts and everyday life of ancient Greece, Egypt or Rome was constructed on its values as a protective sign, bringing luck and threatening away the negative forces. That is why jewels, amulets, furniture, pottery, entrances to houses or ritual sites were decorated with phallic depictions.[347] In Greek classicism a male nude body was considered more sexual object of the representation than a female body, which – if was present in art at all – was usually veiled in draperies. Conducting sport competitions by young men which were completely nude to satisfy visual pleasure and that was a conscious decision of the Greeks.[348] In contemporary terms we would say conscious choice of visual pleasure heavily charged with homosexual desire because of Greek open interest of older men wanting to see the younger ones performing naked. The tradition of a male nude sculpture continued in the

[345] Paweł Leszkowicz and Dorota Nieznalska, "Politics and Eroticism of the Male Nude", organisers: Arsenał Municipal Gallery, Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University, a cycle of dialogues between art historians and artists 17 April 2019, accessed on: 16th August 2022, available at: https://arsenal.art.pl/en/event/politics-and-eroticism-of-the-male-nude/

[346] Paweł Leszkowicz, "Fallus i penis = sacrum i profanum" in *Nagi mężczyzna: akt męski w Polskiej sztuce po 1945 roku*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2012, p. 46.

[347] Ibidem, p. 46.

[348] Ibidem.

Roman era and disappeared with the Christianity rise which brought a male nude image under the fire.[349]

With the catholic culture, a penis with its explicit depictions of erection disappeared from public art and ritual spaces, and the phallic masculine naked muscles and body played the role of a phallic substitute, as Leszkowicz observes on the change of its representations.[350] Nowadays the sight of a male nude in visual culture, in photography and in cinema seems no longer exceptional, on condition that penis is not overtly represented. "At the end of 19th century, the male nude was almost entirely absent from photography"[351] with very few exceptions and as David Leddick continues in his *Liberation of the Male Nude Image in the 20th Century* "male nudity was beyond the light and could be permitted only rarely in painting or the occasional vaudeville performance".[352] It took a long way to get the Supreme Court in the United States (1968)[353], to decide that a male nudity is not obscene, which was a big step forward in photography and art even if its acceptation had a tough time. The penis still was a problem for both politics and male critics but as Leddick recalls the tide was against them.[354] In the framework of art, a male nudity regained respectability as points Leddick[355] but only the one taken by male photographers and watched by male audience. In contrast, as he stresses, the naked female body "had never been lost to view since the days of antiquity".[356]

3.3.2.2. Phallic monism and male body erotic depictions

Obsession about male genitals gets a very special meaning in politics and visual erotic depictions. The pressure to cover intimate parts and suppress their existence only makes them more attractive, calls for more attention and stimulates imagination. The part that is hidden publicly plays central role in fantasies. Such norms of perception of a male body have consequences for contemporary masculinity construction in photography, advertisement, or pornography where the antique model of Hercules takes the form of masculine muscular ideal that becomes a symbolic phallus itself. [357]

[349] David Leddick, "The Liberation of the Male Nude Image in the 20th Century" in *The Male Nude*, Taschen 2015, p. 11.
[350] Paweł Leszkowicz, "Fallus i penis = sacrum i profanum"…", *op. cit.*, p. 46.
[351] David Leddick, "The Liberation of the Male Nude…", *op. cit*., p. 6.
[352] Ibidem.
[353] Ibidem, p. 11.
[354] Ibidem, pp. 11-12.
[355] Ibidem.
[356] Ibidem.
[357] Paweł Leszkowicz, "Fallus i penis = sacrum i profanum…", *op. cit.*, p. 51.

The female ban on looking at a male nude in Western culture is historically rooted in Christianity concepts of sexuality which converted it from being a sacred ritual performed and practised in temples in antiquity into a *sin and dirt, with a naked body be condemned and hated as the site of evil forces.*[358] Patriarchy as a dominant religious and political structure came with a depreciation of women who officially lost their soul, the right to look and civil rights with the Church Council of Trent voting in XVI century for women being officially treated as eternal temptation of Satan - *instrumentum diaboli*. With Freud and his psychoanalytical concepts, as was said in the first chapter, there came the background of collective unconscious of patriarchal ways of looking for female sexuality. Even if he was fascinated by Greek antique and African sexual rituals and its fetishism, his concepts of an active male pleasure in looking (scopophilia) and passive female *enigma* were already the products of rooted European patriarchal philosophy.

Psychoanalysis came first to deconstruct the obsession of phallus since positioned it in the centre of culture. Both Freud and Lacan based their concepts on the assumption of the presence of phallus as an archetype referring to prehistoric and ancient depictions of penis in erection that played important role in rituals and ceremonies. In Freudian model the girl and the boy discover the sexual difference and enter communities "stained" by this dualism and position their future relations towards masculinity and femininity which is centred around the absence or existence of penis and connected with castration fear (as for men) or jealousy (as for women). The Freudian concept assumes that libido always has a masculine connotation and is organised around penis[359] whereas for Lacan phallus carries symbolic meaning in culture. According to Lacan, when a child enters the symbolic order, makes essential sexual differentiation on the basis on masculine body and its phallus becomes a sign of its real and symbolic difference in phallocentric structure of civilisation. Lacan refers to symbolic of its potential in *La Signification du phallus* stressing that it not only centred around desire, power, strength, and glory but also structures the whole language and all meanings created by its system.[360] As Claire Pajaczkowska puts it:

It was Jacques Lacan who first proposed a systematic exploration of psychology from the perspective of structuralist linguistics; and it was he who suggested that subjectivity was a form of 'virtual reality' created by technology of language. This provided to be antithetical to the basic principles of humanism and was indeed as a critique of what Lacan called 'ego psychology'.[361]

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[358] Zygmunt Krzak, „Chrześcijaństwo przeciwne kobietom" in *Od matriarchatu do patriarchatu,* Wydawnictwo TRIO, Warszawa 2007, p. 386.

[359] Paweł Leszkowicz, *Nagi mężczyzna: akt męski w Polskiej sztuce…, op. cit.*, p. 47.

[360] Ibidem.

[361] Claire Pajaczkowska, "The Penis and The Phallus" in exhibition catalogue ed. Naomi Salaman *What She*

Some feminists, as she observes, have found the work of Lacan illuminating the "obscurity of gender conundrum". The metaphor characteristic of Freud and Lacan is the metaphor of casting light on darkness in order to grasp he unknown visible, which in their approach is a 'dark continent' of female sexuality. It is derived from the same Enlightenment philosophy which differentiates between the male rational and female irrational as a ratio of one to the Other. Of all the modern theories as Pajaczkowska claims, which require a transformation of this logic of rationality, have done so through the works of Freud to "colonise the territory of the unconscious for conscious mastery", and were grouped under the general term of structuralism.[362]

Pajaczkowska analyses the "phallic monism" theory, introduced by Freud, and its application in visual representation. The idea centres around the adult unconscious presence of constant, residual, unshakeable belief of the preoedipal child that all beings are endowed with a phallus. According to Freud, there is no difference in the libidinal structure of a little boy and a little girl as both are unaware of the sexual difference between the male and the female and many aspects of a 'normal' adult imagination are in fact a regressive, an unconscious fantasy which in the process of repression structure adult consciousness separating the psychical reality from the 'material one'. Too much anxiety, insecurity, and defence against the dread of loss, against reality and change, and the threat of passive dependency on the active mother, all these, structure the fetishistic tendency in female visual representations[363] encompassing the fear and the fascination. As she concludes after Mulvey:

The structure of looking in narrative fiction film contains a contradiction in its own premises, the female image as a castration threat constantly endangers the unity of the diegesis and burst through the world of illusion as an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish.[364]

The mechanism of fetishism in the dynamics of the cinema spectatorship and visual representation was proposed by both a French film theorist Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey. The assumption was, according to Freudian reading, that fetishism is male. However, as Pajaczkowska stresses, "Mulvey explores the relation between narrative and spectatorship in cinema, showing that classic realism depends on a hierarchy of active and passive identification, in which activity is associated with masculinity and control, while passivity is associated with

Wants. Women Artists Look at Men, Verso 1994, London – New York, p. 28.
[362] Claire Pajaczkowska, "The Penis and The Phallus…" , *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.
[363] Ibidem, pp. 29-32.
[364] Ibidem, p. 32.

femininity and objectification".[365] Masculine control, being unconscious fantasy of sadism linked to voyeurism, makes things happen, whereas femininity is associated with objectification, expressing the fantasy of masochistic exhibitionism and waiting for something to be done, is a mystery for Freud, and a fact for Lacan. For Mulvey and feminism this Freudian "mystery" and Lacanian "fact" create a cultural and political dilemma.[366] Pajaczkowska concludes:

Both Metz and Mulvey reached an understanding of visual culture that transcended the traditionally formalist readings of images and narrative. They both managed to combine a structuralist approach to text as signifying system with a Freudian comprehension of the dynamics of intrasubjective structure. Both established that the enigma of sexual difference is central to the fantasies that circulate around vision and image, but it was Laura Mulvey who most fully explored the dynamics of power and fantasy that inform the gendering of the visual image.[367]

Pajaczkowska develops Mulvey's thought of a gendered visual image by tracking displacements of the female desire to look which goes against Freudian idea of female passivity, stressing here that *the phallus is very much linked to visibility*.[368] Thus, a passive look is transformed into an active gaze and a female absence turns into presence. She explores why fantasies of inversion are so tightly attached to the structure of visual perception by using and criticizing the theory of 'phallic monism' which for Freudians serves as the infantile logic.[369] For her the idea of the 'phallic woman' serves as a counter-idea to the concept of a woman as lack, or a woman as being castrated or damaged, *reflecting fantasy of the other in a pair of defence*. 'The proof' of this insecure fantasy and defence is usually sought in visibility and remains central to the feminist practice and questions regarding subordination of reality to a "one-dimensional fetish".[370]

She refers in her analysis of the exhibition and a project "What She Wants. Women Artists Look at Men" to Freud's famous question "What does a woman want?". Traditional psychoanalysis gives an answer that there is a state of mind which expresses an unconscious feminine fantasy where a woman precisely wants what she 'lacks' and imagines as lack: a penis. This Freudian idea of a penis envy has proved to be very problematic and controversial for feminists. It was suggested by Karen Horney that a penis envy is rather a "phallus envy" where

[365] Ibidem.
[366] Claire Pajaczkowska, "The Penis and The Phallus…",*op. cit.,* p. 32.
[367] Ibidem, p. 33.
[368] Ibidem.
[369] Ibidem, p. 31.
[370] Ibidem, pp. 31, 33.

women envy cultural benefits of authority, power and mastery which all belong to men in a patriarchal culture.[371]

Lacanian theorists note that the ideology of contemporary visual culture replicates the state of mind where women are represented as "not man", as lacking the phallus and being a threat to masculine narcissistic unity of omnipotence. The phallus becomes a signifier of sexual difference, a desirable signifier of control, so any treat of its absence reinforces the boundaries of difference through fetishism, repetition, polarization, and especially the display of visible differences. As Pajaczkowska stresses, sexual difference is understood as "being, in part, a product of representation and the innate structure of language" where a woman always bears the representation of lack, with lack of the active gaze and visual pleasure included, and (over)compensation for that lack. That "penis envy" concept may be as much feminine as a masculine one, when a man behaves like a boy for whom the father or other men represent the phallic symbolic of authority, power, and potency.[372]

3.3.3. Cinematic censorship of female gaze and visual pleasure

3.3.3.1. Hays code and masochistic melodrama.

Cinema and visual culture until the 1970s mirrored all patriarchal fears and regulated female looking in details, depriving female visual pleasure from any right to exist, neither in theory nor in visual practice. Regarding male objects, as Naomi Salaman notes, erotic visual representations of a male nude still do not exist officially, and we can only deal with complex cultural and visual "resistances to the practice of looking at and representing the men's sex".[373] "Sexuality is the least developed dimension of humanity", says Bunuel pointing to cinema and its criticism, and drags himself through the imprints of Christian sin, shame, and blame. Another feminist film critic, Linda Williams stresses the fact that in the field of sexual experiences critical commentaries are rarely interesting, and mainly focused on voyeuristic (male) character with suggestions of erotic excitement searched by the viewers.[374] The reasons of such a negative contemporary attitude to representations of a visual pleasure, especially for women, can be traced in early cinema legislative American regulations referring to "obscene and immoral"

[371] Claire Pajaczkowska, "The Penis and The Phallus…", *op. cit.,* p. 34.
[372] Ibidem.
[373] Naomi Salaman, "Regarding Male Objects" in *What She Wants. Women Artists Look at Men*, Verso London-New York 1994, p. 13.
[374] Linda Williams, *Seks na ekranie*, przeł. Miłosz Wojtyna, *słowo/obraz terytoria*, Gdańsk 2013, p. 9.

codes which controlled and protected women and citizens under the age of 21 who were not "able to make the appropriate moral judgement".[375] In the UK, the British Board of Film Censors in 1912 and the National Council of Public Morals in 1916 published regulations restricting females looks since their looks were forbidden "subjects dealing with premeditated seduction of girls", "nude figures" or "first night" scenes. Later there came the Hollywood Motion Picture Production Code, called the Hays Code, which became applicable in 1931, created by representatives of the most famous Church leaders and religious organisations such as the *Legion of Decency* with the most demanding censors who started the catholic holly crusade against immorality and sex mania in cinema.[376]

Arkadiusz Lewicki considers that the main aim of the Hays Code was suppression of the female eroticism and desire, together with the preservation of masculine patriarchal double standards acclaimed as power. He stresses that giving women the same rights to men in the field of erotics, would give them more power and freedom of expression of feminine sexuality not restricted, and would affect/break whole social structure of 20th century.[377] That is why the most heavily censored films were the ones in which the images of emancipated women were breaking the official patriarchal family scheme:

The emancipated women, emphasizing her sexuality, feeling and expressing the pleasure from sexual contacts, trying to split with the image of a docile wife and mother, was the most dangerous threat, which was thought against in various ways. […] To prevent spreading such 'unsocial' feminine behavior model various means were used to shape the 'correct' one.[378]

Linda Williams in her introduction written to the catalogue accompanying exhibition[379] recalls her favourite example of how the look is constructed and who gets this look, and which comes from US political scene being based upon the necessity of showing sex even if the original aim was to repress it. She describes the question of spectatorship with women being asked to leave the room to protect their morals during the running re-election by Senator Jesse Helms who waved few portfolios of photographic male nudes titled *Perfect Moment* and taken by photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. The Senator throwed the photos on the floor of the Senate shouting that they are "examples of taxpayers' money being wasted on offensive smut".[380] He

[375] Arkadiusz Lewicki, *Seks i Dziesiąta Muza,* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2011, p. 510.
[376] Ibidem.
[377] Ibidem, pp. 528-529.
[378] Ibidem, p. 529.
[379] Linda Williams, "What do I see? What do I want?" in exhibition catalogue *What She Wants. Women Artists Look at Men*, ed. by Naomi Salaman, London New York, Verso 1994.
[380] Ibidem, pp. 3-4.

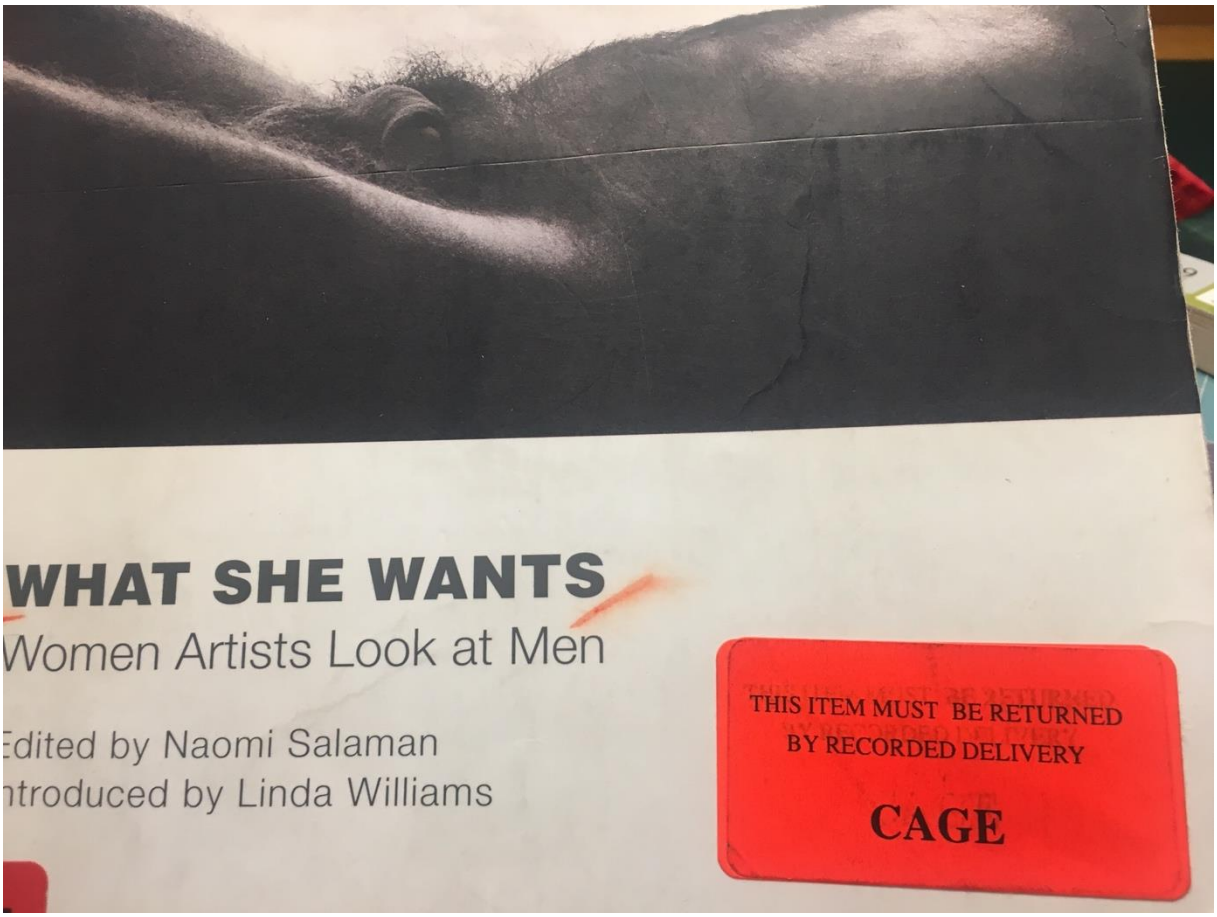
invited senators to look and examine offensive content but did it after asking "all the ladies" to leave the place. Williams's example of Robert Mapplethorpe photographic scandal in Senate in 1990[381] confirms that male nude was still available then to watch mainly for masculine American elite.

Examples with ban on female visual pleasure under the cover of moral protection both in cinema and in other forms of visual culture are plentiful. Melodrama genre belongs to those of generated censorship that "protect" women's morale from direct depictions of desire by relocation of its narrative content into infantilisation and presenting female pleasure as masochistic suffering. Even if the female desire is presented, a woman never owns it, as Kaplan stresses analysing the agency of female gaze and desire as well as the agency of feminine erotic fantasies. Kaplan returns to Mulvey's views on melodrama as a primarily female form which celebrates male action, explores emotion, bitterness and disillusion known for women, serving as a useful social corrective function. For Mulvey, "there is a dizzy satisfaction in witnessing the way that sexual difference under patriarchy is fraught, explosive and erupts dramatically into violence within its own private stomping ground, the family".[382] Mulvey's conclusion about melodrama is that it brings important "ideological contradictions to the surface, and in being made for female audience, events are never reconciled at the end in ways beneficial to women".[383]

As for films produced as "women's pictures" for female audiences and pleasure, they "transformed the pleasure of spectatorship and spectacle into problems of spectatorship and spectacle"[384], as Mulvey wrote in "Social Hieroglyphics" in 1996. According to her, over melodramatic performance draws attention to the feminine identity and sexuality considered as vulnerable and unstable. Asking why women are drawn to melodrama and find the objectification and surrender included there pleasurable, Kaplan follows Lacan's analysis of a girl entering the symbolic world which involves a subject and an object, where "assigned the place of object (lack) she is the recipient of male desire, passively appearing rather than acting. Her sexual pleasure in this position can thus be constructed only around her own objectification"[385], further adopting a corresponding masochism. In practice, as Kaplan notes,

[381] Ibidem, p. 4.
[382] E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?", *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[383] Ibidem, pp. 26-27.
[384] Ibidem, p. 26.
[385] Ibidem.

masochism is reflected as a tendency for women to be passive in sexual relations. By putting herself in film erotic fantasy, a woman becomes a passive recipient of a male desire or by watching a woman on the screen who is a passive recipient of a male desire becomes an inter-passive[386] recipient of sexual actions and such-positioning becomes predominant.[387]



British Library, London 2018, Catalogue of the exhibition *What She Wants, Women Artists Look at Men*

3.3.3.2. Female scopophilia and voyeurism as new phenomena.

Taking the history of female voyeurism and scopophilia, which Mulvey applied in Freudian terms only referring to male subject, they did not exist in culture at that time as far as woman was theorised. From today's perspective a female phenomenon of "hysteria", coined in psychoanalysis by Freud, are considered as a somatic effect of socially implemented suppression of female sexual drives, including an overt visual pleasure. What is more, the concept of scopophilia or voyeurism which are often treated as synonyms, and which Mulvey

[386] Interpassivity is a term introduced by Slavoj Žižek which means that we experience pleasure being passive viewers of somebody else's pleasure being performed on screen
[387] E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?", *op. cit.*, p. 26.

took from Freud, have evolved in women and film studies as well as in visual female practice as a counter-discussion to visual pleasure, voyeurism and fetishism being previously treated as only masculine components of the gaze. Most masculine concepts of visual pleasure and desire in film, with famous sentence that 'cinema does not give you desire but shows you how to desire' as Slavoj Žižek claimed, and he never referred himself to Mulvey's gendered cinematic concepts and probably the difference or sheer existence of the agency of cinematic desire from the female perspective was not so important for him. Nonetheless, the notions of female desire, visual pleasure and their representations, which were theorized as the area of male categories and privileges so far, started to be widely contested after Mulvey's VPNC publication.

Female voyeurism as an erotic component of a female looking still have functioned as a kind of weird concept, generally very rare or absent from the theory of representation and the female gaze issues. It has emerged from the discussion and evolution of the concept strictly connected to Freudian psychoanalysis, later developed, and evolved by Lacan and further discussed in culture on the basis of male voyeurism issues with its a sadistic aspect of control and domination involved. The voyeur's gaze has usually been considered, as a masculine concept and even in last years was analysed away from being gender-differentiated. Voyeurism as such inscribes itself into the core of the cinema where the delight of looking with unrestricted curiosity and spying others, builds and reshapes imagination and notion of pleasure, as stresses Maria Kornatowska.[388] She also follows Freud's assumption about human sexuality and the impulse of peeping which for him is the impulse of voyeurism and belongs to the basic, strong, and primitive ones. Kornatowska observes that watching is the opposite of speaking and is far more important and that is the exact reason why a cinematic narration is consciously based on such a voyeuristic organisation.[389] But Peeping Tom in cinema was always only considered as a male category and as such voyeurism took its roots from that masculinised erotic content of looking. So, generally speaking the history of the voyeur idea has been primarily categorised as male and deviant. And as Chelsea McIntyre claims:

There are some shared aspects of the female experience that are collectively understood, if not always spoken. Voyeurism, or the male gaze, which has likely existed since the dawn of artistic development in humans, is one such phenomenon, and was at last granted a name in 1975.[390]

[388] Iwona Kościelecka after Maria Kornatowska, in *Screening Sexuality. Evolution of the Gaze,* unpublished MA thesis, p. 55.
[389] Ibidem.
[390] Chelsea McIntyre, "The female Gaze. Voyeurism Redefined" in *Sculpture Network,* accessed on: February 22, 2022, available at: https://sculpture-network.org/en/Magazine/The-Female-Gaze

Thus, voyeurism as strictly connected to erotic visual pleasure and sexual drives of women, could not find its place in cinematic analyses of a female gaze category, as if such phenomenon did not exist. Carried and sometimes misled research in the field proves its invisibility.[391] The artist, Chelsea McIntyre is one of those who analyses examples of artistic development of female gaze in the visual arts and confuses it with female voyeurism, which is not always an equivalent category, considering erotic visual pleasure involved in it. However, she makes important observations referring to both:

The female gaze, or female voyeurism, is not generally defined as a direct polar to the male gaze. Instead, it is reestablishment of the way women are portrayed in traditional artistic outputs, such as sculpture, portraiture or performing arts, and is uniquely determined by the female artist. The female gaze aims to take control over the manner in which the feminine form or subject is sexualized, or made to seem vulnerable, for the pleasure of the viewer. [392]

A short history of voyeurism in cinema and visual arts still excludes women from being active viewers and voyeurs. Looking for pleasure and sexual pleasure especially was historically reserved in a film theory for a masculine spectator and a heteronormative male, reflecting Freud's binary perception connected to child development and its recognition of sexual difference. Current psychiatric and popular usage of the term voyeurism in cinema and visual arts evolved from psychoanalysis in the 1950s with its primarily reference to pathology, as mentioned before.

Surprisingly, a brief history of voyeurism published in 2004 by Jonathan M. Metzl[393] contains no gender-differentiation of voyeurism and the line of analysis only includes male voyeurism as the only existent, and there is not a single mention about women categorised as voyeurs and having sexual pleasure from looking. So, one of the latest analysis of voyeurism does not include women as voyeurs, and claims that voyeurism is in 90 % reported as masculine based on the psychoanalytic assumption of "voyeurism's universal male subject".[394] There is a short mention about Laura Mulvey as a theorist who broke the line of thinking about voyeurism, but her gendered concept of the gaze is not evolved.[395] The whole Metzl's article focuses on the

[391] Chelsea McIntyre, "The Female Gaze: Voyeurism…", *op. cit.*
[392] Ibidem.
[393] Jonathan M. Metzl, "From scopophilia to *Survivor*: a brief history of voyeurism" , *Textual Practice* 18(3) Routledge 2004, pp. 415–434, accessed: 12 April 2022, available at: https://www.med.umich.edu/psych/FACULTY/metzl/Textual%20Practice.pdf
[394] Ibidem.
[395] Ibidem.

evolution of (male) voyeurism, first treated as deviation by American psychiatry bible *DSM*[396] which started to be criminalised by law at the beginning of twentieth century.

Even if the question of existence of female voyeurism has been rarely taken into consideration as Metzl's research proves, he mentions Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane as precursors introducing and illuminating its lack or sheer non-existence in mainstream film and visual culture theory. But the only thing he notes is that voyeuristic notion of displacement "enabled a means of critiquing the patriarchal assumptions embedded within psychiatry" and both mentioned scholars "provided a methodology for exploring gendered spectator positions more broadly".[397] Another, rare in his analysis, female scholar he mentions is a historian Barbara Tuchman who later employed the term voyeurism in a "correctly psychoanalytic way to reference not only psychoanalysis' gender politics, but its assumption of a field of vision encompassing both the object of a gaze (…) and the gazer".[398]

The focus on male voyeur can be traced in subsequent versions of mentioned *DSM*[399] where terms were replaced starting from the broad connection of voyeurism to "sexual deviation" and "paraphilia"[400], emphasizing the "recurrent", insistent, repetitive, and involuntarily nature of voyeurism, omitting. references to character or personality.

Metzl presents the changes brought by the theory of cinema and television after the sexual revolution of the 1960s when film critics brought the voyeur issue into light and changed its connotation from a voyeuristic pathology into a social phenomenon. In consequence such a voyeuristic normalisation in visual culture also entered the psychiatric and legislative standards. With the following editions of *DSM* came the mentioned changes, but still has not come the change for women, who subsequently have had not space both in psychiatry and film theory

[396] *DSM – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* according to American Psychiatric Association. First edition was published in 1952, Second edition was published in 1968, third edition appeared in 1980 which 'introduced a number of important innovations', DSM-IV was the fourth edition published in 1994. The latest one, DSM-5-TR was published in 2013 and finally included four cross-cutting review groups: Culture, Sex and Gender, Suicide, and Forensic as wel las a Work Group on Ethno-racial Equity, accessed: February 15, 2023, available at: https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/about-dsm

[397] Ibidem.

[398] Ibidem, p. 423.

[399] *DSM – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* according to American Psychiatric Association. DSM-IV was the fourth edition published in 1994. The latest one DSM-V was published in 2013.

[400] Paraphilia – a condition characterized by abnormal sexual desires, typically involving extreme or dangerous activities, the most common paraphilias are pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism (observing private activities of unaware victims) and frotteurism (touching or rubbing against a nonconsenting person), available at: Oxford Languages www.languages.oup.com

voyeuristic norm.[401] It proves that culture, psychiatry, and laws have always been inter-dependent fields influencing social codes with concept of voyeurism itself, treated primarily as exclusively masculine category. Its normalisation and adaptation into film and television studies shows that cultural evolution with its policies of sexuality goes faster than legislative de-criminalisation of the category, which is based on slow changes concerning medical norms and terms.[402]

Jonathan M. Metzl made a historic analysis of voyeurism as a category which went through the process of de-penalisation in the 1970s after being categorised by psychiatry as the masculine deviation to cure it together with fetishism - another deviation category at that time:

The diagnosis of voyeurism required attention to the patients who presented to psychiatrists' offices and understanding of the gender implications of a society that, according to the 1968 textbook Fundamentals of Psychiatry, 'has long catered to a man's desire for visual stimulation through a variety of art forms, including painting, sculpture, photographs, magazines, books, plays, movies, and impromptu or special performances in brothels.' [403]

As he notes, voyeurism went through the process of normalisation in film and visual theory thanks to American television critics introducing it as something exciting, socially common and unifying in watching TV programmes by whole families. The term entered popular culture in the 1970s with television programmes "effortlessly promoting a narrative of normalization – 'Voyeurism for the entire family' (…) – with no recognition of voyeurism's troubling gender implications".[404] As soon as it has become a popular cultural practice it turned into a normative category.

But still psychoanalysis pointed out, that voyeurism is a practice which is "culturally pathological, imbued with power, gender and other types of nonchemical imbalances that let us see the voyeur as an exaggerated extension of society as well as aberration from it".[405] Further, *DSM-IV* definition avoids problems of classifying voyeurism as a category of a deviation from normal sexuality as well as defining psychopathology on ethical grounds.[406] But what is most important here is that *DSM IV's* description of the term included in the section about "Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders" made no mention of gender, while adding reference to

[401] Ibidem.
[402] Discussions with psychiatrists and artists taking part at the conference *Psychiatry and Art*, Kraków, Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny, October 2018.
[403] Jonathan M. Metzl, "From scopophilia to *Survivor…", op. cit.,* p. 422.
[404] Ibidem, pp. 415-418.
[405] Jonathan M. Metzl, "From scopophillia…", *op. cit.,* p. 428.
[406] Jonathan M. Metzl, "From scopophillia to *Survivor*, a brief history of voyeurism", *Textual Practice,* 18(3), 2004, Routledge, p. 424.

voyeuristic behaviors that cause "clinically significant distress or social impairment".[407] All above proves that both contemporary psychoanalysis and film theory still have a problem with accepting the fact of female voyeurism and the female sexual pleasure in looking.

This artistic and cinematic restrictions on female erotic/voyeuristic looking and ban on her desire which cannot be managed and fulfilled, was analysed by an American film critic Ann Kaplan. She claims, after Nancy Friday, that a woman in films does not own the desire, and what is more, female fantasies and desires as such totally lack the agency.[408] Understandings of male/gendered voyeurism and scopophilia in which female passive gaze is mainly absorbing male pleasure from being-looked-at, provoked various critical and practical artistic and film responses. Lola Young, a black feminist film critic, re-defines this exclusion of female scopophilia existence, feminine pleasures of looking and image-making:

Scopophilia – that is, the sexually motivated pleasure taken in looking- is not the sole preserve of men: women photographers can and have affirmed their sexual pleasure in taking sexualized images of men's bodies. Neither is sado-masochistic violence and there are many ways in which images may be constructed and enjoyed by women viewers that are both subtle and explicit suggestions of the powerful sexual fantasies which many women experience.[409]

This prohibition on female pleasure in viewing, according to her, is necessary because the reality simply cannot live up to the mythology, and concentration on men with overdeveloped musculature suggests a rampant male narcissism rather than an attempt to engage with women's sexual fantasies and aspirations. Going deeper in both white and black female visual pleasure of looking we come across discourses about the male body racialized in contemporary visual culture, and the historical circumstances of colonialism with racism which still permeate contemporary discursive practices.

Young refers to the female fear of the gaze which she objects/criticizes in *What She Wants* exhibition (1994) staging the male nudes portrayed by women artists. She finds non-presence and non-representation of a black nude by women as striking and uncomfortably close to the Freudian notion of white women's sexuality as the "dark continent". She claims that meanings which have accrued to black male genitalia have produced a situation where women photographers, with an awareness of the historical and contemporary material effects of racist ideologies - whether black or white - wishing to make work by using black men are placed in a

[407] Ibidem, p. 431.
[408] E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male", *op. cit.*, p. 27.
[409] Lola Young, *Mapping Male Bodies: Thoughts on Gendered and Racialized Looking*, in *What She Wants. Women Artists Look at Men*, Exhibition Catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

difficult position. This is the reason why black men's bodies are effectively relegated to the status of forbidden territory, fraught with complex problems of the myth of black men's hypersexuality according to European racial and sexual anxieties, and its historical interpretation around black male nude. So, complete male nude becomes dangerous to depict for any woman artist aware of the political implications of image making.

From contemporary white Western perspective, we can say that psychoanalytical classification as sexual deviation of both male voyeurism and female hysteria concepts were based on assumption of mechanisms of suppression and replacement of unfulfilled desires and fantasies. The female hysteria, however, did not go through the process of normalization during last century as it happened with the male voyeurism. Even if the term of voyeurism was de-pathologized in last fifty years thanks to television and popular culture, there is still a gap in analyses done from feminine perspective concerning female voyeurism and female gaze which still can be perceived as passive, absent, or rather invisible and not discussed sufficiently in public from the point of view of feminist discourse.

Among visual arts, film is the perfect medium through which various forms of voyeurism may be depicted since it relies as well on our identification with protagonists and their points of view, their *gaze*. Female directors such as Andrea Arnold, Jane Campion, Joanna Hogg, undertake the idea of a male voyeur and show "why the subject of the female voyeur is also important".[410] Their films offer similar insights into the question why the image of a female voyeur is so obscured, one, and elided by Hollywood. Their works can be treated as legacy and a testimony to Mulvey's analysis of a male dominant gaze and her call for a female production in this field.[411]

Female voyeurism as Davina Quinlivan sums up: "is not just a way of fleshing out a feminist perspective, but a vital foregrounding of female pleasure (even when it takes perverse and fetishistic forms) and a move towards a more authentic sense of female sexuality that remains rarely represented on screen".[412] Voyeurism is not about swapping gender roles but about a female voyeur who "becomes a marker of pleasure and catharsis, knowledge and power, far more positive and productive that any peeping Tom who might lurk, impotently, in the

[410] Davina Quinlivan, "The Female Voyeur in Film", article originally published as: *Prying for pleasure*, on July 9, 2015, accessed: 22 February 2022, available at: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/culture/the-female-voyeur-in-film
[411] Ibidem.
[412] Ibidem.

shadows".[413] Gendered and specifically female voyeuristic gaze proves that the female as a voyeur category is still a kind of cultural and visual aberration, with discussion opened up and even if the female gaze itself has recently become enormously popular subject of academic analyses and workshops, female voyeur appears there very rarely.

3.4. Imaging female desire on screen

Female pleasure in the mainstream cinema, on television, and in most popular visual narratives is the context in which men act and are in control their desire, while women are acted upon. As Lorraine Gamman, one of editors of *Female Gaze. Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, the book that totally reflects Mulvey's concepts, concludes in "Why write a book about women looking?":

Female gaze has virtually remained absent from our screens and from discussion about the representation of women by feminist critics. While many writers have considered how men look at women, few seem to have asked how women in the eighties create and view images of each other and men. The female gaze remains enigma, as I shall argue, the very framework of debate reinforces assumptions which blinker the vision of change for women.[414]

Female lack of visual pleasure on screen as Mulvey wrote in 1975 provoked responses in cinematic analyses done by various scholars and stimulated research dedicated to female desire and films directed by women. One of the most famous ones, Teresa de Lauretis, stresses the effective role of cinema as an imagining machine in which "the stakes for women there are very high", both in production of images of desire as well as in an intervention at the theoretical level, if women are to grasp the process of imaging.[415] She refers to Mulvey on various levels and in the concepts introducing the critique of female representation and scarcity of female imaging on screen, she is asking about the conditions of female presence in cinema and its imaging, as well as in the production of a social imaginary via semiotics.

Using de Lauretis concept of the notion of imaging, female pleasure is the "process of the articulation of meaning to images, the engagement in subjectivity process"[416], and thus the mapping of a female vision of sexuality into subjectivity and authorship film process.[417] In her

[413] Ibidem.
[414] Lorraine Gamman, "Watching the Detectives. The Enigma of the Female Gaze" in *Female Gaze. Women as Viewers of Popular Culture,* The Women's Press, London 1988, p. 12.
[415] Teresa de Lauretis, "Imaging " in *Alice doesn't*: Feminism, *Semiotics, Cinema*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1984, p. 38.
[416] Ibidem.
[417] Ibidem, p. 39.

analysis of vision and illusion in the context of semiotics in cinema and Mulvey's description of the term desire, she writes: "cinematic codes create the gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire."[418] For de Lauretis, desire in cinema is measured by narrative and visual pleasure:

Narrative and visual pleasure constitute the frame of reference of cinema, one which provides the measure of desire. I believe this statement must apply to women as it does to men. The difference is, quite literally,[419] *that it is men who have defined the 'visible things' in cinema, who have defined the object and the modalities of vision, pleasure, and meaning on the basis (...) provided by patriarchal ideological and social formations. In the frame of reference of men's cinema, narrative, and visual theories, the male is the measure of desire, quite as phallus is its signifier and the standard of visibility in psychoanalysis.*[420]

For her, rarity of female gaze depicting desire in our "civilization of the image"[421] that chases visual pleasure, raises from little reconstruction and organization of vision from the "impossible" place of female desire as well as scarcity of its performance in imaging, in the social, in the process of redefinition and analysis of looking at her looking. De Lauretis summarises that the "achieved hegemony of both the cinematic and the psychoanalytic institutions proves that, far from destroying visual and sexual pleasure, the discourse on desire produces and multiplies its instances".[422] She stresses that narrative and visual pleasure should not be thought of as the exclusive property of dominant social and cinematic codes. According to her, the present task for feminism and feminist film practice after a radical analysis of what Mulvey calls a "monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions"[423], is to articulate on screen the relations of female subject to representation, meaning, and vision to construct another frame of reference to female desire.[424]

3.4.1. Reversal of pleasure and narcissistic male hero. Case of Valentino craze

Feminist dissatisfaction with dominant male image on screen led to feminist critique of representation. As de Lauretis recalls: "no other public discourse existed prior to it, in which the question of sheer displeasure of female spectators in the great majority of films could be addressed".[425] The notion of female disapproval and passive looking have become a subject of

[418] Ibidem, p. 66.
[419] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't…*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
[420] Ibidem.
[421] Ibidem.
[422] Ibidem, p. 69.
[423] Ibidem.
[424] Ibidem, p. 68.
[425] Ibidem, p. 57.

critique by Miriam Hansen in 1986 where she recalls a figure of Valentino to discuss the culture's definitions of feminine sexuality and desire. It was for the first time in film history that female spectatorship became a mass phenomenon and women spectators were considered as a socially and economically significant. As Hansen writes:

As Hollywood manufactured the Valentino legend, prompting the fusion of real life and screen persona that makes the star, Valentino's female admirers in effect became part of that legend. Never before was the discourse on fan behavior so strongly marked by sexual difference, and never again was spectatorship so explicitly linked to the discourse of female desire.[426]

The Valentino mythology lasting for decades has brought the recognition of female experience, needs and fantasies which were successfully used by a commercial exploitation and eventual control. The projection of new womanhood promoted a demonstrative liberalization of sexual behavior and lifestyle creating female as a primary target. Numerous bibliographies of Valentino wrote about "hot-eyed and Latin (...) every woman's dream; and women who tried to tear his clothes off when he left theater"[427], or how "his smoldering glance ignited fierce sexual fires in millions of hearts".[428] Hansen recalls the madness surrounding the actor, analysed in "Valentino: An Intimate and Shocking Expose": "the studios telephones could not handle the thousands of calls from women. They begged for any job that would permit even a momentary glimpse of Valentino. Gladly, they offered to work without pay".[429]

As Hansen stresses, the Valentino phenomenon deserves to be read in this gap "as a significant yet precarious moment in the challenging discourse on femininity and sexuality".[430] Valentino presents explicitly a challenge to the feminist film theory developed in the 1970s within the framework of semiology and psychoanalysis. Debate about him inescapably returns to Laura Mulvey's VPNC and "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure", as Hansen develops one of the main reference points to a concept of "'masculinization' of spectatorial pleasure, regardless of the actual sex (or possible deviance) of any real live movie-goer" all coded in the psychic mechanism of voyeurism, fetishism, and narcissism.[431]

[426] Miriam Hansen, "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship" in *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 25(4), Summer 1986, reprinted with permission in *Feminism and Film*, p. 226.
[427] Ibidem.
[428] Ibidem.
[429] Ibidem, p. 227.
[430] Miriam Hansen, "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship" in *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 25(4), Summer 1986, reprinted with permission in *Feminism and Film*, p. 227.
[431] Ibidem, p. 228.

Valentino films add yet another angle to arguments on female spectatorship and feminist re-writing the film history that lasted over decade after Mulvey published VPNC, which includes the question of pleasure and process of identification experienced by women spectators including feminist critics as the one that does not require "putting on transvestite clothes".[432] Hansen argues that in case of Valentino, it is sexual mobility as a temporary slippage between gender definitions and a "distinguishing feature of femininity in its cultural construction" Distinction of Valentino films lie in focusing spectatorial pleasure on the image of a male hero in which a man occupies the place of erotic object and this affects organization of vision. "If the desiring look is aligned with the position of the female viewer, does this open a space for female subjectivity and, by the same token, an alternative conception of visual pleasure?"[433], asks Hansen. But even if the essential element of dominant system "is the matching of the male subjectivity with the agency of the look", feminist theorists like Kaplan and Doane have warned against premature enthusiasm regarding film as Valentino, since for them they merely present the role reversal which only allows women the appropriation of the gaze only to confirm the patriarchal logic of vision.[434]

Undeniably, the figure of Valentino as an erotic object sets into play fetishistic and voyeuristic mechanism accompanied by a feminization of his persona in aspects of theatricality, and here we return into the question of transvestitism or polarity rather than simply reversal of the gaze. Hansen essay motivated by interest in forms of visual pleasure return to Freud's scopophilia, with pleasure in looking as the basic human instinct, without going through Lacan's concepts of the gaze. She argues that "Freud's writings still hold a more radical potential of interpretation" than Lacanian.[435]

3.4.2. Man as fetish, vamp, and polymorphous perversity. Phenomenon of Valentino and Cruise.

Valentino starred in 14 films, between 1921 and 1926, that were produced under various directors and in different studios. Each of these films repeat the same pattern in staging the exchange of looks between him and the female protagonist. Hansen claims that, at the first sight Valentinos films seem to perform the classical choreography of the look, almost to the edges of

[432] Ibidem.
[433] Miriam Hansen, 'Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification… ", *op. cit,,* p. 231.
[434] Ibidem.
[435] Ibidem, p. 232.

parody, offering construction of the point of view that confirms the cultural hierarchy of gender in the visual filed. Whenever Valentino looks first on the woman of his dreams, one can be sure that she will turn out as the woman of his dreams. Whenever a woman initiates the look, she is marked as a vamp to be condemned and defeated in the narrative.[436] As Hansen puts it:

Valentino's appeal depends to a large, on the manner in which he combines masculine control of the look with the feminine quality of 'to-be-looked-at-ness', to use Mulvey's rather awkward term. When Valentino falls in love – usually at first sight- the close up of his face clearly surpasses that of the female character in its value as spectacle. In narcissistic doubling, the subject of the look constitutes itself the object, graphically illustrating Freud's formulation of the autoerotic dilemma: "Too bad that I cannot kiss myself".[437]

Similar in effect, as Mulvey observes about the visual presence of woman who tends "to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation", are shots of Valentino that temporarily arrest the flow of the narrative. However, in Valentino case, as Hansen continues, "erotic contemplation governs an active as well as passive mode, making both spectator and character the subject of the double game of vision".[438] Valentino occupies the position of primary object of a spectacle which involves femininization of his persona by various effects of dressing and disguise.[439] Various mise-en-scenes in his films legitimize the desiring female gaze and bring us to a paradox of female spectatorship since when a woman is not focusing her eyes on him, he stops midway and the subtitle explains: "the shock of his life: a woman not looking at him".[440] This partial reversal of the economy of vision makes Valentino a spectacle but in the effeminate way.

Female visual pleasure and its fate under the patriarchal taboo seems especially interesting for Hansen in the context of scopophilia and its certain aspects that Freud analyses through the period of infantile sexuality development, the time when gender identity is not stable. As she writes, "the female scopic drive is constituted with a bisexual as well as an autoerotic component" which is stimulated in the process of mutual gazing between mother and child. Then these components enter into cultural hierarchies of looking which force women to fixate in a passive gaze. But the narcissistic-exhibitionist role remains a basic ambivalence in the construction of vision, structuring a main drive component. This notion of ambivalence appears crucial to a theory of female spectatorship, mainly because the cinema by enforcing patriarchal

[436] Ibidem, p. 233.
[437] Miriam Hansen, 'Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification… ", *op. cit.,* p. 233.
[438] Ibidem.
[439] Ibidem.
[440] Ibidem.

hierarchies upon organization of the look "also offers women an institutional opportunity to violate the taboo on female scopophilia".[441] For Hansen, the success figure as Valentino himself, functioning both as object and a subject of the look, urges to maintain "the ambivalent constitution of scopic pleasure". What is more, she suggests that scopophilia as one of archaic drives should be distinguished from voyeurism, that is defined by norms of genitality and by regime of the masculine key-hole idea of looking.[442]

Together with the notion of female scopophilia comes Valentino as a fetish and a male vamp for female gaze, entwined with various sadomasochistic rituals included in his films that made an explicit component of his erotic relationships. These voyeuristic and fetishistic aspects of his excess made millions of women indulged in such male visual specificity, usually regarded as male perversion, but in this case fetishization crossed over the theoretical assumption of needed distance:

Once women had found a fetish of their own, they were not content with merely gazing at it, but strove actually to touch it. Moreover, they expected him to reciprocate their fetishistic devotion: Valentino received intimate garments in the mail with the request to kiss it and return them (which he did).[443]

Also, the vulnerability he displays in his films and traces of feminine masochism in his persona, partly may serve as a threat that he posed to standards of masculinity but after all his sexual mastery and control over pleasure made him polymorphous perversity. In focusing pleasure on a male protagonist with ambiguous and deviant identity he appealed to those who felt the demonstrative obsessions with sexual reform, but with effects and implication of this freedom different for women than for men. Valentino also became a challenge to myths of masculinity in American culture then since the heroes on screen were men of action whose determination and energy was enhanced only by a lack of social kindness, especially toward women. A blend of sexual vitality and romantic courtship developed him as the persona of Latin-lover with a cult of his body in which craze around fantasy of a seducer/villain of dark complexion made him a male counterpart of vamp denying the Freudian primarily assumption of passivity of a female pleasure, desire, and fantasy.[444]

[441] Ibidem, p. 234.
[442] Ibidem, p. 235.
[443] Ibidem. P. 245.
[444] Miriam Hansen, 'Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification… ", *op. cit.,* p. 244.

Another example of cinematic famous female visual pleasure analyses Veronica Rail in "'This isn't Filmmaking, It's War' A Gendered Gaze on the Tom Cruise Phenomenon" as overdose for years. In an introduction she quotes opinions of different female critics: "I have to admit I was nearly dying when the female cop referred to Cruise's penis 'the dangerous hidden weapon' she'd love to try".[445] Rail analyses Cruise's success with regard to feminist politics being suspicious of mass-culture productions and ideologically doubtable female pleasure. She refers to Mary Ann Doane who criticizes this peculiarity:

In feminist film criticism, it often seems that politics and pleasure are absolutely incompatible. This is due to the fact that feminist criticism manifests itself primarily as a work of negation of the given images, the given desire. And what often gets lost in the process is the issue of women's pleasure.[446]

For Rail, popular culture needs elaboration because its products "shape women's desires, wishes, and perception of the world" and they rarely offer a site of struggle where social and gender meanings are negotiated. With reference to Mulvey discourse-shaping article, she attempts to thematize one of the gaps left by her, mainly a "paradoxical, doubtful construction of female spectator" provided by VPNC which conceptualizes man as the "bearer of the look" and woman as the object "to be looked at", restricted to masochistic pleasure or adapting herself to the male gaze and wear "transvestite clothes" of sadistic voyeurism/fetishism.[447] She stresses that feminist film theory has paid little attention to both a woman as a bearer of the look or a man as a spectacle for women. Active female gaze in current cinema is still of little discussion according to Rail and she concludes that "feminist film theory has contributed to the repression of the female gaze". [448] As Suzanne Moore put it:

As theory lopes in its ungainly way behind what is actually happening, I could find little explanation for this phenomenon. When I sough material on how women look at men, I discovered, instead, a strange absence. […] To suggest that women actually look at men's bodies is apparently to stumble into theoretical minefield .[449]

"And Tom Cruise?" asks Rails, although many male stars in film industry were sexually attractive, Cruise remains unique if one looks at the actor who has been so successful in the dramatically weakest scripts as her research confirms.[450] Most of his movies give him a chance to show off, with most ambitious projects focusing rather on spectacle then dramaturgy, with

[445] Veronica Rail, "'This isn't Filmmaking, It's War' A Gendered gaze on the Tom Cruise Phenomenon", *Visual Anthropology Review* Volume 9, No 1, Spring 1993, p.92
[446] Ibidem, p. 93.
[447] Veronica Rail, "'This isn't Filmmaking, It's War'…, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
[448] Ibidem.
[449] Ibidem.
[450] Ibidem.

corporeal, often homo-erotic tension. Female spectatorial desires and pleasures come into critical tension with regard to *Days of Thunder.* As Rails researched, a male German critic remarked that the story and character-construction are "as variable and interesting as the 100th lap on the track", while a female author wrote in a women's magazine that "Cruise could take a 90minute shower, and we would love to watch", where instead of commenting on the weakness of the film narrative, she chooses to make it completely absent and demands totally spectacular or pornographic film.[451]

Rail researches a high quota that Cruise receives after numerous intimate close-ups included in his film, like *Taps, Risky Business, Top Gun, Far and Away, or a Few Good Men* which are linked to the film's erotic scenes: "Even with his pants on" [452], as she cites applaud of magazine *People*: "Cruise always manages to pump the screen with heat. Riding the El with Rebecca de Mornay in *Risky Business*, he generates enough electricity to keep the trains live all night".[453] In fact, it is Cruise *electricity* that is delivered to the spectator, while the idea to make love belongs to the woman. It is his body that is on display during the intimate scenes while the gaze belongs to the women: Nicole Kidman as the upper-class character and the female cop in *Days of Thunder* "checking his crotch for a weapon". Rail finds a similar pattern of his success with regard to Valentino and quotes Hansen's remarks about Valentino to describe Cruise.

To a certain extend Rail compares Cruise to Valentino: "the close-ups of his face surpasses that of the female character in its value as spectacle" with "the shots of his face illustrate narcissistic autoerotic dilemma".[454] Yet, for Rail Cruise never "really seems to be the bearer of the gaze – his gaze is one to-be-looked-at rather than a looking gaze".[455] She analyses variety of his looks at women in films and claims that he does not command his gaze, lacks the symbolic power which is associated with male protagonist in Laura Mulvey's analysis of cinematic visual structures. As Rails constates "This lack of power on the part of the male protagonist suggests that Mulvey's binary, post-oedipal model of the male active and female passive spectator position does not work in application to Cruise films. It is rather the idea of the actor's models narcissism".[456]

[451] Ibidem, p. 97.
[452] Veronica Rail, "'This isn't Filmmaking, It's War'…", *op. cit.,* p. 98.
[453] Ibidem.
[454] Ibidem.
[455] Ibidem.
[456] Ibidem.

All Cruise-films almost always include a strong female counterpart: professionals, more experienced, older women, sometimes from a higher social class and their plots leave the female protagonist and the female spectator in an odd position and female maternal figures mostly tamed. The McGillis character in Top Gun represents the most successful domestication of a career-woman. As Rail notes: "subordinating to a scenario of female inferiority, her criticism will be silenced, her power disavowed. She will only be able to reproduce his performative and spectacular declaration of love" [457] with power divided along the traditional gender split.

While a man becomes the object to be looked at, we are not confronted with a female sadistic look on the spectacle, fetishism, objectifying voyeurism or curious scopophilia but instead we find an emphatic look on the vulnerable man. In the words of Elizabeth Grosz, (m)other looking at child, who is guided by demands and lacks symbolic power.[458] The final female product is disempowered woman but these as Rail notes with Cruise "infantile economy seems to work particularly well", and this could explain his attractive vulnerability, his absence to desire a women or his indulgence in narcissism and exhibitionism.[459] "The lack of the gaze in combination with an infantile fear of language" [460] can explain Cruise's *intensity* in which the love of the woman always belongs to the hero and his narcissistic and vulnerable phenomenon.

3.4.3. Male spectacle: James Bond and Brad Pitt's sexuality as sado-masochistic game of power

New practices in contemporary cinema try to re-frame the binary gender perspective with assumed male spectator and his visual pleasure as the clue of onscreen representations. For Frances Pheasant-Kelly, with Mulvey's term "to-be-looked-at-ness" there came a new egalitarianism in film culture which diverge from norms of representation proposed in VPNC. She claims that "recent filmmakers adopt increasingly diverse ways of representing and looking at both sexes".[461]

Pheasant-Kelly trying to contrast Mulvey's ideas, brings examples of a contemporary male body which is "not only sexually objectified by other male characters but also offered

[457] Ibidem, p. 101.
[458] Ibidem, p. 99.
[459] Ibidem, p. 98.
[460] Veronica Rail, "'This isn't Filmmaking, It's War'…", *op. cit.*, p. 103.
[461] Frances Pheasant-Kelly, "Reframing Gender and Visual Pleasure: New Signifying Practices in Contemporary Cinema", in *Sensational Pleasures in Cinema, Literature and Visual Culture. The Phallic Eye* eds. Gilad Padva and Nurit Buchweitz, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 195.

seductively for spectator consumption. Both *Casino Royale* and *Fight Club* encourage a desiring spectator gaze towards the male body". [462] According to her, there appears a new vulnerability for men in cinema which is depicted by a male body violation, "signalling a newly emergent vulnerability for men in cinema".[463] She examines a range of films "to exemplify unfolding trends in cinematic representation of gender to illustrate how Mulvey's argument, though relevant to certain Hollywood films, is now largely redundant, reflecting the growing status of women well as an ongoing, already well-documented crisis in masculinity".[464] But what she does not notice is that polemics raised on Mulvey's ideas allowed the cinema to reach the *egalitarian point* and the *phallic gaze* Hollywood codes redundant or outmoded.

Kelly goes through several critical theoretical responses to Mulvey male gaze concept that consider the objectification of the male body like Richard Dyer and Steven Neale, or Jackie Stacy who documents the responses of female audiences to contest Mulvey approach and illustrates how a spectator constructed by film theory appears in a strong opposition to a spectator called empirical. Stacy investigates British film female spectators and their memories of Hollywood male stars.[465]

One of famous examples of male spectacle is *Casino Royale* which is full of erotic contemplation both for hetero- and homoerotic pleasure as some critics claim. Theoretical positioning of women and men as objects of visual pleasure has always been problematic and carries negative connotations due to feminist theorists who embedded power relationship into the gaze, as well as into homoerotic and feminizing possibilities in relation to looking at men. Richard Dyer finds an analogy in the way visual culture responds to the male as sexual object particularly in representations of male pin-up in advertisement and the way in which Daniel Craig as James Bond becomes an erotic spectacle, especially in the beach scene of *Casino Royale*, when he emerges from the sea in an identical way to the female protagonist did in earlier Bond, like Halle Berry or in *Dr. No* Ursula Anders, the scene features his male "to-be-looked-at-ness" as Kelly notes. Dyer argues that potential feminisation, which is essential problem of the male pin-up, in case of James Bond is denied by different forms of returning the gaze that is assumed by female model who averts her eyes, expresses modesty, neutrality,

[462] Ibidem.
[463] Ibidem.
[464] Ibidem.
[465] Ibidem.

coldness, patience or a lack of interest in anything else. In contrast, the male model looks up, stare into the distance as if he was focused on something else, or directly addresses the viewer maintaining agency of look and essentially disavowing his position of being sexual object of the gaze. Dyer also stresses that male body displayed in the name of a spectacle and pleasure is usually engaged in action, and even if this does not happen, his pose suggests activity by the way the body is posed, always ready for action.[466]

In Kelly's analysis of *Casino Royale,* she agrees with Estella Tincknell that "from the very beginning of the […] franchise the Bond films have always made space for a partial critique of the excessive masculinity"[467] and identifies various ways in which the Bond films have "typically interrogated gender roles".[468] Craig's portrayal of Bond conforms to male traditions of the iconic hero, appearing handsome, muscular, tall and wit but in other aspects, however, varies from the Bond prototype. As Johnson comments: "the action sequences of the film continue to emphasize physical risk and vulnerability of the male body by putting Bond's body and its wounds on display"[469] but she argues as well, similarly to Lisa Funnell, that the film feminizes Bond's body. Funnel discerns this feminization of Craig's performance by locating a difference to previous Bond films. She defines Craig's personification of the iconic hero as the "Bond-Bond Girl Hybrid":

Youthful, spectacular, and feminized relative to the gaze through the passive positioning of his exposed muscular body in scenes where he is disengaged from physical activity. Moreover, through inter-textual referencing of renowned Bond Girl iconography […} Craig's Bond is positioned as visual spectacle and aligned with the Bond Girl character type rather than with his Bond predecessors.[470]

But claims for this feminization of Bond are discursive since his erotic spectacle, even while tortured always is presented as never loosing agency through refusing to perform victimhood and humiliates his oppressor Le Chiffre with comments like: "Now the world is gonna know that you died scratching my balls".[471] As Toby Miller notes, that while Bond's genitals have been threatened in his earlier movies *Casino Royale* displays a hero who is more profoundly wounded but nonetheless recovers and soon continues typical heterosexual activities in several

[466] Frances Pheasant-Kelly, "Reframing Gender and Visual Pleasure…", *op. cit.,* p. 197.
[467] Ibidem, p. 203.
[468] Ibidem.
[469] Frances Pheasant-Kelly, "Reframing Gender and Visual Pleasure…", *op. cit.,* p. 203.
[470] Frances Pheasant-Kelly, "Reframing Gender and Visual Pleasure…", *op. cit.,* pp. 203-204.
[471] Ibidem.

bedroom scenes which signal unambiguously his reclaimed dominant masculine position and power.[472]

The relevant claim to objectification of the male body as violated spectacle, can be traced in *Fight Club,* where "suffering relates to fortitude and masochism as a feature of masculinity".[473] The film involves scenes of extreme body mutilation, in a similar vein as *Casino Royale.* Two protagonists, its narrator (Edward Norton) and Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), form a series of Fight Clubs where men can release from a mundane materialist existence and its numbing effects. Men fight there bare knuckle with their bodies being continually displayed, both for spectators and other characters. Brad Pitt is presented at constant low angle shots that emphasize his physique and convey an erotic spectacle for female and male viewers alike, as stresses Pheasant-Kelly. Moreover, muscular torsos are repeatedly displayed as a violated spectacle, blood and sweat of mise-en-scene, tangling bodies with extreme wounding prompt visual sadistic pleasure through witnessing heavy brutality or masochistic pleasure of participation in the fight.[474]

The masochism of being beaten, according to Pheasant-Kelly, resonates here with the feminizing position of a passive female character of Mulvey's model.[475] Contrastingly, however, as she notes, this masochism in *Fight Club* "mobilizes masculinity and a sense of power".[476] Some claim that *Fight Club* could be considered as moving from placing women as bodily spectacle and the victim of violence, thereby seems to correspond with the feminized position of Mulvey's original schema.

Still, men in film, increasingly "attract a sexually objectifying gaze in their positioning as erotic spectacle".[477] Although, as Pheasant-Kelly argues, that often being objectified and vulnerable, the wounded male character still "carries agency and is able to recover from injury".[478] She gives another example of a male body as undeniably coded as an erotic spectacle which occurs in *Thelma and Louise* with Brad Pitt as J.D being watched by Geena Davis (Thelma) through

[472] Ibidem, pp. 206-207.
[473] Ibidem, p. 209.
[474] Ibidem, p. 207.
[475] Ibidem.
[476] Frances Pheasant-Kelly, "Reframing Gender and Visual Pleasure…", *op. cit.*, p. 207.
[477] Ibidem.
[478] Ibidem.

her car side-mirror. Yet, she opposes, after Marita Sturken, to the fact that the male hero serves as a passive erotic spectacle:

It could hardly be argued that J.D. is disempowered by the gaze of the women and the camera upon him as a sexual being. Rather, the film shows the complexity of the power dynamics of these gazes. J.D. is sexualized by the gaze upon him and he uses that sexuality to get what he wants – pleasure and money.[479]

Fight Club is an example of a film where a male as an erotic spectacle functions for both men and women but here scenes with extreme body damage are interconnected with male masochism and sadism. The two protagonists with its narrator Edward Norton and Tayler Durden are played by encouraging men to look at themselves, with "those who possess the gaze, channel our own power of looking" as Ruddell identifies.[480]

Thus, feminized position of erotic objectification is differentiated here from the phallic gazes of *Fight Club*, "where being a man corresponds instead with both suffering, and inflicting pain"[481] similarly to the Bond movies, assuming that masculinity and its phallic power is presenting signs of injury as signifiers of agency rather than victimhood. Despite allusions to feminization through emotional display and physical change, participation in *Fight Club* produces damaged bodies as evidence of survival and strength. Suffering here relates to courage and masochism functions as a positive feature of masculinity. In both *Casino Royale* and *Fight Club*, as Yvonne Tasker notes, "suffering – torture, in particular – operates as both a set of masculine hurdles to be overcome, tests that the hero must survive, and as a set of aestheticized images to be lovingly dwelt on".[482]

As the examples presented above demonstrate, the male body in contemporary cinema is both strong and enduring spectacle of power with agency and even if disposed to injury, it still serves erotic contemplation in which a spectator pleasure derives not only from viewing a conventional heroic and musculature performance but also from the spectacle of suffering or injury. These never giving up eroticized men's bodies are only immobilized by wounding, and they possess endless capacities to endure this suffering, as well as "enable a prolonged spectator gaze", and finally "they intensify the symbolic potency of survival".[483] As Kelly notes:

[479] Ibidem, p. 202.
[480] Ibidem, p. 208.
[481] Ibidem.

[482] Frances Pheasant-Kelly, "Reframing Gender and Visual Pleasure…", *op. cit.*, p. 209.
[483] Ibidem, pp. 203- 209.

Whilst Mulvey's theory of gendered spectatorship was relevant to certain Hollywood films, and may still reflect some contemporary cinema, an increase in the number of women directors, the establishment of equal rights and the shift in audience desires and expectations have led to increasingly diverse modes of looking. Women are now not merely sexual object of the male gaze but perform in more active, independent roles, while men routinely appear eroticized and victimized. Accordingly, female viewers are invited to project a desiring gaze towards male characters.[484]

What Kelly does not notice in her claim of the "irrelevance" of Mulvey visual pleasure today, is the fact that "increase in the number of women directors, the establishment of equal rights and the shift in audience desires and expectations" with "diverse modes of looking" as well as "women performing in films more active, independent roles"[485] are direct or indirect results of Mulvey's VPNC.

3.5. Directing Female Desire

Cinema, compared to art and visual culture, was few decades late in exploring female perspective on visual pleasure on screen. As a popular culture has always been more dependent on the ideologues and the market, the financiers and the producers, the directors and script writers. That is why Mulvey regarded female avant-garde cinema as way/means of women's visual pleasure liberation and deconstruction of dominant male perspective. But decades following VPNC were to bring dissatisfaction and split in feminist perspective for female visual pleasure, not only heterosexual but female homosexual. Many erotic artists producing explicit images did not even want to be named feminist artists, finding feminism as the movement that complicated female sexuality and did not allow to express their fantasies and desire. Men dominated production of nearly all popular genres overwhelmingly, and as Anne Ross Muir points out about the position of women working in film and television industries, it is not the situation that seems to have been changing.[486] Given that, "the male dominated institutions of production and distribution are inscribed with sexism, we cannot be surprised that the feminist presence, both behind and in front of the camera, is a minority one"[487], as Gamman states.

As far back as 1942, when Maya Deren created *Meshes of an Afternoon* countless women have been creating experimental film but little of this work has entered into writing about film

[484] Ibidem, p. 209.
[485] Ibidem.
[486] Anne Rose Muir, "The Status of Women Working in Film and Television" in *Female Gaze. Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, pp. 143-152.
[487] Lorraine Gamman, Introduction to *Female Gaze. Women as Viewers of Popular Culture, op. cit.,* p. 3.

history. Such was the fate of most female avant-garde films since film criticism has been shaped and dominated by male feature-length and narrative film making, as notes Robin Blaetz in the introduction to *Women's Experimental Cinema*.[488] She stresses that in the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s there appeared a window of opportunity for women and:

The assimilation of this rich field of women's experimental cinema into the wider area of cinema studies and *for this brief moment, scholars paid attention to both avant-garde film and the films that women were producing in ever-greater numbers in relation to feminism and increased opportunities for women in general.*[489]

As Blaetz recalls, the 1960s was a decade of growing interest in avant-garde films and the early 1970s was the time of birth of film journals and festivals devoted to women's cinema internationally. The activity of women film makers was marked by the founding in 1972 the London Women's Film Group with Claire Johnston as a prominent member. Others were Barbara Evans, Sue Shapiro, Linda Dove, Esther Ronay. The group campaigned for equal opportunities in the film industry, started to illuminate debates about women's film in the broader agenda and organized a season of Women's Cinema in London, as White recalls.[490] Although a few women filmmakers were successful in festivals winning prizes, they received neither the critical attention and consideration nor the university jobs that accompanied such success. The first International Festival of Women's Film took place in New York City in 1972, followed two months later by "The Women's Event" during the Edinburgh Festival, then in 1973 by Women's Cinema in at the National Film Theatre in London, and later Women and Film festival in Toronto, which sometimes had categories such as "Eroticism and Exploitation" or "Women: Myth and Reality".[491] All of them were characterized by artistic licence of programming and included a variety of accompanying discussions. Together with these, festival handouts included questions about content proposed by the organizers like critique of female place in society, reflection on dominant ideology or feminine specific values. Blaetz gives the example of New York event, where forums were held to re-consider the image of women in film, the question of a female film aesthetics, scriptwriting, directing, editing, acting, making documentaries, programming and distribution, women in television, and finally the image of men in film.[492] Yet as for content, as filmmaker and critic Joan Braderman observed, chaotic collection of films presented what she named " a misguided attempt to find a female

[488] Robin Blaetz, *Women's Experimental Cinema. Critical Frameworks*, Duke University Press, 2007, p. 1.
[489] Ibidem.
[490] White, Mary C., *From text to practice…, op. cit.,* p. 29.
[491] Ibidem, p. 4.
[492] Robin Blaetz, *Women's Experimental Cinema…, op. cit.,* p. 3.

film sensibility". This period of feminist film studies was infused/pervaded with the struggle to articulate whether *women would be served by analyzing the long history of misogynist imagery* and women's attempts to work within the Hollywood classical system, or they try to make images of themselves from scratch.[493]

Though Blaetz claims that none of the films screened at the festivals then had as great influence on film studies as the discussion held at the "The Women's Event" at Edinburgh Festival of 1972. There were scholar there like Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston who began to introduce the film theory during the festival based on psychoanalytical concepts, *that would change the direction of the entire field of film studies.* [494] Some, like Carolee Schneemann disagreed with the idea of feminist 'new visual pleasures' and 'new language of desire' which Mulvey proposed by said little about forms and contents that could replace Hollywood image and "satisfy manipulation of visual pleasure"[495] which is presented further in this chapter. While both Johnston and Mulvey called for a female counter-cinema as something important to emerge, a number of films had fallen through the cracks of both feminist analyses and the history of the American avant-garde. Blaetz stresses however, the difference of fate that divided female experimental cinema of artists/filmmakers who worked within the context of feminists theories, and received considerable attention, particularly Laura Mulvey, Sally Potter, Chantal Akerman, and Yvonne Rainer. While others as Carolee Schneemann, Barbara Rubin, Barbara Hammer who worked outside of feminist theory as well as outside symptoms like "lyrical meditations, poetic films or unsophisticated film diary"[496], as David James wrote, brought discomfort into visual pleasure representation which alienated their works from critical considerations and traditionally defined American avant-garde.[497] The problematic status of female avant-garde films naming them feminist rather than feminine included the context that shifted the decision of its naming from filmmakers to critics and audience as was emphasized by Kuhn.[498] Ruby Rich set out glossary which included five feminist values to define such films: reconstructive as filmic work that "reconstructs basic forms from a feminine perspective, validative as filmic works which validate women's lives, projectile as the rewritten matinee melodramas for women projecting male fantasies onto female characters", medusan as "work

[493] Ibidem.
[494] Ibidem, p. 4.
[495] Mary C. White, *From Text to Practice: Rereading Laura Mulvey's…, op. cit.*, p. 40.
[496] Ibidem.
[497] Ibidem, p. 8.
[498] Ibidem, p.41.

which is medusan in its use of comedy to disrupt patriarchal narratives", and finally possessing aspect of corrective realism with "films which correct a traditional realist cinema by focusing on women's stories".[499] White says that today this classification seems obscure but consequences it brought were revisited to reflect on their assumptions and methodologies in next decades by feminist philosophers and film critics, like Elizabeth Grosz.

In the 1970s and 1980s as recalls White, early feminists film theory was at its high point and number of experimental film makers "came to be allied with Mulvey's essay. They were Sally Potter's *Thriller* (1979), Yvonne Rainer's *Lives* of *Performers* (1978), Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite(1978)*, and Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman,* 23 *Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975)."[500] By the 1983 when famous English scholar of visual culture Griselda Pollock came to discuss "new language of desire" with a group that included Mulvey, the question has evolved into "new visual pleasures". While Pollock "had failed to define these pleasures closely" she provided examples of films displaying it, made by Potter, Akerman and Rainer.[501] Points resonating with Mulvey's refusal of Hollywood film pleasures and what new pleasures might be were also raised by an American scholar Ann Kaplan who proposed a "focus on cinematic apparatus" and usage of new pleasures as strategy in which "mixture of documentary and fiction as the two forms cannot be distinguished as filmic models" since as she says, "they deliberately refuse the pleasure that usually comes from the manipulation of our emotions...they try to replace pleasure in recognition with pleasure in learning, with cognitive processes as against emotional ones".[502] For Potter, the issue of pleasure is making a movie which is intellectual and creative process, consist of subversive look carrying hope and the possibility of change for the audience. Her *Thriller* and *The Gold Diggers* both sought to experiment with new languages of desire and as she claims, "I go to the pictures for leisure, please give me back my pleasure".[503]

It needs to be stressed that, Sally Potter and Chantal Akerman distanced themselves from feminist film theory. As Potter stated she was not making a feminist work and saw the term as problematic; one likely to encounter resistance. She described her position as 'moving out of a feminist ghetto mentality and away from didacticism' and being the one trying to use more

[499] Ibidem, p. 42.
[500] Ibidem, p. 40.
[501] Ibidem.
[502] Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film…. , op. cit.,* p. 138.
[503] Mary C. White, *From Text to Practice…, op. cit.,* pp. 44-45.

subtle ways to look at female ideas. Potter did not want to be classified as feminist filmmaker, even if her films were widely acknowledged and analysed from feminist perspective. As for Carolee Schneemann she was treated totally outside the lines, both feministic and Avant-guardian. As White recalls Rich and Mulvey's historical comments:

The playing out of many of these debates and the 'theoretical antagonisms' in the late 1970s and early 1980s have been recounted(…) as a period in which a 'new canon of feminist films' emerged. This remains partly obscured as feminist film theory established itself within the academy and at the same time and turned its attention to mainstream cinema and television.[504]

Since discussion about "alternative" pleasures continued to be negotiated and Mulvey herself denied the easy pleasures of narrative film, the "new pleasures that emerged from avant-garde feminist film makers in the 1970s and 1980s suffered from the same criticism from the audiences of any avant-garde film".[505]

Robin Blaetz notes that "many of the filmmakers have blurred the line between performer and observer in their work as a means of investigating the thorny issues surrounding the representation of the female body"[506] which became the popular but in effect the most perilous focus. And its use has become the prime cause of the split between women filmmakers and feminist theorists which issue Blaetz implicitly addresses in *Women's Experimental Cinema. Critical Framework.* But interrogation of the body's status by female filmmakers "as a cultural and linguistic sign, rather than a natural object"[507], has become pervasive and constant, with a focus to challenge the traditional means and rationales for objectifying the female body functioning as the greatest sin in film theory then.

The most risky variation of female experimental cinema and visual pleasure came with Marie Menken's who provided playful, formally complex animation films of the early 1960s. Her *Hurry! Hurry!* with its racing sperm, are little known, most likely because they contradict the sense of her a film poet.[508] Moreover, her loose, gestural camerawork - which then signified incompetence, later was copied by the majority of filmmakers that followed her – today it is emblematic in its extremity.[509] "Not only did Menken hold the camera as she walked but she

[504] Ibidem, p. 42.
[505] Ibidem, pp. 42-43.
[506] Robin Blaetz, *Women's Experimental Cinema…, op. cit*., p. 7.
[507] Ibidem.
[508] Ibidem, p. 10.
[509] Ibidem, p. 13.

allowed her cigarette smoke to drift into the shot and took little care to clean her lens" [510], and this dirty, aesthetics was later absorbed and progressed by a pop culture, as recalls Blaetz. Her formally complex technique that signified amateurism and disorder then, with loosely shot footage, was invariably finally heavy edited by her: "the shakiness, the movement out and in focus, the inclusion of the flash frames at the end of the film roll, and general home-movie look of the shots call attention to the filmmaker and prevent the illusion of transparency and clarity so valued by Hollywood".[511]

Blaetz considered Barbara Rubin and analysis of her film *Christmas on Earth* done in 1963 as one of the more audacious formats of the avant-garde cinema. Black and white, silent, 30 minutes which Candy O'Brian described as "A study in genital differentiation and psychic tumult."[512] Rubin made the "most direct and aggressive countermove possible, opening *Christmas on Earth* with a close up of vagina, its landscape spread across the larger of the two superimposed images so that it becomes a spatial and temporal frame: a centerpiece from which all action issues." Originally, she wanted to call the film *Cocks and Cunts.* As Amy Taubin describes the movie:

There is no narrative, merely a series of sexual coupling seen in close-ups and long shots: men and men, women and women, a dog and a cat fooling around, occasionally a woman and a man. The action is filmed in two diametrically opposed styles. In one, bodies are painted black, with breasts and genitals outlined in white fluorescent paint, so that the couplings seem ritualistic. In the other, the lighting is bright and direct, and whatever mystery or eroticism has been suggested is thereby removed.[513]

In "'Absently Enchanted': The Apocryphal Ecstatic Cinema of Barbara Rubin" Ara Osterweil notes: *the seventeen-year-old Rubin used two 16mm projectors at once but projected the films onto a single screen so that the images of sexual activity were appropriately layered, one permeating the other.*[514] Despite the filmmaker claim that the absence of clothes rejects the fetishization of conventional eroticisms and allows the powerful body in action to dominate, films depicting naked female body were problematized. Both, Schneemann and Rubin are the most notorious in regard to visual pleasure, and their films mentioned here were unavailable for

[510] Ibidem.
[511] Ibidem.
[512] Barbara Rubin, Catalogue "Christmas on Earth 1963", accessed on: May 17, 2023, available at: https://film-makerscoop.com/catalogue/barbara-rubin-christmas-on-earth
[513] Amy Taubin, "Christmas on Earth", accessed on June 24, 2023, available at: https://www.screenslate.com/articles/christmas-earth
[514] Ara Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The corporeal turn in American avant-garde film*, Manchester University Press 2014, p. 10.

viewing for many years.[515] Here, I will discuss only Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* as the artist and filmmaker directly found it connected to polemics evolved around Mulvey's concepts, which she claimed, were functioning as primarily inspiration to VPNC writing.

In the 1980s there came the feminist critique of female erotic visual art treated as pornography as well as the feminist "sex wars" over commercial male pornography production and visual pleasure to satisfy masculine desire caused the split within the feminism forever. Struggle over meaning and representation of explicit visual pleasure on screen has become the core of feminist theoretical disagreement and hostility. So, the issue of visual pleasure, long discussed problem for feminist cultural politics, still remains a problem. "Selling female sexuality to women remains different from selling it to men and the pleasure "on offer" to men differs from the pleasure on offer to women"[516] as concludes a critic of visual culture, Belinda Budge, in times when we are bombarded with images a new understanding of representation and new female representations of their pleasure are begged.

3.5.1. Artistic avant-garde female practice in reference to Mulvey's VPNC

Part of criticism of Mulvey's VPNC concepts came from female avant-garde artists producing erotic art in 1960s and 1970s that was totally rejected, unappreciated, or purposely "invisible" to feminist film critics as well, even if discussed widely in private circles. With all sexual revolution challenges, one remained unchanged: a woman could not look at naked men in a public space and could not produce art for female visual pleasure.

Even if Mulvey closed her VPNC with a hope given to future alternative, avant-garde female cinema and visual production in which she saw a potential of destroying the male dominant pleasure, she was criticised by female artists for taking inspiration in their erotic works and not writing about them in the essay. They were to wait decades for any serious theoretical analysis and positive commentaries.

According to research done in 1990s by American female artists association *Gorilla Girls,* 98 % naked representations in museums still are women[517]. Cinema because of its more

[515] Ibidem, p. 13.
[516] Belinda Budge, "Joan Collins and the Wilder Side of Women. Exploring Pleasure and Representation" in *Female Gaze. Women as Viewers of Popular Culture, …., op. cit.,* pp. 102-103.
[517] The Guerrilla Girls, *The Guerrilla Girls' Beside Companion to the History of Western Art,* published by the Penguin Group, New York 1998.

complicated and dependent process of production as well as distribution was slower than art and cinematic avant-garde in female pleasure representation to reach this point.

Artists like Marylin Minter with *Food Porn* photographs, Betty Tomkins with FUCK paintings inspired by pornography magazines of her husband, Cosey Fanni Tutti *Prostitution* pornographic project, Anita Steckel erotic *Giant Woman* series, Joan Semmel with *Erotic Series* and Sex *Paintings* were named as a circle of Black Sheep Feminism of the 1970s Their works were heavily criticised, censored, taken by police squads, or totally avoided and ignored at exhibitions, in theory of art and feminism. When Mulvey wrote VPNC in 1973, the most ground-breaking figure in the1970s feminist art, American erotic artist Anita Steckel in response to pressure and scandal closing her solo exhibition *The Sexual Politics of Feminist Arts* (1973), together with prominent female artists including Louise Bourgeois and Hannah Wilke, Fight Censorship Group, released a press communique: "denouncing the double standard in the artistic community between sexualised men and women".[518]

Her work exposing erotic imagery to provide her own interpretation of previous art works made by men featuring female nudity and illustration of her heterosexual female desire was condemned by critics and her faculty as pornographic. Steckel's overpainted vinted photographs "Giant Woman" series presents fantasy about nude female confidently trekking through New York City, hanging with Empire State building as a phallic fetish between her tights, and other New York skyscrapers as explicit phallic erotic arousal for women, finally unexpected associations in photostat handouts that consisted of a penis drawing within copies of a one-dollar bill that was to highlight the pay gap between women and men. The application of phallic imagery was to draw attention to male privilege of creating female nude representations still an issue today, as stresses Diana Wilkinson. Steckel boldly wrote in 1973 as a response to scandal closing her exhibition: "If the erect penis is not wholesome enough to go into museums – it should not be considered wholesome enough to enter into women".[519]

[518] Diana Wilkinson, "Artists Spotlight. Anita Steckel: Fighting Censorship and Double Standards", published online: January 28, 2014, National Museum of Women in The Arts, accessed 3 January 2023, available at: https://.nmwa.org/blog/library-and-research-center/anita-steckel-fighting-censorship-and-double-standards/

[519] Anita Steckel cited in "Phallic and feminist: Anita Steckel and the writers of history" by Bhumikorn Kongtaveelert and Betty He, posted March 1, 2022, accessed January 9, 2023, available at: https://art.stanford.edu/news/phallic-and-feminist-anita-steckel-and-writers-art-history

According to materials from the archive of artist: "the group worked toward establishing the right of women artists to use the nude male figure and sexual subject matter in their art because both are natural parts of life".[520] Even if the initiative disappeared a decade later, and is still little known today, at that time it played an essential role in politics of female desire and creating more accepting environment for women's erotic works. All these prove the strength of coded stereotypes of sexuality perception and justify problems, criticism or artists' punishment provoked by absorption of female perspective for pleasure, desire, and depictions of male body as visual pleasure.

The famous photographic show in London Barbican *Masculinities. Liberation Through Photography* in 2020 also confirms the fact of male gaze dominance. Its last part of the exhibition recalls Mulvey's VPNC and female gaze artistic response to her male gaze concept. This section reveals the strong and lasting gender asymmetry between men and women, the latter having limited access to the technology of photography and its public presentation. As Naomi Salaman wrote "although snapshot photography is available to all, studio and commercial practice is still overwhelmingly male-dominated".[521] The section presented *The Approaches* series, done in 1972 by Annette Messager that seemed to be the most provocative female photographic and voyeuristic work in the area of re-versed visual pleasure and the female gaze. The artists used in the project zooming focused on the crotches of men passing by her camera and reversing this way the masculine sexual fixation and cultural privilege of watching obtrusively at female parts of the body without any shame or respect, just for a pure visual pleasure.

Curator Aldona Pardo brought together at *Masculinities* nearly sixty artists and 300 works for the show, but still in 2020, only few of them, were women photographers. There was little space for female heteronormative visual pleasure in main parts of official exhibition unless it was provided under the homosexual cover with male photographers behind the lens. One can wonder if *culture of shame* imposed on Western women is still present in female photographic and curatorial education or the words written by Judy Chicago in 1973 about *female imagery* which is not paid attention because we are "not used to women making their experience

[520] Diana Wilkinson, "Artists Spotlight. Anita Steckel: Fighting Censorship and Double Standards", published online: January 28, 2014, National Museum of Women in The Arts, accessed 3 January 2023, available at: https://.nmwa.org/blog/library-and-research-center/anita-steckel-fighting-censorship-and-double-standards/

[521] Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, "Female Imagery" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd Amelia Jones (ed.), Routledge 2010, p. 53.

visible"[522], are still at work. It looks as if women were censoring other women photographers shooting male nude, excluding them from official visibility, whatever the background reason.[523] The exhibition results as *liberation through photography* but liberation mainly of the male gaze operating behind the camera.

Female erotic art and avant-garde films came first bravely to explore female visual pleasure and desire, before Mulvey's article was published. One of the most important was an experimental, non-fiction film *Fuses,* created by the American artist Carolee Schneemann in the years 1964 - 1967. It is analyzed in the context of assumptions and silence of feminist visual theory that developed after publication of *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in 1975. *Fuses* was absent in any analyses of feminist filmic theory until the 1980s. Schneemann's avant-garde movie was functioning for more than decade as purposely invisible work of female gaze which was very unique and pioneering in its production of new codes in female visual pleasure and male nude representations.

Schneemann and Mulvey met and worked in London in the end of 1960s and beginning of the1970s. They both pioneered postmodern debates on female subjectivity, on the perception of the world from the perspective of the body and its sexuality as factors determining one's awareness and self-knowledge. Even throughout 1970s female body and polemics around its representation were unofficially excluded from publications in *Screen*, still extremely masculinized cinematic magazine as various theorists and filmmakers recall that time. Thanks to both Mulvey and Schneemann, the issues of female gaze and female authorship became the most stimulating, controversial, and fruitful at the same time and entered the fields of discussion in contemporary humanities.

3.5.2. Schneemann's pleasure representation as avant-garde *falling too far outside the lines*

Schneemann's experimental film, depicting an open pleasure of a sexual act for the first time in history filmed by a woman, was made in opposition to the masculine perspective of filming sex in avant-garde movies made by men in the United States, including by Stan Brakhage, a friend of Schneemann's in whose films she starred as a muse. It broke all the then-current criteria and

[522] Ibidem.

[523] Conversations with an art curator at GGF Gdanska Galeria Fotografii Mariola Balińska, researcher of Jacqueline Livingston's male nude photography and artist's exclusion from official exhibitions lasting for decades, 2019.

conventions according to which women were seen and evaluated as “sights”. In an artistic world created by men, where women were the objects and not the subjects, Schneemann created her own vision of the representation of corporeality and sexuality. In the politically and culturally turbulent 1960s, the Fluxus movement[524] emerged, manifesting discovery, exploration, change and transgression, "blurring" the boundaries between art and life, rebelling against oppressive sociopolitical systems and creating new ones in which women were supposed to have freedom of artistic expression. It soon became apparent, however, that Schneemann, with her clear artistic conception of open female sexuality, did not follow The Fluxus Manifesto and was “banished from Fluxus practice for falling too far outside the lines”[525], as recalls Andrea Terpenkas.[526] So even for her colleagues her artistic activities were unacceptable. As the artist herself recalled, one of them said: "If you want to paint, paint. If you want to run around naked, you don't belong in the art world"[527]. In an interview for *Wide Angle* in 1977 she said: "it's too stupid, but there is still a mind/body divide", and quoted words addressed to her, probably by a member of the Fluxus group: "If you are going to represent physicality and corporeality, you are not going to be an intellectual authority for us"[528]. This confirmed the truth of John Berger's statement in 1972 that "women are there to satisfy appetites, not to have appetites of their own"[529], adding that, according to the European artistic tradition, "the sexual passion of women in art should be minimized, so that the viewer can feel that it is he who holds the monopoly on such passion ".[530] Given the above context, the reactions of the male Fluxus group do not seem surprising. Although Schneemann has appeared nude in many of her colleagues' film actions, she has only been a 'sight' for them.

The difference between Schneemann’s artistic activities and those of Fluxus movement was that she used the body very freely, in a liberating way, not suppressing its sensual potential, but

[524] Fluxus which means “to flow”, was an avant-garde movement of artists that emerged in the late 1950s, spanned the globe and but had an especially strong presence in New York City. The founder and organizer of the movement is considered George Maciunas, who described Fluxus as, “a fusion of Spike Jones, gags, games, Vaudeville, Cage and `Duchamp.” They focused on experimental and performance aspects of the movement to involve the viewer. It was the process of creating that was important, not the finished product. Key artist who belonged to Fluxus were Yoko Ono, George Brecht, Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, Allan `Kaprow, Nam June Paik, Carolee Schneemann, Alison Knowles, available at: https://www.theartstory.org/movement/fluxus/
[525] Andrea Terpenkas, “Fluxus, Feminism, and the 1960’s”, *Western Tributaries* 4, 2017, p. 1–2.
[526] Ibidem.
[527] Interview with Kate Haug *Wide Angle* (1977), in C. Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics*, Cambridge, MIT Press. 2003, p. 21.
[528] Interview with Kate Haug *Wide Angle* (1977), in C. Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics*, Cambridge, MIT Press 2003, p. 21.
[529] John Berger, „Sposoby widzenia”, *op. cit*., p. 55.
[530] Ibidem, p. 47.

rather awakening it. It was this excess of female expression that excluded her from the movement. Despite all avant-garde and transgressive representation of the body and sexuality, they always followed the male perspective, depersonalized, theatrical, ironic, or set in a ritual context. Like Andy Warhol, who was also criticised for the specificity and sincerity of his erotic films, Schneemann had an instinct and was keen to "break the taboo of the vitality of the naked body in motion, to eroticise my shame-filled culture and then to break its strict rules of morality concerning women".[531] As she said: "I wanted to let the film give me a sense of getting closer to tactility, to bodily sensations that are unconscious and fluid - to an invisible, living, orgasmic dissolving".[532] As long as the female body was artistically explored by the male part of the avant-garde movement, it fitted into the traditional convention of gender reception, but when the creator of the vision of female pleasure and bodily meanings became a woman, it proved to be too transgressive.

When asked about the impulse to make *Fuses,* Schneemann admitted that it was a form of polemic with the film *Window Water Baby Moving* (Stan Brakhage, 1959), and a response to her mixed feelings about "the power of the gaze of the male partner, the male artist"[533], his masculine construction of the depiction of sexuality being “a medical or pornographic image”[534]. The artist greatly appreciated Brakhage's extraordinary authenticity, courage, and risk in focusing on what was bodily real in the act of birth. She believed that it was this metaphorical understanding of the camera as the male eye, which was the subject of all their aesthetic tension and dispute as friends. She also stressed that Brakhage was the first to touch in this film the area of the sacred erotic, to which Schneemann repeatedly referred in her entire work.[535] Schneemann calls Fuses a "visual construction of an open and free sexuality”.[536] But most her artistic inspirations and works were directed at unveiling and demolition of deprecating European social conventions of depicting unreal women and their corporeality. They were rooted in her long-standing and reliable historical research on "lost" paintings and writings by women artists, as well as her studies of non-European cultures and religions, and her inspiration by the works of Wilhelm Reich, Antonin Artaud, and Simone de Beauvoir.[537]

[531] Interview with Kate Haug..., *op. cit.,* p. 23.
[532] Ibidem.
[533] Ibidem.
[534] Ibidem.
[535] Interview by Kate Haug with C. Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics…, op. cit.,* p. 23.
[536] Ibidem.
[537] Interview by Linda Montano with C. Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics, op. cit.,* p. 133.

Schneemann's defiance against the social Western conventions in *Fuses* and her expressive creative stance on sexuality earned her a very hostile and sexist reaction from both men and women, within and outside the artistic feminist community. Some spoke of "narcissistic exbitionism", others thought Schneemann had done something "extremely troublesome", or contemptuously called her "a pussy mascot, only to be fucked or subjugated", as she recalls few comments of her colleagues about her and *Fuses*.[538] Some, however, frankly said that they were jealous "of the woman's pleasure, moved by the open intensity and shameless pleasure, which until then had been culturally and politically repressed the plethora of comments at the time and very exciting in terms of the reception of the film".[539] The cultural models, which the artist fought to unmask, proved to be so socially rooted that even the attitude of the men who defended her art and her attitude turned against her in the long run.[540] Questioning and challenging Western female sexual liberation via pleasure/ displeasure representations in various forms of visual arts for next decades, together with being widely critiqued, unappreciated, or unrecognized, she finally received a Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement of 57th International Art Biennale in Venice in 2017, two years before her death in 2019 at the age of 80ty.

By remaining silent about *Fuses,* Mulvey contributes to the history of feminine silence, where silencing women by other women has become a cultural phenomenon with depreciation of women's achievements. This fact has recently been described by Mary Beard, a scholar of antiquity, as an "old experience of misguided intervention" on the male-female and female-female axis, and socially rooted attitude of depreciation of female art, actions, judgements, and valuations. It permeates invisibly and unconsciously in the depicted myths and legends which were "silencing women" in various ways in education or language that treats women asymmetrically and with less prestige.[541] Dubravka Ugrešić, a Croatian writer, argued that "silent women [...] have actually and symbolically provided, and continue to do so, intellectual, political, artistic, ideological and every other cover for male production, whatever 'products' would come into play. All this makes women silent victims, but also accomplices in matters of gender relations".[542] Explaining the reasons for such a situation, another popular Croatian

[538] Ibidem.
[539] Interview by Kate Haug, *op. cit.*, pp. 20–49.
[540] Ibidem, p. 22.
[541] Mary Beard, "The Public Voice of Women", *The London Review of Books*, winter lecture, March 2014, accessed: December 7, 2018, available at: https://psarhetoric.wordpress.com/2014/03/17/mary-beard-the- public-voice-of-women
[542] Dubravka Ugrešić, „Mizoginia. Drżyjcie, czarownice wracają", *Gazeta Wyborcza* 5-6.03.2016.

writer, Vedrana Rudan, uses her own example to describe pathological relations between women and women whose "normality" she exposes in her books. She admits: "[...] as I get older, something comes out of me that I have spent my whole life trying to suppress - a truth that has been instilled in me for generations: women are less important ".[543]

3.5.3. Touch and desire in Jane Campion's *The Piano*

In 1993, Jane Campion changed history when she became the first woman director who received the prestigious Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival. Her success became an inspiration for many female directors who began to fight their place in history. In 2019 BBC Culture's critics made a poll of the 100 greatest films made by women and *The Piano* was chosen as the number one. Now 25 years after it was made, "a tale of female desire and oppression"[544] still resonates so deeply in viewers. Melissa Silverstein, founder and president of *Women and Hollywood* cites the groundbreaking nature of the film as a reason for its resonance:

It might be one of the first films that I saw where I fully understood what it means for a director to have a vision. Nothing is said. It is felt. The Piano arrived at a time when most films depicting female sexuality were directed by men. I've always considered Campion's vision ground zero for the female gaze.[545]

Campion's story is of a mute Scottish pianist named Ada McGrath played by Holly Hunter, who is sold by her father into a marriage with New Zealander Alisdair Stewart played by Sam Neil. She travels to the remote island with her daughter, and after her new husband sells her piano to his friend George Baines played by Harvey Keitel, Ada gets furious and resolves to reclaim her beloved instrument through a bargain with the new owner. New Zealand film critic Maria Lewis claims that it was Campion's cultural identity that made *The Piano* so special:

Jane Campion has always centered the female narrative. Not the female narrative as Hollywood knows it, but the kind that's familiar to a New Zealand and even an Asia-Pacific audience: women who are unusual, women who are complicated and talented, women who are weird, women who have overcome, women who march to the beat of their own drum – or piano, if you will.[546]

Touch in Campion's movie, as Joanna Di Mattia notes, creates its own language. Firstly, Ada's beloved piano becomes the object suffused with her repressed desire articulated via rapturous

[543] Verdana Rudan, „Wybaczę matce, przeproszę córkę", *Duży Format. Gazeta Wyborcza,* 30.06.2016.
[544] Hannah Strong, "*The Piano* as Number One Film Directed by Woman" posted: November 25, 2019, accessed: January 16, 2023, available at: **WWW.BBC.COM/CULTURE/ARTICLE/20191125-THE-PIANO-NUMBER-ONE-FILM- DIRECTED-BY-WOMAN-POLL**
[545] Ibidem.

[546] Ibidem.

compositions of Michael Nyman. She touches the instrument like a lover, with great tenderness and passion, with a thrill of discovery in a new place. On the beach, while she is waiting with her daughter for her new husband, she removes some of the piano's packing material as if she was unbuttoning a shirt. Campion narrows the focus onto Ada's fingers that enter the dark, intimate space and care the keys, as Mattia evolves the sophisticated visuality of touch in *The Piano*.[547]

Later usage of touch turns on the complexity of meanings associated with it – pleasure, desire, liberation, passion, risk, power, and violence with relationships portrayed by Campion. But Ada, Baines and Stewart engage with touch, each in a different way. In particular, as puts de Mattia "the economy of touch between Ada and Baines explores how sexual desire between women and men is a bargain in which power relations are repeatedly renegotiated over shifting ground".[548] She also notes that female desire becomes the concern which returns in all Campion's career, most notably in the movie *Holly Smoke* (1999) and *In the Cut* (2003).

Touch in *The Piano* is also vital as for narrative currents and physical textures. Campion creates a sensory, sensual world through close ups to skin with movements of the camera that appear to stroke it. Since the erotic dynamic unfolds early in the film, after one of Baines' first piano lessons, Campion shows Baines lying and gazing at the piano as if it was Ada's epitome. After she has gone, he raises, and standing close to instrument undresses, and wipes the piano with his undershirt, then touches it with a hand as if placing his skin exactly where Ada's has been before. At this point, as writes Sue Gillett, he wants to be the piano, "to be the receiver of such rapturous touching, to be played upon, to have such hunting music evoked in and through his own body".[549]

Campion also plays with male to- be-looked-at-ness and female pleasure exposed:

When Baines displays his naked body to Ada he emerges from behind his sheer, red curtain as a soft, vulnerable body to be looked at, not as a sexual aggressor. Campion feminises Baines and in doing so reminds us that what he desires above all else is for Ada to desire him. When Ada finally comes to him of her own free will, he falls to his knees, fulfilling her needs first. As Gail Jones explains, Baines "opens

[547] Joanna Di Mattia, "The Heart Asks Pleasure First: Economies of Touch and Desire in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993)", CTEQ *Annotations on Film*, Issue 84, posted September 2017, accessed on: January 29, 2023, available at: https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2017/cteq/the-piano/

[548] Ibidem.

[549] Joanna Di Mattia, "The Heart Asks Pleasure First…", *op. cit.*

Ada's jacket, but instead of the usual codes of ravishment, dives beneath her hooped skirt to give oral pleasure.[550]

In the end, Baines experiences as well the corruptive nature of touch when his touch is not reciprocated enthusiastically. He decides to return the piano to Ada saying that this *arrangement is making you a whore and me wretched*. When she returns to Baines without burden of dependence of the deal, she touches him for her own pleasure as well as his, and we come closer to understand what it is.[551]

Campion turns the intimacy of touch into spectacle, as de Mattia concludes. But the movie was also considered as a betrayal of feminist resistance raising questions of preoccupied commentators, like "What does Ada want? Does Ada have any agency in this agreement? Is she appalled or aroused?" Many of whom saw Baines as a rapist, and Ada as agreement to the "bargain", alongside the film's matrimonial happy ending.[552] But what Campion does is positioning relationship of Ada and Baines with its increasingly erotic terrain, as a rejection of convention from the very beginning. She contrasts by purpose scenes of dull and comical drinking tea by Stewart and Aunt Morag with intensity of contours of desire that unfolds at Baines' cottage. Neither what Ada nor Baines want, might be describes as a "normal" relationship, what stresses Mattia. He has a wife in England, she has a husband in whom she is not interested. Both of them active and passive in this relation and their "desire for each other is patently disruptive, a risk, and they are each empowered and disempowered by it".[553]

What is interesting here regarding Campion's meaning of touch is that to some feminist critics the sense of touch is more important than Mulvey's male gaze, dominant and ruling sense in cinema. Sue Gillet gives example of Campion as a contrary to Mulvey's proposal and refers to Campion's as a popular filmmaker who makes pleasurable narrative films in which women are interesting to look at:

It is true to say that these eccentricities and daring enable her to transform both the visual and narrative dimensions of film beyond the sexual polarities which Mulvey described, and in ways which maintain an appeal to a mass audience. One of her great talents as a director lies in her ability to enlarge the field of what looks good and to film women who look good as more than to-be-looked at; another is her construction of quest narratives which are driven by the interaction between male and female desires and projections and which maintain an unusual degree of interpretative openness, or inconclusiveness.[554]

[550] Ibidem.
[551] Ibidem.
[552] Ibidem.
[553] Ibidem.
[554] Sue Gillet, "A Pleasure to Watch: Jane Camion's Narrative Cinema", uploaded 1 March 2001, accessed: 17th

The Piano has moved from view to touch parallelly with the shift in feminist theories, since in 1990 Gaylyn Studlar highlighted the viewing experience as the "sensory presence of the world in the self" enabling a new conceptualization of the self.[555] This "neglected tradition of phenomenology in film theory"[556] as Dudley Andrew calls it, was further developed in 1992 Vivian Sobchack's monograph *The Address of the Eye.* Sobchack joins others in describing her own viewing experience of *The Piano* as an affective experience and theorizing how viewing engages the body in general. However, as stresses both, its importance and neglection within cinema studies Anu Koivunen:

Although never established as a major popular tradition within film theory, Sobchack introduced in The Address of the Eye a critical language for discussing film viewing as an embodied, sensory experience. Drawing on "semiotic phenomenology" rather than on Maurice Merleau-Ponty as many other feminist scholars would do in 1990s, and not explicitly engaging in question of gender, sexuality, or skin color, Sobchack's project was to theorize "the embodied nature of film experience" and "vision as it is embodied, vision as it is performed, vision as it signifies, vision as it radically entails a world of subjects and objects to make sense of them and of itself as it is lived."[557]

Film writer Laura Venning recalls this another embodied perspective of film reception writing that she was expecting something restrained and melancholic, but instead she was transported into the "dark, transgressive Gothic story where female desire and female creativity are unstoppable forces".[558] In Campion's films aesthetics works to aim the re-visioning and refashioning of the feminine and its desire represented, refusing to censure the actions of her women as it was limited in repertoire of gestures, expressions and poses in classical cinema with female body and beauty manufactured as standarised, repetitive and homogenous decoration.[559] This is what Sobchack articulates as a notion of "vision of flesh" which for her is a "mode of primarily embodied identification with the materiality of the film"[560] and where identifications with narrative and characters are secondary as notes Koivunen, and illustrates it with Sobchack words: "Which is to say that movies provoke in us the 'carnal thoughts' that ground and inform more conscious analysis".[561]

January 2023, available at: http://www.screeningthepast.com/issue-12-first-release/a-pleasure-to-watch-jane-campions-narrative-cinema

[555] Anu Koivunen, "The Promise of Touch: Turns to Affect in Feminist Film Theory" in Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers (eds.) *Feminisms,* Amsterdam University Press 2015, pp. 100-101.

[556] Ibidem. p. 101.

[557] Ibidem, pp. 101-102.

[558] Joanna Di Mattia, "The Heart Asks Pleasure First…", *op. cit.*

[559] Sue Gillet, "A Pleasure to Watch…", *op. cit.*

[560] Anu Koivunen, "The Promise of Touch…", *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[561] Ibidem.

Being critical of the cultural and social pressures dictating preoccupations about female appearance, Campion interests are focused on women's desires and in finding the cinematic language for its expression. Mirror in her film becomes for Ada a tool for sexual fantasy rather than an gadget for self-regulation and preoccupation about the look. When Ada gazes at her reflection in a hand-mirror she is not scrutinizing effects of her appearance but "trying to fall through her image into a release of her passion and in kissing the mirror she uses her reflection as a means of transporting her back to the remembrance of sexual desire"[562] as she was separated from her lover by force.

In an essay on *The Piano*, Ann Hardy describes Campion's oeuvre as a rare film in its successful rejection of dominating male gaze which directs the audience view and in its construction of influential and sexualized female gaze as *"egalitarian situation that many feminist critics have imagined but few directors have ever produced on film"*.[563] As Gillet continues:

Campion's construction of an active female gaze is an important strategy through which she is able to invoke female desire as more than simply narcissistic, inwardly focused, and magnetic (in the sense of attracting the desire of the others.). But equally important is her construction of female images which do not paralyse the identification through which female viewers enter the films at the border of appearances.[564]

Astonishing power of Campion's cinema lies in breaking "the hypnotic spell of the female image"[565] that makes women in the audience identify with female characters and watch them being involved and empowered by close distance, totally different from Mulvey's proposal of immerse spectator, lost in the spectacle.

3.5.4. Catherine Breillat' erotic drama of female *Romance*

Catherine Breillat is considered a representative of "New French Extremity" or "Cinema de corps" screening widely contested borders that separate art from pornography. Throughout her for almost fifty-years career her "erofilms" as Aikaterini Delikonstantinidou calls them, were influenced by contemporary artistic and theoretical tendencies, and motivated politically by

[562] Sue Gillet, "A Pleasure to Watch…", *op. cit.*
[563] Ibidem.
[564] Ibidem.
[565] Ibidem.

authored visual representations featuring the female quest for visual pleasure and female search of desire.

Breillat's intention to explore this unarticulated and unrepresented aspects of female sexuality and its sexual experiences within male-female relations were portrayed in *Romance* (1999) and brought her both fame and strong critique for deforming femininity. As a director, she adopted and subverted both mainstream porn tactics and experimental film traditions to engage and expose omissions and absences of female pleasure in dominant male-authored visual tradition, as Delikonstantinidou notes.[566] Her cinematic vision is regarded by some critics as power which unsettles "authoritative presumptions underpinning the erotic image"[567] and brings the overall feeling of female sexuality as temperamental and physical disability. *Romance* censures conventional assumptions about heterosexual romance and explores the nature of female need for male attention and erotic love. The young couple Marie played by Caroline Ducy and a male model Paul played by Sagamore Stévenin, after three months of passion are in crisis. Paul does not feel any longer physical desire, prefers to read Bukowski and drink sake alone, or watch movies in the evenings. He is bored with Marie who loves and desires him madly after his refusal to touch her, feels humiliated and desperately starts an erotic odyssey to find fulfillment in other relations.

Her sense of emptiness leads her to seek the pleasure first with Paolo, played by Italian porn star, Rocco Siffredi, but sexual encounters with him were screened in totally disappointing way for female pleasure. As exposes Troy Bordun, "There is not a clear-cut identification with the body of Rocco Siffredi in *Romance*, whose presence is nearly absent as the camera focuses instead on the actress's face, and the sounds are of voiceover rather than the sex act".[568] At this point one can ask whose pleasure again do we have on the screen? Not female, for sure. The reason for this may lie in the fact noted by Roger Ebert that one can have a feeling that *Romance* is so analytical that you sometimes get the feeling Marie is putting herself through her sexual encounters simply to get material for her journal. These poor guys aren't lovers, they're case

[566] Aikaterini Delikonstantinidou, "Catherine Breillat's Cine-erotic Anti-Romance: Visualizing the Extremities of Desire", Studies in Visual Arts and Communication: an International Journal Vol 1, No 1 (2014) on-line ISSN 2393 – 1221, accessed on: January 20, 2023, available at: https://journalonarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SVACij-Vol1_No1_2014-DELIKONSTANTINIDOU_Aikaterini-Visualizing-the-Extremities-of-Desire.pdf

[567] Ibidem.

[568] Troy Bordun, "Sex is Metaphysical: Catherine Breillat's Pornographic Films", accessed: January 17, 2023, available at: https://www.cine-excess.co.uk/sex-is-metaphysical-catherine-breillatrsquos-pornographic-films.html

studies. Marie relates to Paolo (Siffredi's character) as if he is a laboratory specimen".[569] What is more, contrary to Mulvey's observations about the men often depicted in the cinema as ideal ego, in *Romance* as claims Bordun, Siffredi is not "more perfect, more complete, more powerful than the man in the audience because here he is barely present onscreen both in frame, through dialogue, or narrative importance, and neither does he appear omnipotent in either feature as his sexuality, strength, and manliness"[570] is at best questionable.

The second sexual relation of Marie comes with masochistic experience with Robert (Francis Berléand), neither attractive nor interesting headmaster at her school who ties her up so slowly and talks so much while she cries, that makes you bored with bondage forever. The change of colors from white aesthetic used within her boyfriend scenes into red ones with bondage scenes seem schematic and repetitive. Every sort of romance becomes for Marie a sort of hell, kind of punishment for Paul, with sex functioning as a gap to fill intimate emptiness or take revenge on Paul, whom she does not want to lose. As Linda Williams observes, "the film's point here is not pleasure but to show how short-lived and difficult such 'pure' desire is – indeed, how much work must be invested in its achievement".[571]

Romance is very problematic from feminist point of view which wants "eroticism as a product of and for women's sexuality"[572] and as an opposition to male-centered pleasure in pornography. Numerous analyses have been written about Breillat's cinema with trials to categorize or reconceptualize her specific, sexual filmic ecosystem. Oscillations move from pornography to hard-core art and erotic art, erofilms and *non-pornographic pornography* as Troy Bodrun defines it eventually: "a non-pornographic pornography would be a sexually graphic film crafted in such a manner to convey not just arousal – or better, no arousal at all – but to operate as a challenge to existing sexual relations and the power dynamics therein, both onscreen and off".[573] Breillat's herself makes a distinction between pornography and the erotic: "The affective power of pornography depends on the detailed yet hyperbolic depictions of sexual arousal, scenarios, acts, and sensations aiming to turn the reader on, whereas the affective

[569] Roger Ebert, Reviews *Romance* (1999), posted: November 12, 1999, accessed: January 24, 2023, available at: https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/romance-1999,
[570] Ibidem.
[571] Joanna Di Mattia, "The Devious Conflict: Love and Sex in Catherine Breillat's *Romance* (1999)", posted September 2016, Issue 80, CTEQ Annotations on Film, accessed: November 9, 2022, available at: www.sensesofcinema.com/2016/cteq/romance/
[572] Ibidem.
[573] Troy Bordun "Sex is Metaphysical: Catherine Breillat's…", *op. cit.*

power of erotica revolves around desire and emotional realism".[574] Bordun stresses that, sex scenes in Breillat's *Romance,* "although resembling the acts we would see in porn, i.e. nude men and women engaging in sexual intercourse, is as dissatisfying for the characters as for the viewers".[575]

Romance was analysed numerously with regard to Mulvey's concepts like female as spectacle to be looked at with looking being gendered as masculine and it was claimed that Breillat offers a female vision of corporeality and abjection that brings de-objectification of the corporeal and provides a liberating aesthetics "vis-à-vis the reductive regimentation" of the body by the male hegemony of spectacle in which "being looked at is gendered feminine". To subvert these truths and binaries of the gaze Breillat exposes the traps of conventional heterosexual sexuality and as Delikonstantinidou claims creating Marie as icon of female *jouissance*[576], however it is very doubtful watching her sad face, distance, and submission. However, Delikonstantinidou argues that female agency of looking and desire on its own terms are on display in intimacy scenes:

In all of the scenes of brutal intimacy that occur during the film, Marie is shown to be actively looking as well as guiding, rather than simply receiving, the male gaze—even in moments when she occupies extremely compromised positions. Indeed, the female protagonist is constructed by Breillat as the subject of her own desire: actively rendering herself an object of desire, putting her body on display, and allowing it to be put on display. Marie plays the role of the exhibitionist, and the role of the masochist as we shall see further on, only on her own terms.[577]

Contrary to Delikonstantinidou Bordun constates that Breillat "displaces or puts sex somewhere else, outside of eroticism and sexual arousal, and into critical thought" and makes female characters passive the same way as it was exposed in Mulvey's critical analysis. Thus, he notes that the usage of specific aesthetic and narrative makes male gaze passive as well, and these activate critical engagement in the film experience instead:

Long takes, close-ups of faces instead of genitals, no moans or groans except during the male orgasm as a counterpoint to the silence of the woman, and highlights the frequent inactivity of the female character, always immobile and often in tears while the man has his pleasure. Breillat's female characters are at first glance intentionally passive in the sense described by Laura Mulvey in her famous essay, but what is active in the film experience is not the male spectator or his scopophilia; it is rather his critical engagement with the message through style, content, and narrative.[578]

[574] Ibidem.
[575] Ibidem.
[576] Aikaterini Delikonstantinidou, "Catherine Breillat's Cine-erotic Anti-Romance…", *op. cit.*
[577] Ibidem.
[578] Troy Bordun, "Sex is Metaphysical…", *op. cit.*

Additionally, Bordun follows the path of Breillat's *Romance* and disagrees with Mulvey's concept of universalized spectator and standarised film experience through attempting to merge gender and sexual difference at the cinema. According to him, the key to the critique of Mulvey is the facts that cinema opens up a multiplicity of viewing positions and ambiguity of usage of sexuality as in case of Breillat's film that allows affection from numerous vantage points.[579]

The exposition of romantic misconception of heterosexual couple concept as an entity was done by purpose and is exposed here as an illusory state which suffocates sex and finally destroys love as stresses Joanna Di Mattia.[580] Breillat's *Romance* "hovers between passion and philosophical argument without achieving its ambition to fuse the two"[581] as Janet Maslin wrote in New York Times. She would not even call it a passion since the seriousness of the director and its leading protagonist with her sad face, together with her questionable comments as narration, can provoke an overall impression of desperate, empty inside, passionless and depressed, "stony postured" woman.[582] A "sense of identification through psychological interiority" [583] was not achieved through Breillat's pessimistic vision of romance and female pleasure designed to be dark, painful, and sad for women.

The critique of the film along with asking for the message of some disturbing scenes that were regarded as more illustration of director's own confusion about sex, stressing the fact that even the movie was defended by women in feminist terms, one can have the "strange feeling they're not saying what they really think".[584] Roger Ebert compares Marie to the woman of Freud who he was thinking about asking the question, "What does a woman want?" since Marie asks herself the same question but in the film her encounters and emotion seem as if her body and identity were disconnected. For him "it's more like a documentary of a dogged woman's forced march toward orgasm, a goal she is not sure she values".[585] Ebert finally claims that the film, even if not enjoyed brings an "icy fascination" with a woman who never stops thinking. But as Maslin critiqued Breillat exploration of nature of women's needs: "It's doubtful that the film's

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[579] Ibidem.
[580] Joanna Di Mattia, "Catherine Breillat's *Romance*...", *op. cit.*
[581] Janet Maslin, film reviews "With Her Libido as Navigator. One Woman's Adventures", *The New York Times*, posted: September 17, 1999, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/17/movies/film-review-with-her-libido-as-navigator-one-woman-s-adventures.html
[582] Ibidem.
[583] Troy Bordun, "Sex is Metaphysical*...", op. cit.*
[584] Roger Ebert, *Romance* (1999), accessed on: 24th January 2023, available at: https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/romance-1999.
[585] Ibidem.

intellectual aspects would command the same attention if the camera did not make the actors' genitals as familiar as their faces" negating its intellectual and metaphysical value.[586] Of course, the film is French, as constates Ebert and for the French: "Wine takes the place of flirting, dining takes the place of seduction, smoking takes the place of foreplay and talking takes the place of sex." [587]

3.5.5. Spanish cinema. Female reversal and fetishistic perspective.

Paradigms of representation of the male body in Spanish female-authored cinema were explored by an American academic Barbara Zecchi. She focuses on films that use the male body as a "didactic" of female pleasure, "revealing women's sexual polycentredness" in which male protagonists function as the active equivalent for sexual exchanges which displace penetration in favour of more polymorphous sexual performances. She analyses movies that display the "mature" women with the younger male partners who become the essential to validate female desirability, challenging at the same time the myth that older men have undeniable sexual appeal by presenting their sexual insufficiency.[588]

In analyses of all Spanish female films Zecchi refers to Mulvey's fundamental issue of mainstream cinema where a female body is filtered by hegemonic gaze as object of male visual pleasure.[589] In Spanish production a male body is designed in detail with all nuances of masculinity codes which empower narcissistic gaze of male spectators.[590] Significantly, as Zecchi stresses, the nude male body is relatively rare to see, probably because of lack of cultural framework for its heterosexual exhibition.[591] Although it is very seldom placed on sexual display for heterosexual women's gaze, there have been some recent exceptions in as she notes with regard to female-authored Spanish cinema.[592]

An increasing awareness of the lack of an "authentic" female perspective in women's film has brought its problematization and sparked various initiatives. Spanish women directors, in particular have not followed the experimental feminists trends of the 1960s and 1970s and tried to shape an alternative filmic discourse. Their works were to disrupt the female display

[586] Janet Maslin, "With Her Libido as Navigator…", *op. cit.*
[587] Roger Ebert, *Romance…, op. cit.*
[588] Barbara Zecchi, "Women filming the male body: Subversions, inversions and identifications", *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 3: 3, pp. 187–204, 2006, doi: 10.1386/shci.3.3.187/1
[589] Doane cited in Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…", p. 188.
[590] Scarlett cited in Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…:", p. 188.
[591] Barbara Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…:", *op. cit.*, p. 188.
[592] Ibidem.

criticised initially by Mulvey and have endeavored to articulate pleasures which could be alternative to male narcissistic scopophilia, declaredly or indirectly refraining from usage a narrative that produces male pleasure.[593] With their stories being persistent in representation of a "female character whose presence does not freeze the action"[594] depicted socially unseen content by suppressing cultural 'normality' exposed in mainstream productions. Spanish directors often go to the extreme in the reification of the male subject, or its relegation to invisibility and as Zecchi observes, less than 10% of the entire Spanish female-authored production feature a male protagonist. More frequently, male protagonists function as an excuse and the necessary counterpart which ultimately serves exclusively for a presentation of women's issues and desires.[595]

In Spanish comedy *Put a Man in your Life—Pon un hombre en tu vida* (1996) , director Eva Lesmes explores effects of filmic representations of the opposite gender. She adopts the case of Tiresias, the mythological character who was transformed for seven years by the gods into a woman and thanks to that learned which sex was granted greater pleasure. In Lesmes's movie, Juan Antonio (Toni Canto) a football coach and a wife-to-be Belinda (Cristina Marcos), experience belonging to the other sex. Their bodies are switched during accidental collision in a swimming pool and as result they both confront the situations of everyday that were unknown and unthinkable to them before. While Belinda senses what is like to have an erection and she constates that men's orgasms, compared to women's are "not such a big deal", Juan Antonio learns how it is to menstruate and discovers that "penetration is not as important for women as he had thought".[596]

Simple tale of Lesmes engages ultimately one of the primary challenges in cinema, namely a faithful representation of the body of the opposite sex. Zecchi asks important questions about the inbuilt predicaments that configure gender representations. "What are the limits of – or how limited is – the representation of the 'other' body? How can one envision – and reproduce through images – the physical experience of the other sex?"[597] Stressing the binary structure in *Pon un hombre en tu vida*, in which neither man nor woman grasp the reality of the opposite

[593] Ibidem, p. 189.
[594] Ibidem.
[595] Ibidem.
[596] Ibidem.
[597] Ibidem.

sex, she claims that Lesmes "portrays a simplistic version of a complex issue in the filmic sphere".[598]

Zecchi research evolves around the Spanish women directors who both use the male body in their cinema and focus on female pleasure. The woman inscribed as subject of her own desire rebels the traditional display of female in mainstream cinema. Spanish female directors "propose an alternative to phallic sexuality and to the dichotomy male-active versus female-passive" and "their sexual display does not gravitate around what Suleiman has called in the 1986 "the insistence on the uniqueness, and the unicity, of the erect phallus".[599] Instead, they develop an "explicit and programmatic attempt to reveal (…) their sexual polycentredness" through the way, which Zecchi calls 'a didactic use of the masculine body'.[600] However, as she notes in the process of "deconstructing the fetishism of the woman as spectacle", some female directors downgrade the male body to a thoroughly passive role, or to what Mulvey has called a position of 'to-be-looked-at- ness'.[601]

Dolores Payas, the Spanish director, has interrogated the way female sexuality is approached in cinema and explained why the parameters of female sexuality are rarely challenged:

Very simple, a gentleman penetrates a lady and immediately after – oh, miracle – she starts to orgasm. All women know that this is not the way it goes at all. Why don't we, then, deny it? Why don't we calmly vindicate our sexuality? We don't do it because the rule – with respect to sexuality – is penetration. Obviously, men are disturbed by the thought that penetration is not enough for us. Because for them it is (enough). It is the peak; it's the sexual act. And so, as far as cinema is concerned, the clitoris does not exist. [602]

Similarly, another Spanish director Ana Diez has described the way she sought to capture sex scenes in an explicit way and from a satirical perspective:

Perhaps the only female point of view that is not given in cinema is the act of loving making, since most intercourse scenes depict panting and gymnastics. But I have never seen love-making and I am interested in it more and more. In order to bring the myth to an end (. . .). Because those gymnastic acts still dominate men's fantasies, given their education, pornography, and movies'.[603]

Payas' film *My Name Is Sara - Me llamo Sara* (1998) and Ana Diez's *Ander and Yul – Ander y Yul* (1989), both portray the sex that explore sensual exchanges which is a rarely seen on display of male sexual performance, and do not focus on an erect penis. The male body is

[598] Ibidem.
[599] Suleiman cited in Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…", *op. cit.*, p. 189.
[600] Ibidem.
[601] Ibidem.
[602] Cami-Vela cited in Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…:", *op. cit.*, p. 190.
[603] Ibidem, p. 190.

arranged as the means of female pleasure in both films. The first one *My Name Is Sara,* is a rare example that takes womanhood at 40ty for its theme, with Sara (Elvira Mínguez) as a university literature teacher who lives with her teenage daughter and longtime partner Adrian (François Eric Gendron). Film depicts frustrations and contradictions of Sara's relationships with friends, parents, and her daughter which she nags for having sex while at the same time as a mother takes a younger lover herself. Not satisfied with her life, Sara sleeps with one of her students and the representation of sex is a kind of didactic as Zecchi calls it.[604]

Ana Diez's movie *Ander and Yul,* shots the sex scene which is a long sequence in which the two partners caress each other, displaying sensuality of a whole-body, following the delicate movements of the couple through blurred shots and the whole sequence unfolds almost in slow motion.[605] The scene was considered very important since it "departs from the traditional notion that female pleasure depends on penetration" [606] and that was the core that puzzled some male film critics. What is more, as Carlos Roldan argues that it is unreal and impossible relationship, which is only the product of Ander's imagination, emphasized by the dreamlike tones of the scene.[607] Such a criticism proves again the critical resistance to the female authorship right to present female desire and sexual fantasies on screen and at the same time serves as another example of success in this field.

These two Spanish films portray the male body at ease in sexual intercourse and both women and men are active to accomplish mutual sexual satisfaction. However, they are not common cinematic examples since in several other films female directors use male body as a passive component of film diegesis to vindicate the position of a woman as active subject which serves as a simple, direct reversal of Mulvey's active male-passive female concept. Manane Rodriguez's *Portrait of a Woman with a Man on the Background - Retrato de mujer con hombre al fondo* (1997) serves as such an example of "inversion of parameters" in cinema. Here female protagonist Cristine reproduces the stereotypes usually attributed to men in patriarchal society. Firstly, she does not want love, she wants sex. She is interested in brief sexual encounters without any stable relationship following them. Her work is the most important while emotions and sentimental life do not matter. Rodriguez protagonist "stares at the masculine bodies in bathing suits walking on the shore", exactly the same way as male characters gazing women

[604] Barbara Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…", *op. cit.,* p. 190.
[605] Ibidem, p. 191.
[606] Ibidem.
[607] Ibidem.

uncontrollably, as if they could not take their eyes off the women in bikini on the beach. The bedroom as well is created as a place of female control, with her position enjoying quick sessions of intercourse with leaving her passive partners unsatisfied. The movie became a literary inversion of the female objectification theory which developed on Mulvey's VPNC, but at the same time has become important because illuminated the working of structure by the application of culturally atypical reverse. If we were to employ objectification theory to Rodriguez's film, *her visual presence* would become the reverse of primarily assumption where "his visual presence tends to work against the development of a storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation".[608] Further "woman's legs and face" would be replaced by "the man's muscular biceps, abs and buttocks".[609] As Zecchi sums, Cristine as a character "embodies what psychoanalysis considers an oxymoron: the female fetishist". [610]

Just as women bodies fragmented to become a conversion into tranquilizing fetish in phallocentric discourse, the male body is transformed into an icon without no other meaning, lacking any depth.[611] In this way it is "feminised" as some claim by patriarchal norms, and all these denaturalize traditional gender roles in cinema. Usage of this strategy, for Schorr and creation of the female fetishist is in effect a replacement of fetish or "mere substitution of one form of sexism for another".[612] What is more, as was argued and criticised by feminists in mainstream cinema, by transformation of male body into the spectacle film reinforces the criticised concept of subject-object dichotomy. Thus, the case of *Retrato de mujer con hombre al fondo* seems to portray a banal inversion of gender roles with no significant improvement in questions of gender quality, even if such an inversion carries undeniable potential to provoke valuable estrangement of cultural "normality".[613]

The second section of Spanish female-auteurs analysed by Zecchi, addresses the topic of the ageing body, both male and female with exposing the 'mature' woman who is generally forgotten in mainstream cinema. In Spanish cinema her body and her desires become visible. Her desirability is illustrated by a younger partner who functions as the essential instrument that demonstrates this specific, socially invisible or rejected desirability. A great success of the bestselling novel *Look At Me! The Challenge of the Older Woman/ - ¡Mírame! El reto de la*

[608] Barbara Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…", *op. cit.,* p. 191.
[609] Ibidem.
[610]Ibidem.
[611] Ibidem, pp.191-192.
[612] Ibidem, p. 192.
[613] Barbara Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…", *op. cit.,* p. 192.

mujer madura (2007) in Spain and further fame of the film based on the novel, directed by Gerardo Herrero's *An Invisible Woman/Una mujer invisible* (2007) became successful examples of this unseeable issue. Thanks to them came television programmes which provoked unprecedented attention to the topic of aging women in Spanish media. Paradoxically, they highlighted and made invisible woman visible in interviews, criticism, press, and magazines bringing the controversial double-standard of aging to be widely discussed in public. This temporality of woman as image, is confronted by Spanish women directors with regards to their sexuality as a narrative issue. They illustrate it by a "young male to reinforce the statement that a middle-aged woman who can still be sexually desirable. Additionally, by depicting older males on screen that are no longer desirable to females".[614] Additionally, Spanish female directors challenge the myth that "older men have undeniable sexual appeal, often condemning their characters" in a process which Zecchi designates as "revengeful asexualisation, a metonymical castration".[615]

Josefina Molina focuses on this topic intensely and challenges the common belief that "ageing does not decrease men's attractiveness as it does for women" in her two films: *The Most Natural Thing* / *Lo más natural/* (1991) and *Lola Goes to The Port s* / *La Lola se va a los puertos* (1993). In both, younger man falls madly in love with an older woman. In *The Most Natural Thing* the plot is based on the divorce of a mature couple that leads to two new relationships, both with younger partners. Clara (Charo López), being in her forties begins dating with Andres (Miguel Bose) who is in his thirties. Clara's ex-husband is in his fifties and falls in love with a woman twenty years younger than him. Molina contrasts both relationships to demonstrate that even though they are kind of abstractive symmetry, they bring opposite connotations in the social context. While the storyline of her ex-husband and young lover is "completely natural" as the title implies: *the most natural thing*, Clara and Andres together are considered as unnatural and unusual sexual combination by mainstream audiences. Here, Molina challenges this heavily coded norm and assigns the notion of *most natural* to the less traditional relationship that is created as more successful and passionate.

As for depiction of female visual pleasure, the camera "does reveal that an older woman experiences desire in front of the beauty of a naked male body, but nothing is said about the beauty of the body of an ageing woman".[616] That is why, Molina's trial to challenge the

[614] Ibidem.
[615] Ibidem.
[616] Barbara Zecchi, "Women filming the male body…", *op. cit.*, p. 194.

cinematic status quo is still limited and ambivalent: while her films dare to expose cultural norms on female aging and desire, she does not manage to empower sexually her mature protagonists.

In sum, Spanish women directors tend to counterbalance the injustice of cultural norms regarding female visual pleasure and desire, by reversing the common perspective of asymmetrical aging and displaying that biology has favored women, who do not need an erection for intercourse. Female authored cinema is attempting as well to present the female desirability and desire as active, regardless of temporality of Hollywood stardom, together with 'didactic' trials to portray female sexual pleasure the way that can finally bring identification to female audiences and be regarded as closer to female sexual reality.

3.5.6. Céline Sciamma, *Portrait of A Lady on Fire.*

As professor of film Jane Gaines stresses, the first objections to the film theory tensions based on blinding heterosexual construct of masculine/feminine opposition came with lesbian feminists critics sharp response who argued that binary theory "cancelled the lesbian spectator whose viewing pleasure could never be constructed as anything like male voyeurism". Positing a lesbian spectator would significantly change the trajectory of the gaze theory and lesbian looks in cinema have brought such a change in looking. They lead us to see how the eroticised female star body might not just function as the object, but what Gaines calls the visual objective of another female gaze.

Phenomenon of Céline Sciamma and charisma following her every movie which is infused with specifically female looking reached its peak with her fourth film *Portrait of A Lady on Fire.* Premiered at Cannes Film Festival in 2019 was thought to be the film of the festival top prize for a woman, happening the second time after *The Piano* success in 1993. Sciamma finally walked off with the Best Screenplay[617] but has become the first woman to ever win the Queer Palm, accompanied by "standing ovations, glowing reviews, and the sort of prelease buzz you can't buy".[618] At the time when both audiences and producers are calling for real gender

[617] Jason Solomons, "Céline Sciamma: The world's most important filmmaker**",** accessed on: January 27, 2023, available at: https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/celine-sciamma-the-worlds-most-important-film-maker/
[618] Ibidem.

representations[619], she claims proudly: "I am saving the world"[620] by focusing on the subject of womanhood and specificity of its gaze, this time portraying erotic female gaze and lesbian desire. Jason Solomons, British film critic notes that she has become an icon to a new generation of moviegoers, inspiring even a t-shit, and being welcomed as a rock star when her *Petite Maman* was screened at the London Film Festival: "I can't recall seeing anything quite like it for a film director, not even Tarantino".[621] Solomons explains reasons of her fame:

Her championing of female-driven movies and, in her own work, delivering films about gender, sexuality, female friendship and love, have made her a feminist icon to a new generation of filmgoers and film critics, of all genders, both in France and around the world. Her name is emblazoned on the Girls on Tops t-shirts series, alongside her own heroes such as Agnès Varda and Jodie Foster, and fans wear these with pride.[622]

Encompassing all her work he states: "I don't think there's more important film-maker in the world right now than Céline Sciamma".[623] He stresses that it seems still too early for her to win awards, even though her *Portrait* was nominated at major ceremonies in 2019 and 2020. Because of coded cinematic and festival mentality "It was the same story" she says, "the women get nominated, but the men win. If I didn't call this out for what it was, pure gender bias, things would never change".[624]

Portrait of A Lady on Fire has become Sciamma major breakthrough, where she portrays a story of a passionate lesbian love affair in 18th Brittany, between a hired bohemian young artist Marianne (Noémie Merlant), and aristocratic female Héloïse to be painted by her (played by Adèle Haenel, Sciamma ex-partner). Like her previous films *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011) , *Portrait of A Lady on Fire*, orbits around intense looking. The story evolves at times when female painters could only paint women, and *Portrait* has become her "response to missing images" in cinema. The film was to be a pean to the female gaze. As the director claims: "Female topics have been despised and ignored for so long, so, in cinema, we've been missing insight and images, we've

[619] Peter Debruge, "Film Review: 'Portrait of a lady on Fire'", accessed on: 25 January 20223, available at: http://variety.com/2019/film/reviews/portrait-of-the-lady-on-fire-review-1203220399/

[620] Rachel Syme, "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" Is More Than a "Manifesto on the Female Gaze", accessed on 25 January 2023, available at: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire-is-more-than-a-manifesto-on-the-female-gaze?utm_source=onsite-share&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=onsite-share&utm_brand=the-new-yorker

[621] Jason Solomons, "Céline Sciamma: The world's most important filmmaker**",** accessed on: January 27, 2023, available at: https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/celine-sciamma-the-worlds-most-important-film-maker/

[622] Ibidem.

[623] Ibidem.

[624] Jason Solomons, "Céline Sciamma: The world's most important filmmaker**",** accessed on: January 27, 2023, available at: https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/celine-sciamma-the-worlds-most-important-film-maker/

been missing charisma, so many things".[625] Institutive for Sciamma is how women look, desire and create together with leaving space for the audience to find their own experience in her movies.[626] "It is my humanity" as she says and states that her "take on 'feminism' should not even be called that" but also feels that there is a "cultural shift in feminism now".[627] Directed by a woman, shot by woman and starring almost exclusively by women the movie's "love story is almost secondary to the film's fixation on the act of looking, of really *seeing* another person, both literally and figuratively", as stresses Rachel Handler.[628] Sciamma says in interview, "part of pleasure, part of excitement, is being part of the brain of the film".[629] She wanted to invent a female painter, as there were lots of women painters at the late 18th century, and based it on accurate research and sociology but without intention of portraying a destiny of a particular woman, and without an illusionary happy ending of ending up together. She made the audience to respect the fact that it is not possible for them to be together, and for Sciamma this fact makes a new kind of story as well.[630]

The gaze is the biggest part of the movie creating erotic tension that hoovers everywhere, women are looking at each other, painting each other, female-director filming these women, the gaze informing the sex scene, slow rhythm and breathing.[631] While many directors depicting lesbian romance accentuate the taboo of the same sex love, Sciamma is interested neither in shock nor shame but in the force of visual pleasure and desire together with specific bonds that form it and make it happen. Filming of sex scenes and nudity with specific, planned modesty, sidesteps cinematic stimulating conventions. The only "official sex scene" involves showing fingers in an armpit rubbing drugs, and later the only shot we see Héloïse's full nude body stretched on the bed with a small mirror blocking her pubis while Marianne gazes at her own reflection in the mirror and sketches a self-portrait.[632] This relative modesty of the film feels, in part as claims Syme,

[625] Ibidem, p. 5.
[626] Maycock cited in Jason Solomons, "Céline Sciamma: The world's most important filmmaker**",** accessed on: January 27, 2023, available at: https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/celine-sciamma-the-worlds-most-important-film-maker/
[627] Ibidem.
[628] Rachel Handler, "The Women Behind *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* Believe Their Movie Can Save the World", accessed on 27 January 2023, p. 3, available at: https://www.vulture.com/2020/03/portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire-q-and-a-cline-sciamma-adle-haenel.html
[629] Ibidem.
[630]Ibidem.
[631] Rachel Syme, "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" Is More Than a "Manifesto on the Female Gaze", accessed on 25 January 2023, available at: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire-is-more-than-a-manifesto-on-the-female-gaze?utm_source=onsite
share&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=onsite-share&utm_brand=the-new-yorker
[632] Ibidem.

like a "criticism to another acclaimed French lesbian romance, 2013's *Blue Is the Warmest Color*, whose male director included a six-minute sex scene that the female stars later said they found demeaning to film".[633] Sciamma story is about desire, but used as a means to personal growth and creation of sense of one's own self-worth, without a fatalist perspective and showing that although this leaves us exposed and vulnerable, it defies solitude, as stresses Ela Bittencourt.[634] What is more, as she adds it is "the muse speaking up that sets off the transformation of the relationship between her and the artist into a true meeting of the minds, which can then bloom into passion".[635]

Sciamma herself calls *Portrait* a "manifesto about female gaze" and one cannot deny that she subverts the male perspective if favor of feminine ways of looking. Men are hardly visible at all and even when they appear we see their backs or faces out of the focus. As it was said before, in case of Spanish cinema, *Portrait* joins the style of masculine extreme invisibility, often with a feeling of masculine intrusion. Sciamma story is built out of female glances and stares, as stresses Rachel Syme and disagrees with the director's statement:

"manifesto" seems too didactic a term for "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" 's finespun romance and delicate, transfixing tableaux, and "female gaze"—a scholarly term worn out from overuse—is inadequate shorthand for its thorough exploration of the entanglements between artistic creation and burgeoning love, between memory and ambition and freedom. The film is about the erotic, electric connection between women when they find their desire for creative experience fulfilled in each other, but it is equally about the powers of art to validate, preserve, and console after a romance is over.[636]

Generally, Sciamma-mania can be considered as well from the point of rare radical women's autonomy in female-authored cinema, which few directors managed to embrace and where "women take the reins and isolation becomes a measure of their freedom" as stresses Bittencourt.[637] Feeling the great support and appreciation of her images by the audience the director says that "We aren't going to disappear or disappoint them. This time, we will not be erased".[638]

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[633] Rachel Syme, "Portrait of a Lady…", *op. cit.*

[634] Ela Bittencourt, "Portrait of a Lady on Fire: Daring to See", June 23, 2020, p. 2, accessed on: 26 January 2023, available at: https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/6991-portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire-daring-to-see

[635] Ibidem.

[636] Ibidem, pp. 2-3.

[637] Ela Bittencourt, "Portrait of a Lady on Fire: Daring to See", June 23, 2020, p. 2, accessed on: 26 January 2023, available at: https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/6991-portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire-daring-to-see

[638] Jason Solomons, "Céline Sciamma: The world's most important filmmaker**",** accessed on: January 27, 2023, available at: https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/celine-sciamma-the-worlds-most-important-film-maker/

However, praised and acclaimed as "manifesto of female gaze" and "one of the most unforgettable depictions of love foresworn, of lesbian love, of any true love, in cinema",[639] it also brings a critical thought about the female gaze screened in a radical way. An impression of imbalance and ambiguous reflection over erasure of male protagonists, a portrayal of feminine *sisterhood* in an illusionary way[640], as well as director total focus or fixation on female desire depicted as emotional and intellectual journey – often regarded as uniquely female component leads as to accusations of false freedom of the female gaze. As contents Emma Syea, lecturer in philosophy, "By stressing that a female gaze deals in emotions rather than actions, it seems we are in danger of falling back into the trap of the male gaze".[641] For her, moving away from the male gaze, is not "simply a matter of replacing it with the female gaze"[642], exactly as it is presented in *Portrait* since the fashion the female gaze was conceptualized by Sciamma becomes a kind of trap and propagates some stereotypes about female identity. However, one part of the role of the female gaze was accomplished in *Portrait*, namely depiction of "what it feels like to be the object of the gaze" and how to return that gaze defiantly becoming the subject at the same time" [643], as suggests Joey Soloway.

Syea claims that the female gaze is the "relatively new concept and still under-defined", often understood as an empathetic, sensitive, thoughtful and "depicting women as fully-realized individuals with complex inner lives".[644] For her the idea that women are more sensitive, compassionate and caring, and generally better at emotions is long propagated gender stereotype, and a trap of male gaze which limit women to role of supporters, nurtures, organizers and helpers. Thinking from this perspective *Portrait* can be treated the way Robin Blaetz researched and classified some female production as "lyrical erotic meditation".[645] Focus on feeling, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs as well as on the issue how a female gaze tackles objectification has become a kind of obsession for Sciamma. Praised for the way she avoids the kind of thoughtless objectification, for the focus on "the emotional build-up rather than the sex itself" and finally, "eroticization of the character's feelings rather than actor's bodies", as well as some claim "after all, the best depictions of women's bodies are not really about bodies at all, but the experiences

[639] Ela Bittencourt, "Portrait of a Lady on Fire…", *op. cit.*
[640] Conversation with Dr Eduardo Rencurrell Diaz, director and lecturer, about false concept of sisterhood that makes feminism and its filmic depictions of the idea untrustworthy, Havana Film Festival December 2019.
[641] Emma Syea, "The false freedom of the female gaze. Beyond the gendered gaze.", 24 June 2022, *IAI* News, accessed 18 August 2022, available at: https://iai.tv/articles/the-false-freedom-of-the- female-gaze-auid-2163
[642] Ibidem.
[643] Joey Soloway cited in Emma Syea, "The false freedom of the female gaze….", *op. cit.,* p. 2.
[644] Ibidem.
[645] Robin Blaetz (ed.), "Women's Experimental Cinema", *op. cit.,* p. 8.

and emotions attached to them"[646] only proves the lasting obsession about female body objectification, seen as a necessarily negative phenomenon.

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that our understanding of objectification is too simplistic and needs serious revision, otherwise it gets us back again to mind/body prehistoric duality. Since it grew on Mulvey's concept of "woman as image" and "passive object of the male gaze", the objectification theory initially focused on a heterosexual perspective and was proposed by Barbara Frederickson and Tomi Ann Roberts in 1997.[647] But as Nussbaum maintains, there is nothing wrong with "treating each other as objects whilst also respecting each other's humanity" and for her "in matter of objectification context is everything" giving her an example of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* Syea constates negative connotations of objectification:

Pretending that women do not ever engage in objectification themselves not only seems strangely prudish but also works to reinforce gender stereotypes, namely that women do not desire in the same way that men do, that they prioritise the emotional over the physical, and crucially, that to do otherwise would be distinctly un-lady-like. The upshot of this is that depictions of women's sexuality are constrained.(…) Broadening our understanding of objectification will enable us to privilege female desire in all its complexity.[648]

In sum, a rush to distance from the male gaze, makes filmmakers who want to adopt a female gaze to face the risk of separating depictions of physical intimacy, desire, and nudity. Syea argues that "moving away from the male gaze is necessary but it's not clear that trying to create a female counterpart is the best way to do so. A better way forward would be to transcendent the notion of a gaze altogether. (…) Far better to be free to create, than forced to gaze ".[649]

3.6. In search of the female gaze.

Female gaze and women in film, their stories, their histories, and their images have been Mulvey's "longstanding preoccupation*"*, and she returns to all these aspects in *Afterimages* reflecting changes in her perspective and including various films directed by women of colour.

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[646] Emma Syea, "The false freedom of the female gaze. Beyond the gendered gaze.", 24 June 2022, *IAI* News, accessed 18 August 2022, available at: https://iai.tv/articles/the-false-freedom-of-the- female-gaze-auid-2163

[647] Objectification theory, according to Frederickson and Roberts, is a framework that in particular brings into light sexual objectification of women, as the "experience of being treated as a body or collection of body parts valued predominantly for its use or consumption by others. Stripping one of their own bodily agency and sexuality, as well as humanity." Theory also includes objectifying gaze that enables a state of self-objectification. The individual may then restrict social behavior in a way to display themselves as desirable so the "purpose of self-objectification is a response to the anticipation to be objectified." Accessed 21 March 2022, further reading available at: www.en.m.wikipedia.org

[648] Emma Syea, "The false freedom of the female gaze…", 24 June 2022, *IAI* News, accessed 18 August 2022, available at: https://iai.tv/articles/the-false-freedom-of-the- female-gaze-auid-2163

[649] Ibidem.

The preface is illustrated by a photo of a Black protagonist, great-great-mother Nana Peazant played by Sheila Rowbotham from *Daughters of the Dust,* directed by Julie Dash, 1990, and which analysis is included in the book. Mulvey's focus on black female experience and black cinema belongs to what she calls "images of after" or "from after".

However, as she writes in her latest book, almost after fifty years of VPNC publication: "All the essays in Part Two are about films made by women, signaling that an important and radical shift is beginning to overtake cinema".[650] This "beginning" sounds unfortunately disappointing when she comments in documentary of Nina Menkes that little was changed in the female gaze and its cinematic representation, with systems of production and distribution being male dominated within last fifty years.[651] But the films she discusses in *Afterimages* demonstrate that:

When women make films, cinema mutates in their hands and through their eyes. This is not to argue that there is an essential or coherent 'women's cinema' but rather that a 'women-inflected cinema' can take up topics and perspectives hitherto neglected or simply not imaginable by male-dominated culture (...) and to visualize in imagery those 'experiences left mute by culture in the past. [652]

Female gaze today is also a kind of reminder, in Mulvey's words, that "'initial struggle' continues, and broadens out beyond the question of women's equality".[653] Since VPNC was published female gaze went a long and complicated evolution both in theory and in practice becoming one of the most used perspectives to analyze visual and filmic productions. With female discussed as a passive spectacle, as an active gazer and spectator, as female director having its own voice, agency and understanding of sexuality presented, or women groups of writing scrips which position female characters in the center of plots. There was a turn in feminist perspective from analyses of women as spectacle to women in melodrama which "confirmed the extent to which spectatorship was gendered"[654], later came digital technology changing analyses of film spectatorship. Subsequently, the whiteness of the female gaze that came into discussion the 1980s and 1990s with bell hooks pointing out that "Hollywood's all-encompassing whiteness had never been addressed by white feminist theory"[655] as Mulvey recalls and adds that "to address the question of racism would have demanded a much more

[650] Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages…, op. cit.,* p. 10.
[651] Nina Menkes, *Brainwashed…, op. cit.*
[652] Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages…, op. cit.,* pp. 11-13.
[653] Ibidem. p. 14.
[654] Ibidem. p. 243.
[655] Ibidem. p. 18.

historically informed and serious argument"[656] at the time of essay writing. Considering reasons for invisibility and lack of Black women experience representation within Western European cinema or visual art, it is affected by white people's lack of connection with Black experience and their problems, as artist Katarzyna Kozyra suggests during a conversation about Black female gaze.[657]

What needs to be stressed, since female gaze in cinematic production was often criticized for application of masculine stereotypes and patriarchy as well as producing just reversal of objectification with male figure as the object of the female gaze, the process is still ongoing, and it can be claimed that female directors are still in search of the female gaze. Additionally, as a female director April Mullen comments how "the press' recent focus on her gender made her newly consider the female gaze".[658] She writes:

Over the past 20 years, in all forms, in all moments, I've been focused on creating. (...) Over the past year, I've found myself suddenly being labeled a "female filmmaker," part of an awareness campaign that singles out women in film and TV in order to equalize their severe underrepresentation in the industry.(...) Until very recently, I thought of myself simply as a filmmaker. There was no gender attached to every press article or headline about me. Maybe I was naive not to look around or outside of my work, but I never saw myself as a "female" filmmaker.[659]

The answer about the female gaze come with more questions she has asked herself:

What is the female gaze? And why is it that I don't like differentiating myself as a woman? Could it be that over the years I have been told time and time again in convoluted ways that I needed to "fit in" and suppress my female essence while on set with more than 200 men? Have I been cutting myself and my female voice short in order to succeed in this very male-dominated industry?[660]

It is worth to mention recent female initiatives like #reclaimtheframe which celebrated twenty years on 8th March 2023 and was founded by a female director Mia Bays as a primary initiative called #BirdsEyeView to promote female gaze in production and develop conscious spectatorship level, has finally become supported by British Film Institute. It also promotes female research, screenings, discussions, and female writings for cinematic productions. Other female cinematic initiatives are #herartslab, #wftv_uk Women in Film & TV UK, or www.femalegazeband.com/link-garden show the importance of the female gaze trend.

[656] Ibidem. p. 243.
[657] Conversation with visual artists Katarzyna Kozyra at Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation, Warsaw, June 2019.
[658] April Mullen, "How Being Called a 'Female Filmmaker' Helped Me Understand the Future of Cinema", posted April 17, 2017, accessed January 2023, available at: https://www.talkhouse.com/female-filmmaker-understand-future-cinema/
[659] Ibidem.
[660] Ibidem.

Finally, in 1990s came the discussion about transgender and queer gaze concepts, provoked by the binary male gaze concept which brough firstly in 1970s and 1980s homosexual voices of lesbians and gays into the light. Mulvey also stresses that when she was writing the essay she did not know for example about "the male panic sparked by Rudolf Valentino in 1920s"[661] and looking back she says: "I seem to have missed a lot of possible nuances in the argument, especially where a potential female or lesbian spectator is concerned".[662] As she finally explains the metaphor of the book title *Afterimages,* as the concept of the use of cinema not applied simply to women but to everyone, "to all groups of the culturally oppressed."[663] And maybe today, after all that has been criticised for fifty years as "blind spots" in Mulvey concepts, we are closer than ever to the concept of the "matrixial gaze" referring to trans-subjectivity and coined in 1999 by an artist and philosopher Bracha Ettinger in her book *The Matrixial Borderspace*.[664] However, the way to liberated, de-codified female gaze and other genders cinematic freedom looks long, according to the recent documentary of Nina Menkes *Brainwashed. Sex-Camera-Power* released in 2022, a movie which presents how strong is still in operation the "real impact of the male gaze" in cinema.[665]

3.7. Summary

Chapter presents the most important theoretical responses to the Mulvey's concept of dominant heterosexual male gaze in cinema and masculinization of female spectator as a result, which excluded existence of female visual pleasure and female voyeurism. The female gaze, which was assumed by Mulvey as passive and adapted to patriarchal standards of looking, fulfilling male sexual fantasies, has become a very controversial assumption, and opened the space for very important discussions concerning both the female desire and the desire itself. Female scopophilia and female voyeurism appeared as separate fields of reflection and finally enter the process of normalization. Culturally produced masculine expectations towards visual representations of femininity described by Mulvey, together with psychoanalytic assumptions and the lack of counterbalance in female gaze production in the 1970s made female desire invisible. Mulvey brough this Western assumed female passivity and invisibility into lights.

[661] Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages…, op. cit.,* p. 246.
[662] Ibidem, p. 244.
[663] Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages…, op. cit.,* p. 15.
[664] Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2006.
[665] Nina Menkes, *Brainwashed…, op. cit.*

Thus, VPNC has become an impulse to discuss and present overlooked and suppressed female erotic imagination in cinema. With these came the polemics about refused female visual pleasure, female sexual mobility, with the reverse proposals of man functioning as image, an eroticized object of the female gaze, and male body being treated as fetish for female viewers. Polemics about a man as spectacle and sexual object, provoked by Mulvey's VPNC, brought some balance into analyses of masculine images and archetypes produced in cinema. It also illuminated the critique of the consequences of wide psychoanalytic perspective usage, which needs to find a way out to escape from the phallocentric sign that still determines the visual culture, producing fetishistic images of men and women. Various analyses of films prove that trials of depicting female visual pleasure and desire causes many problems. Finally, chapter demonstrates how visual pleasure politics, thanks to female activism, both in visual theory and film practice, have influenced the change within the social permission to see and to produce filmic representation of women who own their desire and have an agency in visual pleasure field.

Chapter IV

Beyond Binarism. Non-heteronormative Ways of Looking and Fluid Identities

4.1. Importance of sexual (in)difference and transdiscursive disappointment.

The concept of sexual difference based on heterosexual Freudian model and implemented by Mulvey to cinematic perspective of looking, has become one of the central points of polemics regarding the process of cinematic identification. Her assumption about binary looking and sexual difference based on male/female assumptions concerning desire, evoked numerous protests from other sexual representatives who treated their exclusion as hegemonic, oppressive, and exclusive for forms of the gaze not based on binary gender identification and critique of desire, attached to the gaze, which refers exclusively to sexual binary difference.

All these disappointments have apprised the re-evaluation of the binary ways of looking and pleasure involved in male/female scheme of desire presented on the screen which effected in transdiscursive discussion that brought new ways of analysis to the stage of filmic and visual studies. The usage of psychoanalytical line of thinking with its heterosexual, binary pattern was considered as reducing, limited, ignorant, and offensive, and in result this denial of diverse sexual differences in film representation and identification has become the field of controversy for the next few decades. There came the counter discussion illuminating homosexual gaze both male and female, with perspectives which further led to formulation of transgender and queer concept.

"Afterthought on Queer Opacity" by Nicholas de Villiers, are of direct influence by Mulvey's "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'", where he illuminates his impression by VPNC and points that it has become so productive in a transdiscursive way thanks to numerous disappointments it generated. All these discontents have shifted the meanings of public and private as well as influenced the transition of a politics in a neoliberal era with inclusion and legalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual. transgender, and queer visibility or even commercialization of them.[666] Villiers opens his analysis of contemporary homosexual celebrities referring to Mulvey's and her transdiscursive author function:

Yet the proof that Mulvey's original text was truly transdiscursive can be seen in the way these lingering questions, and possibly disappointing answers about "transvestite" spectatorship, along with other "lines of thought" (if not, Steven Shaviro laments, "lines of flight"), have been so productive for the

[666] Nicholas de Villiers, "Afterthoughts on Queer Opacity", *Invisible Culture. An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* (IVC), Issue 22: *Opacity*, published online: April 18, 2015, accessed: May 2021, available at: https://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/afterthought-on-queer-opacity/

fields of feminist psychoanalytic film theory and queer film theory (see, for example, Ellis Hanson's introduction to Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film). In this way, I actually appreciate the result of the disappointment.[667]

In his article, written as a response to questions regarding his limited focus on queer white men in his book *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes and Warhol*, Villers lingers over the "meaning and uses of *disappointment* as it relates to newer and more diverse examples of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer tactics of "opacity" that offer alternatives to the confessional metaphor of coming out of the closet" making his work on queer opacity a comparable disappointment, in a positive transdiscursive sense, similar to one that VPNC generated. He writes, referring to the overwhelming and demanding transparency of the gaze:

I find such opacity remarkably "queer" as a means of resisting both confession and homophobia; I suggest that homophobia can involve anxiously insisting on knowing rather than refusing to know about the sexuality of gay people, demanding transparency to the gaze of the interrogator, indicating a fear of the hidden and the unknown.[668]

Villiers's concept of queer opacity has become, similarly to Mulvey's male gaze and its binary assumption, provocative idea in the time of pressure for "coming out of the closet" and transparency of the gaze. His refusal that "remakes visibility and regimes of recognition outside of standarisation" has become a critical trans resistance and an alternative to the hegemonic tendency of "the closet", which will be discussed further in the chapter. [669]

Due to this controversial approach, the theories of cinematic binary gendered identification were verified, problematized, and analyzed with more scrutiny taking into consideration other genders perspectives. Apart from homonormative re-analyses of the gaze, visual pleasure and cinematic identification came criticism of gendered body identification concept. One of such attempts was that of Anne Friedberg in 1990 who reviews the identification processes based on Freudian scheme and formulates a criticism of restrictions which Mulvey incorporated.[670] She notes that the most overriding difficulties came with the structure of relations and "variables of

[667] Nicholas de Villiers, "Afterthoughts on Queer Opacity", *op. cit.*
[668] Ibidem.
[669] Ibidem.
[670] Anne Friedberg, "A Denial of Difference: Theories of Cinematic Identification" in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Routledge 1990, pp. 36-45.

gendered body identification" and points out to the fact that "gendering of identification has remained the site of most debates in feminist film theory".[671] Referring to Mulvey she writes:

The codification of pre-existing "patterns of fascination" in narrative cinema structure the "look" in a split between male-as bearer-of-the-look and female-as-object-of-the-look. In order to accept her account – which details the dual pleasures of voyeuristic scoptophilia and narcissistic identification - the question remains: is the female spectator forced to identify with the male protagonist? (...) [672]

According to her, identification seems to be focused on recognition of a human form and bodies, which does not have to be centered as a gendered interaction, and all these offer more fluid, cross-special displacements. Here she brings a range of examples of "non-human" stars from Lessie to Yoda concluding that their "star quality" is built upon different paradigms and that the "human form is not required for identification".[673] As she claims, the pleasures offered by them are "precisely the denial: the star's body is not the subject's body, nor his, or hers. This might explain the fascination with the non-human in cinema, a projection into NOT self, a bestial other".[674]

Friedberg claims that gendered questions enhance cinematic identification and power of operations of cinematic apparatus. She sees identification as recognition and in her analyses argues that the viewer's pleasure is cross-special, detached from the objects looked at and depending on insights, fantasies and other unconscious mechanisms which are not directly connected to transmitted cultural codes and "right values". She also opposes the introjective identification[675] based on incorporation and the assumption of close relation of viewing and becoming. She concludes writing about cinematic censorship that the fear of the ideological effects of "wrong values" and fear of identification with them seem to be a great threat of the cinema.

In the context of the fear also alternative cinema practices that pose "positive" identification with "improved" ego ideals are criticized, which she claims totally fails to realize the basic operation of identification. For Friedberg, the creation of more realistic, less stereotyped

671 Ibidem, p. 41.
672 Ibidem.
673 Ibidem, p. 42.
674 Ibidem.
675 *Introjective Identification* description: comes form psychoanalytical concept "where a person finds another person atracttive in some way, then they will often take a part of that other and introject that part into their ego. In this way, they become more like the admired person. Also, having a part of that person in them, they feel closer to them and usually like to be phisically and emotionally closer to them, perhaps for fear of distance leading to the introjected part (…) being lost.", accessed: June 20, 2022, available at: www.changingminds.org/disciplines/psychoanalysis/concepts/introjective_identification.htm

ordinary cinematic characters, and moving away from binary gendered gods and goddesses, implies the same process of identification.[676] This phenomenon especially works as a disavowal, which is often based on unconscious system of fears at the level of transgressive or historically regarded long as "deviant", non-heteronormative representations produced, which will be presented further in this chapter.

4.2. Homosexual Masculinity Dilemma

4.2.1. Man as homosexual erotic spectacle.

Creating representations of male homosexual characters as non-criminalised protagonists in mainstream cinema was cobbled roughly. Pathologizing the homosexuality and classifying it as deviation by the American Psychiatry Association has had severe cultural consequences and has gone through an obsessive "chase" in laws, psychology and subsequently stigmatisation and mockery in widely considered culture. Its decriminalisation was a painful and long process, and which consequences are still present in social stereotypes still happen to influence some filmic unrealistic or deviant representations.

One of the results of reflection over VPNC was the criticism of a heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy and the analysis of a male "homosocial" phenomenon in culture and sociology – the term coined by Eva Kosofsky Sedgwick who developed criticism of both categories.[677] Sedgwick was not referring to cinema in her thought, but her ideas entered the field in various ways and influenced further discussion about representations of both heterosexual and homosexual male characters.

Over the decade after Mulvey's VPNC numerous books and articles appeared discussing the images of women circulating in cinematic fields. But most of them, as Steve Neale claims, were taking their basis on Mulvey's search to "demonstrate the extent to which the psychic mechanisms cinema has basically involved, are profoundly patriarchal, and the extent to which images of women mainstream film has produced lie at the heart of those mechanisms".[678] Among these debates, there were discussions of sexuality and its representations which "has

676 Anne Friedberg, "A Denial of Difference…", *op. cit.,* p. 44.
677 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950- 2009) – was an American academic scholar in the fields on gender studies, queer theory and critical theory. She is perhaps best known as one of the originators of Queer Theory. Available at: www.evekosofskysedgwick.net
678 Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle. Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema", *Screen*, Vol. 24 No. 6, 1983, p. 253.

tended overwhelmingly to center on the representation of women"[679], as Neale points out. He claims, polemizing with Mulvey, that masculinity as spectacle in film started to be discussed officially in homosexual terms within the Gay Movement but "derived many of its basics tenets from Mulvey's article".[680] All these provoked the questions and considerations about homosexual male ways of looking and dominant images re-produced. As he notes, researching the undiscussed phenomenon of the heteronormative masculinity as a spectacle in mainstream cinema, "Only within the Gay Movement have there appeared specific discussions of the representation of men (…) Most of these, as far as I am aware, have centered on the representations and stereotypes of gay men".[681]

His analysis of this gap embraces the time up to 1983, but its great importance lies in the opening the space for further reflection:

Both within the Women's Movement and the Gay Movement, there is an important sense in which the images and functions of heterosexual masculinity within mainstream cinema have been left undiscussed. Heterosexual masculinity has been identified as a structuring norm in relation both to images of women and gay men. It has to that extent been profoundly problematised, rendered visible. But it has rarely been discussed and analysed as such. Outside these movements, it has been discussed even less. It is thus very rare to find analyses that seek to specify in detail, in relation to particular films or groups of films, how heterosexual masculinity is inscribed and the mechanisms, pressures and contradictions that inscription may involve.[682]

Using Laura Mulvey's article as central, structuring reference point of analysis, Neal research embraces identification, looking process and men functioning as a spectacle–from a male perspective, from a masculine point of view. He poses questions on how Mulvey's concepts apply directly or indirectly to produced images of men, and how they function if applied to a male spectator. With the main aim not to challenge Mulvey's theses but to open new polemics "within the framework of her arguments and remarks for a consideration of the representation of masculinity as it can be said to relate to the basic characteristics and conventions of the cinematic institution".[683]

In Neale's analysis of identification, referring to John Ellis' book *Visible Fictions*, which was written under the influence Mulvey's essay, Ellis draws on Mulvey's arguments and extends

[679] Ibidem.
680 Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle…", *op. cit.,* p. 253.
681 Ibidem.
682 Ibidem, p. 254.
683 Ibidem., p. 254.

the quality of some of her theses which she puts forward *vis-à-vis* gender and he also argues that desire itself is fluid, mobile, and constantly transgressing identities, roles and positions, so cinema draws and involves many forms of desire, so "identification is never simply a matter of men identifying with male figures on the screen and women identifying with female figures".[684] For him identification involves multiple sense of seeing including narcissistic identification, with the image and the "constituent parts of the spectator's own psyche" parading before him or her, which we can apply to visual pleasure identification, both feminine and masculine. And as the Other is concerned, a source of contemplation is involved. So, the image becomes the source of both, narcissistic process and the source of drives, desire for the other as object-oriented process.[685]

Analysis of David N. Rodowick about the male star image, has become famous especially in terms of his polemics with Mulvey, even is his idea was "neither to completely sustain nor subvert Mulvey's argument, but rather to illuminate a series of assumptions and a system of oppositions that organize her discussion of sexual difference and mechanisms of visual pleasure in film".[686] He claims that Mulvey is less concerned with problems of textual analysis than with the definitions of structures of identification and mechanisms of pleasure and unpleasure that accompany them.[687] Analyzing the male star in Mulvey's terms, Rodowick writes:

Mulvey discusses the male star as an object of the look but denies him the function of erotic object. Because Mulvey conceives the look to be essentially active in its aims, identification with the male protagonist is only considered from a point of view which associates it with a sense of omnipotence, of assuming control of the narrative. She makes no differentiation between identification and the object choice in which sexual aims may be directed towards the male figure, nor does she consider the significance of authority in the male figure from the point of view of an economy of masochism.[688]

He claims that Mulvey schema collapses when we ask about the possibility of "female unconscious", which becomes a question mark for her essay, and it is because the potential for feminine desire and female subjectivity can only be defined (according to her) by a feminist counter-cinema that should arise through the negation of Hollywood codes of male looking and male visual pleasure.[689] Taking into account the Rodowick's argument, it is not surprising that

684 Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle…", *op. cit.,* p. 254.
685 Steve Neale after John Ellis, in "Masculinity as Spectacle. Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema" in *Feminism and Film,* ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 255.
686 David N. Rodowick, "The Difficulty of Difference" in *Feminism and Film,* ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford 2000, p. 185.
687 Ibidem, p. 186.
688 Ibidem.
689 Ibidem, p. 196.

male genres and films involve constantly sado-masochistic themes, scenes and fantasies of heroes to be marked as objects of erotic gaze. Looking at the male can be structured around a male figure as a spectacle and a pleasure, including his walk, move, ride, fight, or violent brutality. This look at the male produces as much anxiety as the look at the female as Neale points out, and it seems that in heterosexual and patriarchal codes, the "male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed".[690]

As for Neale, he also turns to Mulvey's remarks about the glamorous male movie star and finds it worth extending and illustrating her point of view about the male protagonist, and the extent to which his image is dependent upon narcissistic fantasies of the "more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego".[691] He claims that it is easy to find examples of films in which all these fantasies are heavily present, and in which a male hero is powerful and unstoppable to astonishing degree. So, when we think about the Clint Eastwood characters, Tom Cruise protagonists, the *Mad Max* films, the *James Bond* series, the Steve Reeves epics *Superman,* all westerns, gangster or adventure films, a male hero's power is plunged in narcissistic images and authority, almost godlike. But the male body is also often disqualified as an object of erotic contemplation and desire which can be marked in terms of repression, involving damage and sadism.[692]

It must be stressed that the mainstream cinema, with its assumption of a male norm, perspective, and look, constantly takes women and the female image as its main object of investigation. It rarely investigates a man and the male image at the same level of scrutiny as women who after Freud have always been presented as a problem, a source of anxiety and obsessive inquiry. "Where women are investigated, men are tested. Masculinity as an ideal, is implicitly known. Femininity is by contrast, a mystery. This is one of the reasons why the representation of masculinity both inside and outside of the cinema, has been so rarely discussed" [693] concludes Neale.

690 Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle. Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema", *Screen*, Vol. 24 No. 6, 1983, p. 258.
691 Ibidem, p. 256.
692 Ibidem, p. 258.
693 Ibidem, p. 264.

4.2.2. Pleasure, ambivalence, and *detachability* of the gaze. Tom Cruise fluid persona.

The phenomenon of a homosexual man functioning as a spectacle and a fetish for both men and women started to be explored in the 1970 when women were deprived of looking at a male nude and *Playgirl* magazine was issued as a counterbalance to *Playboy.* This way the male homosexuality became a visual pleasure for both male and female readers of fashion magazines, primarily Italian ones, which was researched and discussed in feminism tracing first the absence and later the gendered overlapping of female visual pleasure in official visual publications and film production. In photography for example, Robert Mapplethorpe, an American photographer, was treated for a long time as a pornographer with his homosexual cross-race explicit and fetishistic shots of a black male nude, while today his photos serve to all genders, despite the fact that he is still heavily censored and rarely exhibited for wide audiences.

The criticism of a binary, heterosexual gaze assumed as a norm takes its roots in the psychoanalytical approach applied in Mulvey's VPNC and later in the feminist film theory, which was followed by the exploration of other genders with fluid pleasure concept introduced. The identification with the pleasure presented on the screen has become one of the mostly discussed topics in homosexual circles, both by male directors and male gaze film theorists. Isaac Julien *Looking for Langston* (1989) 40 min movie, that will be presented further among racial gaze issues, was made as a direct inspiration and Isaac fascination rooted in Mulvey's concepts of VPNC. An official webpage of the artist and filmmaker describes the movie:

Looking for Langston is a lyrical exploration - and recreation - of the private world of poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist Langston Hughes (1902 - 1967) and his fellow black artists and writers who formed the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s. Directed by Julien while he was a member of Sankofa Film and Video Collective, and assisted by the film critic and curator Mark Nash, who worked on the original archival and film research, the 1989 film is a landmark in the exploration of artistic expression, the nature of desire and the reciprocity of the gaze, and would become the hallmark of what B. Ruby Rich named New Queer Cinema.[694]

Making *Langston* was a double transgression, and has become an awesome, vivid homosexual pleasure representation embracing a trans-race provocation with exposure of homoerotic male, cross raced desire, identification across gender, race, time, and space. Considered as a touchstone for African American Studies has been widely taught in North American Universities,

694 Isaac Julien Studio, Artworks 1989/2017 *Looking for Langston* Film, Installation Views and Photographic Exhibitions, available at: https://www.isaacjulien.com/projects/looking-for-langston/, accessed: June 23, 2022.

art schools and colleges as well as screened, exhibited and published worldwide as an iconic photography work with rare archival materials for nearly 30 years.[695]

Desire and fantasy interfere here so closely with the visual diegesis of the film that Julien's own ga(y)ze proves the mobility of the gaze in fantasy. *Langston* successfully unpacks and complicates the relationship which the eye has with what it sees on a screen, not only within a gay male context. It proves the detachability of the gaze and thus the complex relationship between subjects. One can be trapped outside the fantasy of homosexual love, with pleasure and gaze or their ga(y)ze that become fluid. Corporeographies of the dancing bodies which "mingle," "interweave," and "merge into each other"— do not stop there.[696] All boundaries of the masculine body are blurred, opening not only their own borders but shifting and enabling our identification with interracial homoerotic relations, fantasy, and touch.

The director of photography working with Isaac Julien on *Langston* and later on his other films is a woman, Nina Kellgren. Julien referred to her work during the celebration of Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure at 40* in British Film Institute in 2015: "I certainly learned from Laura that a means of ensuring that male protagonists look desirable is to work closely with a (straight) woman director of photography – hence my work with Nina Kellgren on *Looking for Langston* (1989) and other films".[697] This appreciation of a female gaze in shooting a homoerotic desire by a male filmmaker is incredibly important and proves that the look itself for representations of sexuality is something far more complex and dependent on various elusive factors different than binary gender division.[698]

Visual pleasure and its ambivalence of can be also illustrated by Tom Cruise transgressive persona who serves for both heterosexual and homosexual audiences. He has become one of the most successful stars of the 1980s and 1990s, and still remains the important Hollywood personality, even if a controversial one. Cruise became famous in an epoch which started to redefine the terms of masculinity and his protagonists address the anxieties surrounding the

695 Synopsis of *Looking for Langston*, accessed: May 3, 2020, available at: https://www.isaacjulien.com/projects/looking-for-langston/

696 Omar Daou, *The Male Gayze: Queer Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, accessed: May 19, 2020, available at: https://www.scribd.com/document/495572331/Omar-Daou-The-Gayze-Full-Thesis-Manuscript-5776228

697 Isaac Julien, Visual Pleasure at 40", *op. cit.*

698 Iwona Kościelecka, "Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography. Analysis of Female Gazes Behind the Lens" part of an unpublished internet article, ordered by London Centre of Interdisciplinary Research after Gender Winter School in London, Birkbeck Univerity of London, 2020.

significant social changes that came as the consequence of American failure in Vietnam. He offers a performative model of masculinity based on a marital, heroic ideal, as well as being positioned as an object of spectacle for both, homoerotic relationships, and female audience as analyses Ruth O'Donnell.[699] Cruise preoccupation with male friendship and male bonds, makes him a perfect "homosocial" example and at the price of heterosexual romance or lack of interest in women. His objectification through making him a spectacle, and his transgressive protagonists make him the perfect example of analysis of the gaze which at various moments becomes detachable of Mulvey's binary gender division.

"Cruise's anxious performances of masculinity suggest their relation to broader gender concerns articulated by his cinematic image"[700], suggests Ruth O'Donnell who explores his popularity and success through the specific psychoanalytic concepts. Her research focuses on gender concerns enclosed in Cruise's films and the way they can be understood within the psychodynamic framework including hedonistic masculinity which works in an ambiguous way for the gaze of both sexes, reassuring male and female audiences, even if many plots of his films are "resolved by a capitulation to restrictive gender roles and sexual mastery over women".[701]

Although O'Donnell does not refer directly to Mulvey's concept of the "woman as image", her analysis is based on contrary assumptions about female as the object of the gaze, with terminology used in Mulvey's essay and not on a social phenomenon which signifies the archetypes and may be seen as a preserver of the conservative status quo, or allow "viewers pleasures to go against the ideological grain".[702] By examining a man as an image, where the star persona of a sexualized Tom Cruise is characterized by his narcissism and "presented as the object of an erotic look" with "his body offered as a spectacle", the object of the gaze, excessively performing masculinity with often indicative homoerotic implications. Instead, O'Donnell uses ideas evolved by Sedgwick and Butler which refer to the discussion of a male homosexual desire and masculine bonds characterized historically by homophobia where Cruise inscribes himself perfectly, with almost all his romantic heterosexual coupling which are fundamentally dishonest. This "homoerotic dynamic of Cruise's same sex friendships remains

699 Ruth O'Donnell, "Performing Masculinity: the Star Persona of Tom Cruise", Royal Holloway, University of London Department of Media Arts March 2012, p. 9, accessed: on 10 March 2022, available at: https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/portal/files/4579892/2012odonnellraphd.pdf
700 Ibidem, p. 10.
701 Ibidem.
702 Ibidem, p. 23.

compelling – and we are never quite sure that he has put these attachments aside fully in the name of heterosexual closure", as O'Donnell narrates identification of the actor's homoerotic longing noted by Robert Lang (2006) in *Jerry Maguir*e and *Collateral,* which was pointed before by Yvonne Tasker and Cynthia Fuchs (1993) in *Lethal Weapon*.[703]

According to Ruth O'Donnell and Mark Simpson, Tom Cruise has become the perfect cinematic embodiment of the new male narcissism that emerged in the mid-80's. Cruise looks good, spends money on his appearance, is aspirational in is outlook. But as they claim this narcissism is also symptomatic of powerlessness. His characters lack influence position in contrast to their controlled image projection, exploited corporeality, frequently revealed muscles that expose an exhibitionist masculinity which camouflage undesirable emotions and projects bravado instead.[704] All these makes him a perfect star example to analyze a masculine spectacle, to which one can apply concepts ascribed primarily to women as spectacle, but contrary to passivity of female protagonists discussed by VPNC Cruise persona is always functions as a very active spectacle.

In Mulvey's terms, Tom Cruise dressing up as an aviator, a soldier, a racing driver, a samurai, in order to achieve a feminine aim – to be looked at, can also be considered as a masculine masquerade, if we use converted concept of a female masquerade in cinema proposed by Mary Ann Doane. *Top Gun's* overt homoeroticism has been quoted widely in the popular media. As Simpson suggests, the "number of locker room scenes in which these pilots' parade around in their underwear or white towels while banding expletives of my 'dick and my ass', suggest a greater preoccupation with their beautiful bodies than with their professional skills".[705] Quentin Tarantino described *Top Gun* in the following way: "It is a story about a man's struggle with his own homosexuality. It is! That is what *Top Gun* is about, man".[706] Homoerotic charge was born thanks to Cruise's autoerotic sexuality, beautiful and objectified star image and marginal place assigned to the female lead in relation to him. As O'Donnell points out, Cruise's films are rarely centered on heterosexual romance:

In many of Cruise's film the intensity of commitment and feeling is displaced from the heterosexual to the homosocial to the homoerotic. Even when he stars with his wife Nicole Kidman in Days of Thunder (Tony Scott, 1990) and Far and Away, as well as the later Eyes Wide Shut, their romantic pairing is less charged than his close male relationships.[707]

703 Ruth O'Donnell, "Performing Masculinity…", *op. cit.,* p. 50.
704 Ibidem, p. 51.
705 Ibidem, p. 53.
706 Quentin Tarantino cited by Ruth O'Donnell, "Performing Masculinity…", p. 53.
707 Gaylyn Studlar cited in Ruth O'Donnell, "Performing Masculinity…", *op. cit.,* p. 54.

Cruise's characters are often "in danger of regressing to a feminine identification, and usually come across as sympathetic to, but not desiring of, women"[708] and juxtaposition of masculine and feminine traits is evident from Cruise's very first role, in Franco Zeffirelli's *Endless Love* (1981).[709] David Ehrenstein who dedicated a chapter of his book to Cruise, *Open Secret: Gay Hollywood 1928-1998,* argues that Cruise's sexuality is less interesting than his homosexual image.[710] This sexual transgression quality and being the object of the gaze for both hetero and homosexual audience "manifests itself beyond the films in which he stars".[711] Cruise slippage between the construction of his onscreen desirability, which serves as a double homoerotic and heteroerotic sign which coupled with his offscreen fan inscriptions as the object of gay desire proves his transgressive potential.[712]

Reading the analysis provided by Ruth O'Donnell, it is surprising to discover that she refers to Mulvey's terms only in the part entitled "Making an exhibition of Oneself". It may be obvious for feminist theorists that most terminology used by her to research Cruise persona as a homoerotic image, a sexual object, a homosexual visual pleasure etc., and the aim is to explore the masculinity as sexual performance in psychoanalytical context, come indirectly from VPNC In Mulvey's and Steve Neale's terms, O'Donnell claims that Cruise's spectacle is available for all to enjoy, but Cruise does not practice the male erotic gaze in his relations with women:

Cruise's presentation as an erotic spectacle is indicative of cinematic phenomena which complicate Laura Mulvey's account (1975, republished 1992) of classical Hollywood and its patriarchal forms of looking, in which only women on screen are defined by their to-be-looked-at-ness'(1992, p.27) , where cinema is structured by patriarchal codes of looking. Nor is Cruise in command of the male gaze – he cannot be described as active in his looking relations. Equally, the star's objectification cannot be explained by Steve Neale's (1993) discussion of men's bodies in genres such as the action film and western. Neale points to the disavowal of bodily pleasures that many action heroes undergo via torture and suffering in narratives marked by sado-masochistic phantasies and scenes' (Neale 1993, p.15), an inflection absent from Cruise's early films.[713]

Nonetheless, according to O'Donnell, the star persona of Tom Cruise encapsulates a variety of unresolved contradictions regarding gender and sexuality[714] which can function as trans-

708 Ruth O'Donnell, "Performing Masculinity…", p. 45.
709 Ibidem, p. 47.
710 Ibidem, p. 55.
711 Ibidem.
712 Ibidem.
713 Ibidem, p. 98.
714 Ibidem, p. 80.

discursive springboard, regarding the fact that he is in an "autoerotic center of the universe"[715] and real *gender trouble*.

4.2.3. Monstrous homosexuality, camp, and cultural exorcism

Homoerotic relationship and its representations as monstrous, deviant but at the same time functioning as alluring and sexy-objects of a spectacle (using Mulvey's category) have become the field of exploration in a dichotomy heterosexual – homosexual. Neil Jordan's adaptation of the *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (1994) can serve as one of the best examples. "Cruise's flamboyant turn as the dandy bloodsucker Lestat and Brad Pitt's suffering vampire-with-a-conscience Louis provide alternative models of masculinity by which the erotic, the homoerotic and performances of various types are explored".[716] Robert Lang suggests that the "vampire movie is the most homoerotic of film genres, or sub-genres, which authorize a search for love between men"[717], and the exploration of these genres has become the further project of his book. Discussing the "Interview with the Vampire", he claims that a logical culmination of narration and the main character construction is trying to find "enduring intimacy with another man, which we find in almost every film that Cruise has made"[718]. Sexual deviance, as historically embedded in the literary figure of vampire, dates back to the 18th century, and figures in the film in the homoerotic relationship between Louis and Lestat, and later with the vampire Armand, can be bisexual or sexually polymorphous as O'Donnell notes referring to Kenneth Gelder comments on the gayness of a male vampire. She closes with Gordon's and Hollinger's reflection on the cinematic usage of the vampire body as markers of erotic pleasure difference:

The vampire's body can be thought of as a type of polymorphousness and androgyny founded on the disappearance of the markers of sexual and reproductive difference' in which erotic pleasure and the ability to reproduce are located orally. It is thus unsurprising that the star Tom Cruise came to be cast as Lestat, given the homoerotic elements of his star persona.[719]

Various monstrous forms of representations were implemented by heterosexual mainstream cinema to frighten, laugh out, condemn, punish, or suppress male homosexuality into a visual and narrative deviant scheme. All these have become the basis of analyses of non-binary gaze and trials of its representations created outside the dominant cinematic and social trends. All

715 Ruth O'Donnell citing Simpson, "Performing Masculinity…", p. 107.
716 Ibidem. p. 113.
717 Ibidem.
718 Ibidem.
719 Gordon and Hollinger in Ruth O'Donnell, "Performing Masculinity…", pp. 113-114.

that refers to the discourse provided by Freud's/Mulvey's perspective based on a bisexual construction of vision. Monstrosity, as one of main tendencies, became a subject of analysis by Mathew Martin in his essay "The Monstrous Non-Heteronormative Formed by The Male Gaze"[720] in which he refers directly to Mulvey's concept of the dominating male heterosexual gaze. He refers to Mulvey's observations about a man being reluctant to erotic gaze and quotes her words: "hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one advancing the story, making things happen" (…) "the man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in the further sense".[721] Taking this into account, he stresses that this visual male power only refers to bisexual normative sexuality as the emblem of order, universality and nature, making others who are deviation of heteropatriarchal ideals the signs of disorder.[722]

Researching silence about sexuality and gender throughout history and film, Martin points out that monsters and "freaks" served as forms of entertainment where non-heteronormative others played the role of protagonists, and observes referring to Mulvey:

The Other – racial, sexual, etc. – has been depicted as monstrous as a form of propaganda to control the cultural perception of what is hegemonically different or unacceptable. Laura Mulvey has famously discussed the representation of inequality in cinema as well as the manipulative power of the male gaze, particularly the way in which it has constructed visual representation of women, the other and sexuality within the media.[723]

Male homosexuality as monstrosity in cinematic representation, which disavows contempt, fear and fascination has become the same phenomenon as women being represented as monsters on the screen, which was the aim of analysis done by Barbara Creed in *Monstrous Feminine*.[724] Martin examines American horror films, *The Exorcist* and *Little Shop of Horrors (LSOH),* exploring the ways in which the male gaze has constructed the representation of "abnormal" sexuality, and more specifically abnormal queer-of colour sexuality as physically monstrous. He recalls Creed's and Kristeva's use of abject as crucial, and defined as "that which does not 'respect borders, positions, rules … that which 'disturbs identity, system, order".[725] Martin quotes Kristeva definition saying that the place of the abject is 'the place where meaning collapses' and he stresses that the abject "complicates the established social binaries of the

720 Matthew Martin, "The Monstrous Non-Heteronormative Formed by The Male Gaze" pp. 62-73, in *The Phallic Eye. Reframing Gender and Visual Pleasure,* (eds.) Gilad Padva & Nurit Buchweitz, Palgrave Macmillan 2014.
721 Matthew Martin, "The Monstrous Non-Heteronormative…", *op. cit.,* p. 62.
722 Ibidem.
723 Ibidem.
724 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis,* Routledge, London 1993.
725 Matthew Martin, "The Monstrous Non-Heteronormative…", *op. cit.,* p. 63.

symbolic order, the one which is upheld by the male gaze".[726] What is perceived in the films as something that contradicts this symbolic order and is transformed, coated or associated with abjection. According to Creed, representations of the monstrous in the modern horror films are the ones grounded in ancient religious definitions and historical notions of abjection. They are, perversion and sexual immortality, the feminine body and incest, corporeal alienation, murder, human sacrifice, death and decay, bodily wastes, the corpse, and each of these is associated with the possession.[727]

Continuing this line of thinking Martin explores the way in which some of the characters in the films mentioned above are viewed, presented, used, violated, reduced, or punished in various ways to approach consistent American ideal of heterosexual and hegemonic nuclear family. Both films he analyses feature homosexuality, but they never use terms "homosexual", "gay" or "lesbian". What the films use is a camp, as a way to suggest or signify the existence of this homosexuality.[728] According to Fabio Cleto, "Camp is affiliated with homosexual culture" with roots in "late-Victorian slang, meaning the actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis," which is associated with "theatrical, high society, the fashion world, and the underground city life"[729] As Martin explains, the meaning of camp in homosexual representations, referring to Mulvey, is following:

By using camp, these films can engage with and acknowledge homosexuality by way of the veil through which the male gaze can process it: to portray male homosexuality without a metaphorical distancing would be offensive to the male audience. Mulvey writes: "Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like," and it is for this reason that any version of non-heteronormativity must be either camp and/or monstrosity.[730]

This use of camp lens reveals, according to Martin, that what is referred to in films explored by him as dual or non-binary gender, is "an expression of drag rather than simply of hegemonic monstrosity."[731] The bodies possessed, in both films, actually serve as a mock and challenge to socially defined roles of gender, become the representative of disruption among social hegemonic norms and "normalcy". In this context Martin refers to Judith Butler fundamental study, *Gender Troubles*, where she states that "Drag […] effectively mocks both the expressive

726 Ibidem.
727 Ibidem, pp. 63-64.
728 Ibidem, p. 67.
729 Ibidem.
730 Ibidem.
731 Mathew Martin, "The Monstrous Non-Heteronormative…", *op. cit.*, p. 70.

model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity".[732] In effect, his form of cinematic protest via monstrosity exhibited is not working to establish hegemonic gender norms but instead it works to promote gender euphoria and a break into the traditional roles, enhancing the contradiction of hegemonic norms, as he stresses. Historically, as Paul Semonin writes, monsters were created to "symbolize the imbecility of popular beliefs, the perfect metaphor for decrying the sheep-like mentality of the masses".[733]

By creating and including monsters in the horror films, the cinema is mocking the fears they represent, exactly the "fears of gender-bending and non-heteronormativity and allowing for the exploration of the true horror within a patriarchal society.[734] However, films he analyses *The Exorcist* and *LSOH*, end with unsettled conclusions and hegemonic attempts to remove both the masculine and feminine queer and queer-of-colour presences from American society. So, the case gets worst when it comes to the non-white non-heteronormative films, where a white male "persistent anxieties over race and immigration" can be found. According to Roderick A. Ferguson, "Afro-American non-heteronormative formation function as a palimpsest in which the disparate genealogies of sociology, American citizenship, Western nation-state formation, aesthetic culture, and capital collide".[735] He adds, that it is the "negation or demonization of non-white non heteronormative formations that allowed for the development of and existence pf the hegemony. […} it is as if American society, through film, is attempting its own cultural exorcism".[736]

4.2.4. Male ga(y)ze and normative trials of its representation.

Academic Omar Daou proposed for the first time in 2017 linguistic and semantic modification of Mulvey's *male gaze* into *male ga(y)ze* or *gayze* with reference to male homosexual looking. Drawing on Mulvey's VPNC he focuses on exploring the difference in homoerotic male visual fetishism and notions of pleasure and fantasy functioning in the male *gayze*. In this extremely masculine business of conceptualizing the gayze and *body fascism,* ruling in gay subcultures more than in heterosexual relations, he finds a great value in this feminist project which he finds crucial because of its intersectional value and function.

[732] Ibidem.
[733] Ibidem.
[734] Ibidem.
[735] Ibidem.
[736] Ibidem.

Referring to Mulvey's notion of fetish, he claims that "fetish in many ways can act as the common ground that unifies the different practices of looking"[737]. The fetish-object being gazed at is more often considered a substitute of lack. He draws from Williams, who compares heterosexual assumption, where the fetishized feminine object is gazed by a male subject, making fetishism highly connoted to the practice of disavowing sexual difference in the Freudian sense.[738] Daou claims that in a homosexual context the fetish becomes more layered and speaks of the films of Almodóvar highlighting the liberation from the heterosexual definition of the fetish into a new territory where fetishism is strongly interconnected to the space between subject's own idealization and object of desire. The dual function of the gaze, no matter whether scopophilic or narcissistic, is complicated when we discuss the *gayze* since the object fetishized is at the same time a site of desire and a site of identification because it is founded on the sexual "sameness" or "indifference" requiring a different type of disavowal than heterosexual setup, and where the conflict between an object of identification vs. an object of desire does not exist. According to Williams, this disavowal gets a new meaning in gay fetishism:

...[functions] as a means of disavowing not sexual difference, but rather the gap between one's perception of self and the ego ideal, which is at once object and subject of desire. The fetish may substitute for a perceived lack of beauty in the subject whose ego ideal is also object of desire. The process negotiates between.[739]

Another issue that Daou addresses is different functioning of homoerotic male gayze in fantasy which he discusses in Jean Genet's silent film *Un Chant d'Amour* (1950). The main aim of the movie was to emphasise what is seen at display of subversive, homosexual visual desire content differing from the hegemonic, commercial mainstream canon, as well as to allow for the radical possibility of inversion of visuality by displaying what we are not allowed to see. So, the "very subject matter of the film itself deals passionately with the subject of looking" [740] within the very male setup of the gayze, where functions of looking and maleness of vision (visual discourse) prove to be as even more significant,[741] as points out Daou. He stresses the difference in homosexual ga(y)ze in the context of desire and identity referring to Mulvey's concepts of the heterosexual gaze:

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[737] Omar Daou, *The Male Gayze: Queer Cinema and Psychoanalysis,* Utrecht University *GEMMA* Project, August 14, 2017, p. 25, accessed on: May 2019, available: at: https://www.scribd.com/document/495572331/Omar-Daou-The-Gayze-Full-Thesis-Manuscript-5776228

738 Ibidem, pp. 16-17.

739 Ibidem.

740 Omar Daou, *The Male Gayze…", op. cit.*, p. 25.

741 Ibidem. p. 17.

In Mulvey's heterosexual scenario, the scopophilic gaze functions in a way to capture the (oh so mysterious and castrating) woman on screen and make sense of her (to tame her, so to speak, as a way of relieving anxiety), while narcissistically identifying with the male surrogates onscreen. In the project of the gayze, looking is not a matter of decrypting a body of the opposite sex (—transforming the woman's body into a phallus through scopophilia) and identifying with a(n idealized) male protagonist, it is rooted in the realms of desire and identity at once.[742]

Chant revolves around the story of two French and Algerian male prisoners, lusting for one another yet separated by a concrete wall, and communicating their desire by smoking a cigarette and later blowing the smoke into each other's mouths through a thin straw in the wall. They are fantasising about one another, touching their own bodies, caressing, masturbating themselves. The guard repeatedly, voyeuristically observes very sexually charged male bodies in all these actions while walking along the hall of prison chambers. While doing so he catches a sight of those prisoners which makes him be stimulated by their sight and provokes his sexual fantasies that finally come as a stream of anger and erotic frustration. Thus, the first function of the gayze in film is actually the gaze that is "not designed to be-one-way street" [743] as comments Daou. His visual pleasure, desire and high arousal convert in the criminal act, and he kills one of the prisoners by putting his gun in mouth, which becomes an act of homosexual visual perversion.

Daou draws on Mulvey's male gaze which functions "as a trap for a woman"[744], with the female body owned, imagined, dreamed-up, constructed and deconstructed in a reductive way, thus totally striped off from the agency and being made exhibitionistic but in scripted and forced way. So, he asks here if "the body is held hostage within the gaze of the (male) camera and the (male) spectator, can we really speak of exhibitionism or simply a forced entrapment and fetishism? Is it exhibitionism or the exhibition-of?".[745] Here he finds the intervention in the film which is encapsulated by the scene of the prison inmate staring back and masturbating while the guard watches, which is transgressive and "steers in the opposite direction how the very formula and idea of the gaze is constructed".[746] Instead of captivity we can speak of liberation, and perhaps the gayze through entrapment attempts to set free as sums Daou.[747] But on the other hand, the function of the guard and his narcissistic identification with sexualized male bodies

742 Ibidem.
743 Ibidem, p. 28.
744 Ibidem.
745 Omar Daou, *The Male Gayze…"*, *op. cit.,* p. 29.
746 Ibidem, pp. 30-31.
747 Ibidem, p. 31.

gazing back and speaking back, involve both phantasies of power and omnipotence layered with jealousy, control, disrespect and aggression.

Apart from narcissism, fantasy and its realms become in Genet's film other crucial factors that are intertwined with the process of identification where Daou finds the important field to explore the difference between heterosexual/homosexual notions of the gaze. On the use of theory of fantasy in film criticism he quotes Barbara Creed (1998), who writes:

The concept of a more mobile gaze was explored by Elizabeth Cowie in her article 'Fantasia' (1997), in which she drew on Laplanche and Pontalis's influential essay of 1964, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality'. Laplanche and Pontalis established three original fantasies - original in that each fantasy explains an aspect of the 'origin' of the subject. The 'primal scene pictures the origin of the individual; fantasies of seduction, the origin and upsurge of sexuality; fantasies of castration, the origin of the difference between the sexes' (1964/1986:19). These fantasies - entertained by the child – explain or provide answers to three crucial questions: Who am I?' 'Why do I desire?' Why am I different?' The concept of primal fantasies is also much more fluid than the notion of fantasy permitted by apparatus theory, which inevitably and mechanistically returns to the Oedipal fantasy. The primal fantasies run through the individual's waking and sleeping life, through conscious and unconscious desires. Laplanche and Pontalis also argued that fantasy is a staging of desire, a form of mise-en-scène. Further, the position of the subject is not static in that positions of sexual identification are not fixed. The subject engaged in the activity of fantasizing can adopt multiple positions, identifying across gender, time, and space. Cowie argued that the importance of fantasy as a setting, a scene, is crucial because it enables film to be viewed as fantasy, as representing the mise-en-scene of desire. Similarly, the film spectator is free to assume mobile, shifting modes of identification [...] [748]

He notes that explication of fantasy is very much seen throughout the film in the prison guard's gayze with the bodies of the prisoners and the experience of gay intimacy and out of his reach. Thus, the guard is the one who is held captive by his projections, fantasy and desire, and perversely the prisoners are the ones who experience a form of mastery over him via gazing back. This gayze becomes so strong fetish itself that eventually he reacts furiously and ends the life of one of them, performing his control through violent realization of disavowed desire.[749] The excitement or act of desiring stimulates murderous drives and proves the violence of the fantasy which may function as ambiguous, both being auto-erotic one and carrying betrayal or feeding Genet's "ethics of evil", as Leo Bersani notes.[750] The gayze, existing outside the body, claims Daou, is detachable and analogous to the trauma of castration anxiety, being both foundational and traumatic and a trap outside the fantasy of homosexual love.[751] He delineates

748 Barbara Creed in Omar Daou, *The Male Gayze…, op. cit.,* pp. 36-37. (Creed, 1998, p. 13).
749 Omar Daou, *The Male Gayze…, op. cit.,* pp. 39-41.
750 Ibidem, pp. 40-43.
751 Ibidem, pp. 44-45.

this trajectory of the male gayze reasoning after *Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation* by Earl Jackson who drew from Lacanian thought uncovering the notion of "detachable" gaze:

The supposed subject of the gaze is thus actually always subject to the gaze that exceeds the subject's control. If the gaze is always outside the body, the subject's access to visual perception (thus to mastery) also situates the subject as exterior to itself, placing that body in the field of visibility (and the potential mastery by the "annihilating" other).[752]

A film like *Chant*, presents the gay body in a way that challenges traditional heterosexual notions of how bodies are looked and represented in visual pleasure context. In this sense, Genet unpacks the relationship of the male homosexual eye with what it sees on the screen and complicates it with elements of desire, fantasy, and their murderous drives which they may invoke affecting visual diegesis and creating both, the process of re-inscription informed by the body and reconfigured homoerotic spaces of representation. Daou notices, that the "way the camera is made to move in gay film differs radically form the way it does in the traditional, heterosexual, Hollywood narrative films which Laura Mulvey employs in her formulation of the theory of the male gaze".[753] Nonetheless, he admits the blueprint of Mulvey's project has become the basis "while thinking about visual cues and patterns which can be extracted from film and analyzed for their sexual, psychoanalytical, and gender-related significances". He concludes about the male gaze/gayze difference and functioning of desire:

In gay film, the gayze is allowed to be much more disoriented, shifting between the different characters and bodies, with an unclear idea about whom is to be identified with, whom is to be desired, and whom is to be spied on voyeuristically—since the dynamics between identifying through an ideal ego versus desiring through the erotic function of looking are much more problematic in a same-sex desire situation.[754]

4.3. Lesbian gaze. The "dark continent" of psychoanalysis.

4.3.1. Sexual indifference. Rethinking lesbian desire.

When sexuality was conceptualized and politicized by Mulvey in the 1975, feminists' voices divided into lesbian and heterosexual analyses of visual pleasure. Being feminist lesbian could no longer be regarded as an alternative sexual practice or lifestyle with its theory constituting an important critique of the compulsory heterosexuality as social and cultural organization with

752 Omar Daou, *The Male Gayze*…, *op. cit.,* p. 44.
753 Ibidem, p. 69.
754 Ibidem.

institutions supporting such a scheme. Among the most radical feminist writers were Monique Wittig who authored "heterosexual contract" in *The Straight Mind* (1980) and Adrienne Rich defining the term of "compulsory heterosexuality" in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) which have been the most influential publications, regarding the critique of heterosexuality as a norm. All these was written prior to Judith Butler's usage of the term "heterosexual matrix" in *Gender Trouble* (1990*)* or "heterosexual hegemony" coined in *Bodies That Matter.*[755] As a theoretical concept the term heteronormativity as a dominant social scheme was established in gender-orientated feminist and queer studies in the early 1990s. Both theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler previously used a term heterosexism[756] which was provoked and inspired by Mulvey's gendered visual pleasure analysis, and heteronormative paradigm that followed the binary concept of looking. In 1998, B. Ruby Rich, well known researcher of lesbian cinema, wrote that lesbians are finally no longer invisible in cinema. One year later, in 1999 Patricia White added that lesbianism is already existing phenomenon and social identity, which is understood, and visible on the screens of cinema and television.[757]

In terms of female identity generally, it is worth stressing after Luce Irigaray who uses its concept in multi-valued ways, noted firstly:

Identity is defined as a male concept used to make sense of men's necessary separation from their mothers. For women, who have a different, much closer relation to their mothers, according to Irigaray, identity is meaningless: no separation or delimitation of boundaries occurs between mother and daughter. Within a male framework, the possibility of a female identity is, therefore, unrecognized, unknown, unthought, as are reciprocity, fluidity, exchange, and permeability.[758]

Similarly, the interpretation of the unconscious, according to Irigaray, reduces it to the masculine notion and "thus obscures it, since the unconscious has something to do with the feminine"[759] That is why Irigaray seeks ways to modify psychoanalytical practice and procedures since she considers their modes of operation and analysis of female and lesbian figure as reductive, "situated at the level of the masculine structure of seeing, of the piercing gaze"[760]:

[755] Tiina Rosenberg, "LOCALLY QUEER…", p. 8, footnote 6.
[756] Ibidem.
[757] Clara Bradbury-Rance, *El Cine lésbico después de la teoría Queer,* ACGIC A.C. Osífragos 2019, p. 9.
[758] Christine Holmlund, "The Lesbian, the Mother, the Heterosexual Lover: Irigaray's Recodings of Difference", *Feminist Studies*, Volume 17, Issue 2. Summer 1991, accessed: March 11, 2023, available at: https://omnilogos.com/lesbian-mother-heterosexual-lover-irigaray-recodings-of-difference/
[759] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One…, op. cit*., p. 145.
[760] Ibidem, p. 146.

I would say that, on certain points (and not minor ones), institutional analysis is reductive. It maintains itself paradoxically in sexual indifference, inasmuch as, for that analysis, the female sex is always understood on the basis of a masculine model. I would say that psychoanalysis, unfortunately, does not bring, or no longer brings, the "plague," but that it conforms too closely to a social order.[761]

Despite her previous critique of lesbian identity, later in 1987 she insists that women generally need a distinctive identity of their own, not the identification with men. Sexual difference is for her, one of the hopes for the future. Being Lacanian student who did not share his line of thinking and left his school, she wrote two iconic books almost parallelly in time to Mulvey's VPNC writing and publication. Even if two scholars have not referred to each other, their interests in representation of women and female pleasure are positioned very close and often used together in feminist criticism regarding representation and visual pleasure. *Speculum of the Other woman* written by Irigaray in 1974 and further *This Sex Which Is Not One,* a book written in 1977, both have become an iconic re-codings of psychoanalytical analysis, influencing lesbian and feminist theory. Lesbian perspective for visual pleasure has been for a long time "behind the screen of representation" and "unalterable facts"[762], using Irigaray words. She has criticised widely the practice of male sexuality socially considered as "normal" stressing that "female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters".[763] All that has been proposed for female eroticism by Freud and Lacan, according to Irigaray was totally foreign to female own pleasure, "unless it remains within the dominant phallic economy"[764] and "woman, in this sexual imagery, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies"[765]: "In this terms, woman's erogenous zones never amount to anything but a clitoris-sex that is not comparable to the noble phallic organ, or a hole-envelope that serves to sheathe and massage the penis in intercourse"[766], as she stresses referring negatively to Lacanian idea of women as lack:

About woman and her pleasure, this view of the sexual relation has nothing to say. Her lot is that of "lack," "atrophy" (of the sexual organ), and "penis envy," the penis being the only sexual organ of recognized value. Thus, she attempts by every mean available to appropriate that organ for herself: through her somewhere servile love of the father-husband capable of giving her one, through her desire for a child-penis, through access to the cultural values still reserved by right to males alone and therefore always masculine, and so on. Woman lives her own desire only as the expectation that she may at last come to possess an equivalent of the male organ.[767]

[761] Ibidem.
[762] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One,* translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York 1985, p. 9.
[763] Ibidem, p. 23.
[764] Ibidem, p. 24.
[765] Ibidem, p. 25.
[766] Ibidem, p. 23.
[767] Ibidem.

The economy of female sexuality, according to Irigaray, did not seem to be a desirable objective for feminism as well, thus in her words: "a woman's development, however radical it may seek to be, would thus not suffice to liberate woman's desire".[768] Similarly to Mulvey, Irigaray frequently argues that "woman" is the "silent condition of representation" which is intolerable and unacceptable for her.

Irigaray also raises the question and critique about the interpretation of female homosexuality modeled on that of male homosexuality, bringing the critique of "predominance of a single libido". She has always emphasized the need to define femininity in relation to the lesbian and lesbian relationship, since for her these provide an alternative to the hegemonic phallocentric model, which she harshly condemns. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* Irigaray starts theoretical critique and reconstruction of the lesbian figure and presents meaning of its overlooking by psychoanalysis. As Holmlund writes:

For Irigaray, the lesbian's reduction by Freud to a man—she looks and acts like a man; she desires another woman like a man—stands as "the extreme consequence" of what Irigaray labels the "hom/m/osexuality" of psychoanalysis, by which she means its inability to conceptualize women except as the "same" as men. All exchange, Irigaray insists, takes place among men, and male homosexuals are ostracized only because they too openly enact this basic principle. Lesbianism, in contrast, is over-looked by psychoanalysis because "the phenomenon of female homosexuality appears so foreign to [Freud's] `theory,' to his (cultural) imaginary, that it cannot help but be `neglected by psychoanalytic research'.[769]

Irigaray shows Freud's vision of the lesbian as inevitably "masculine" which is the result of his own desires and denials, and that makes the lesbian figure full of contradictions. She also charges Freud with overlooking gestures like "miming-acting, pretending" which are capable of increasing the "pleasure over simple discharges of instincts, he instead passes over lesbian pleasure and by extension, female pleasure. In the framework of sameness he constructs, women in general, and lesbian in particular, as granted no separate identity", and as a result, equality quite literally cannot be considered, as Holmlund constates.

Irigaray by presenting the lesbian, also exposes the conflict within philosophy of feminism and psychoanalysis, showing up that "mature femininity" is in effect mere masquerade imposed on women by men. Desiring another woman "like a man," the lesbian plays with the "masculinity and femininity of psychoanalytic discourse, thus making both visible as "constructions and

[768] Ibidem, p. 32.
[769] Christine Holmlund, "The Lesbian, the Mother, the Heterosexual Lover…", *op. cit.*

performances". At the same time, she discovers, "what an exhilarating pleasure it is to be partnered with someone like herself', which demonstrate that the lesbian woman "are not simply resorbed" by a male-defined femininity and she stresses the importance of touch as opposed to sight, as well as importance of the lips to be the central metaphor with their connection to lesbian sexuality.

Irigaray interest in analyzing the figure of the lesbian and lesbian relationship found its continuation in feminist discussion that evolved around the critique of Mulvey's binary heterosexual visual pleasure, which excluded female homosexual subject. Jane Gaines stresses that it was the US lesbian feminist who first raised sharp objections to the film theory explaining tensions between masculinity and femininity, specifically regarding spectatorial pleasure as inherently male. They argued that such assumption "cancelled the lesbian spectator whose viewing pleasure could never be constructed as anything like male voyeurism".[770] Positing lesbian spectator in film theory has significantly changed the trajectory of the gaze and made us see how the eroticised female body functions not just as the object but the "visual objective of another female gaze within the film diegesis,"[771] as Gaines stresses. Lesbian viewers, according to her "were subverting dominant meaning and confounding textual structures" and the lesbian reception "held a key to challenging the account of cinema as producing patriarchal subject positions".[772]

The key critique gathering main thoughts on lesbian cinematic representation, referring both to Mulvey and Irigaray concepts were included in Teresa de Lauretis seminal article "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation"[773], first published in 1988. De Lauretis embraces main concepts articulated by feminism and current debates against feminism, in particular the critique of the Western feminism discourse on love and sexuality, rooted in psychanalysis as theory of sexuality and sexual difference which for her need emergent rereading. As she stresses:

Nevertheless, that emphasis on sexual difference did open up a critical space -a conceptual, representational, and erotic space - in which women could address themselves to women. And in the very act of assuming and speaking from the position of the subject, a woman could concurrently recognize women as subjects and as objects of female desire.[774]

[770] Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations… ", *op. cit.* ,p. 339.
[771] Ibidem.
[772] Ibidem, p. 340.
[773] Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" in Feminism and Film, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, *op. cit.*, pp. 384-406.
[774] Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference…", *op. cit.*, p. 384.

She revolves her thought around Irigaray concept of sexual *indifference* (women are, or want, the same as men) which implies, as notes de Lauretis, that "there are not really two sexes, but only one"[775], and in consequence that there is a "single practice and representation of the sexual".[776] De Lauretis calls it sexual (in)difference since "the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects" and as she claims within this conceptual frame, "female desire for the self-same, another female self, cannot be recognized".[777] As de Lauretis claims, the fact that a "woman might desire a woman "like" herself, someone of the "same" sex, that she might also have auto- and homosexual appetites is simply incomprehensible in the phallic regime of an asserted sexual difference between man and woman" and "which is predicated on the contrary, on a complete indifference for the 'other' sex, woman's".[778] She stresses after Irigaray, that Freud "was at a loss with homosexual female patients, and his analyses of them were really about male homosexuality: "the object choice of the homosexual woman is [understood to be] determined by a masculine desire and tropism - that is precisely, the turn of so-called sexual difference into sexual indifference, a single practice and representation of the sexual."[779]

It is important to stress that, using Irigaray words critiquing Freud, "there will be no female homosexuality, just a hommo-sexuality in which woman will be involved in the process of secularizing the phallus, begged to maintain the desire for the same that man has".[780] With the term "hommo-sexuality" [hommo-sexualité] Irigaray refers to French word *homme,* and in Latin *homo,* both meaning "man", as well as to the Greek meaning *homo* – "same". With this linguistic distinction, both Irigaray and De Lauretis remark the conceptual distance and ambiguity of the term, which does not even consider and differentiate lesbian sexuality.

Historically, similarly to male homosexuality, the lesbian figure was also socially asserted as female sexual deviancy. Heterosexual "gender crossing was at once a symptom and a sign of sexual degeneracy", as Havelock Ellis notes in discussion with others in "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female

[775] Ibidem, p. 385.
[776] Ibidem.
[777] Ibidem.
[778] Ibidem.
[779] Ibidem.
[780] Ibidem.

Deviance" in 1982. Even if first groundbreaking English edition of Monique Wittig's book *The Lesbian Body* in 1975 "has proved capable of producing lesbian texts in a context of total rapture with masculine culture, texts written by women exclusively for women, careless of male approval"[781], visual field and its lesbian critical assessment was to come in following decades, after Mulvey's heterosexual concepts included in VPNC.

Similarly to male homosexuality the lesbian figure was visually perceived by excess and the discourse of camp, as Sue-Ellen Case writes, "an exaltation of the 'I' through costume, performance, mise-en-scene, irony, an utter manipulation of appearance" and it was considered unacceptable that the lesbian working-class bar culture of the 1950s "went into the feminist closet" during the 1970s with lesbian identification been encouraged to use feminist dress code, as she writes, and adds "yet the closet, or the bars, with their hothouse atmosphere [have] given us camp – the style, the discourse, the mise-en-scene of butch-femme roles"[782] which recuperated the space of seduction. That is also interesting regarding Richard Dyer's analysis of Bettie Davis as independent woman star and her "performance style, her 'bitch' and camp roles and their reception and imitation in gay male culture".[783] This "structured polysemy" of a star image, as White notes, "allows the figure to be claimed by diverse audiences and generates unpredictable effects in a range of reception contexts over time"[784], opening and creating the fluid identification or a fluid identity concept as it is widely discussed today.

Among important critical approaches to Mulvey's key omissions in VPNC, which is female as spectator and the lesbian representation, come with the contribution of White interrogating mentioned paradigms. She stresses that "in film criticism and theory, making gender the axis of analysis has entailed a throughgoing reconsideration of film for, by and about women, and a consequent transformation of the canon of film studies"[785] bringing also discussion of "some of the diverse women's film production practices".[786] White notes that "the emerging film criticism of lesbians, as well as African American women, and other women of colour, also tends to identify and reject stereotypes – such as the homicidal, man-hating lesbian, the African American mammy, the tragic mulatto, and the Asian dragon lady – and advocates more complex

[781] Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference…", *op. cit.*, p. 393.
[782] Ibidem, p. 395.
[783] Patricia White, "Feminism and Film", accessed: April 7, 2023, available at: https://studylib.net/doc/25546635/ , p. 123-124.
[784] Ibidem, p. 124.
[785] Ibidem.
[786] Ibidem, p. 117.

representations".[787] She refers widely to Mulvey's VPNC as the "single most inescapable reference in the field (and arguably in contemporary English-language film theory as a whole)" which has become the most "throughgoing and explicit introduction of neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theory to feminist film studies".[788] Which provoked "rejection of pleasure as a radical weapon" and as Mulvey explained later in 1981 and 1988 in "Afterimages…", her essay explored the "masculinization" of the spectator, regardless of the actual sex (or possible deviance) of any real move goer.[789] In the wake of Mulvey's VPNC, feminist film theory psychoanalytic paradigm brough into lights the massive exclusion of the female subject position and was "trapped within the monolith" of female spectatorial masochism[790], as writes White, or within "heterosexual matrix" and its hegemony as Judith Butler puts it in *Gender Trouble* and in *Bodies That Matter*. She also stresses referring to de Lauretis' critique of Mulvey's concept of "woman in the audience" that woman cannot be reduced to "woman as image" since her identification with this position depends on wide cultural codes, narrative, and individual experience. Theoretical construction of "the female spectator" conceived as a singular phenomenon was also identified by de Lauretis in 1980s as one of the central and necessary contradictions in feminism - between "the Woman", as a fictional philosophical or aesthetic male construct, "an essence ascribed to all women distilled from numerous dominant Western cultural discourses"[791] with an attempt to contain women within ideas of femininity enigma, proper womanhood, nature or evil and women who are "historically-specific individuals" and real, material beings.[792]

Lesbian spectatorship has posed especially revealing challenge to psychoanalytic theory which treated equation of "sexual difference" with heterosexual matching and the "presumption that women cannot desire the image because they are the image".[793] Jackie Stacey addresses these absences in Mulvey's article and psychoanalytic accounts in the article "Desperately Seeking Difference" (1987), where she points out to theorization of identification and object choice within a binary framework of oppositions which necessarily masculinize female homosexuality.[794] Therefore, which stressed Ellsworth in 1990, the attempts to address lesbians

[787] Ibidem, p. 118.
[788] Ibidem.
[789] Patricia White, "Feminism…", *op. cit.,* p. 119.
[790] Ibidem, p. 120.
[791] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Barbara Creed,* Routledge 2006, p. 63.
[792] Ibidem.
[793] Patricia White, "Feminism…", *op. cit.,* p. 121.
[794] Jackie Stacey, "Desperately Seeking Difference…", *op. cit.,* p. 455. Here she develops considerations about

as viewers and social subjects have side-stepped the psychoanalytic paradigm without any consideration how lesbian viewers might appropriate dominant heterosexual representations.[795] De Lauretis asserts that sexual difference concept closed within conceptual binary of "Man" and "Woman" has restricted feminist film theory and psychoanalysis itself and for her there is a need for a notion of gender which is not so bound up with (hetero)sexual difference.[796] In *Technologies of Gender* she develops both terms, gender and sexual difference with the latter functioning for her as a social construct or rather social technology which works for and supports state interests. As in her previous work *Alice Doesn't,* she stresses that "women occupy a position that is both inside and outside of ideology of gender. For, as well as being an 'effect of representation', gender is also the 'untheorized experience of women'".[797] To describe this feminine in general and lesbian figure moving in and out of gender she uses a filmic analogy the "space-off"[798] and suggest that feminist attempts to address viewer as female are irrespective of the viewers actual gender. The ongoing project of feminism, she says, is to define the blind spots and space-off women who remain outside the spaces of representation.[799] For her women's cinema as a new conception should cut "across the boundaries of independent and mainstream, avant-garde, and narrative cinema – one that does not always privilege avant-garde and independent productions[800], as it was suggested by Mulvey in VPNC.

Female fluid identification as viewer was addressed by de Lauretis in the essay "Strategies of Coherence" included in *Technologies of Gender* where she is rethinking women's cinema and suggests that the film does not invite a one-to-one identification depending on the spectator's own particular identity, i.a. with black women off screen identifying with black women on-screen, but rather enables more complex sort of formed identifications and women identities which should be considered in their "multiple socio-historical specificities.[801] This fluid female identification is further discussed by de Lauretis in the essay "Desire in Narrative" where she suggests female "double desiring position" and her "bisexual disposition" which discusses Mulvey's figuring a male-hero as "the active principle of culture".[802] De Lauretis argues that

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woman's obsession with another woman analyzing two films *All About Eve* (1950) directed by Joseph Mankiewicz and *Desperately Seeking Susan* (!984) directed by Susan Seidelman.

[795] Ibidem, 121-122.
[796] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey…, op. cit.,* p. 64.
[797] Ibidem. p. 67.
[798] Ibidem.
[799] Ibidem, p. 68.
[800] Ibidem, p. 69.
[801] Ibidem.
[802] Ibidem, p. 71.

narrative and visual pleasure "should not be seen merely as belonging to dominant codes fulfilling their oppressive functions".[803] For her it is possible to find a space for female desire and identification referring to female Oedipal trajectory:

Like the boy, a girl's first love is her mother. Freud characterizes the pre-Oedipal stage as the little girl's 'masculine phase'. This is due to the active aim of her libido, in contrast to the passivity she develops when she is initiated into femininity during the Oedipus Complex. Faced with the social and instinctual demands of heterosexuality, the girl surrenders her desire for the mother but, unconsciously or not, the desire stays active, leading to a bisexual disposition and a fluctuating pattern of (masculine and feminine) identifications and object choices in her later life. All this makes the passive 'feminine' identity sanctioned by patriarchy unstable and difficult to achieve.[804]

De Lauretis believes that such "sexual differentiation" within spectators challenges Mulvey's assumption of cinematic identification functioning as masculine. As she writes: "the analogy that links identification with-the-look to masculinity and identification-with-the-image to femininity breaks down precisely when we think of a spectator alternating between the two".[805] So she proposes a model of cinematic identification, in which "the female spectator benefits from a double desiring position". For de Lauretis there are two sets of cinematic identification, and only one is already recognized by film theory:

In addition to 'the masculine, active identification with the gaze (the looks of the camera and of male characters) and the passive, feminine identification with the image', there exists another form of identification, which involves 'the double identification with the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject, and with the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image. This double figural narrative identification is what anchors the subject in the narrative flow – it is also what allows the female spectator to occupy both active and passive positions of desire at once – she is doubly desiring spectator whose desire is simultaneously 'desire for the other, and desire to be desired by the other.[806]

In *Alice Doesn't* de Lauretis claims that this untheorized experience of women creates a blind spot within a current cultural discourse as well as in feminist cinema and female filmmaking strategies which should work with and against narrative that emphasize the female subject doubly desiring position. Chaudhuri notes that patriarchal ideology does not permit women to sustain their double desire thus whenever this double desire is registered in mainstream film, it must be presented as duplicitous or impossible, "leading to a conflict that is resolved by the woman's destruction or reterritorialization – at the end of the film"[807], so the heroine dies or gets married. Later, in the book *The Practice of Love*, de Lauretis contrast these cinematic

[803] Ibidem, p. 72.
[804] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey…, op. cit.*, p. 72.
[805] Ibidem.
[806] Ibidem.
[807] Ibidem, p. 74.

strategies with avant-garde/ independent women's films where the heroine does not die and does not get married in the closure but escapes with another woman, who is not her rival, but her lover.[808]

4.3.2. Perverse pleasures. Filmic lesbian looks.

In filmic context, lesbian issues of (in)visibility have shifted in today's media. Film producers have realized, as stresses Chaudhuri, the commercial potential of "lesbian chic" and its ability to crossover to mainstream audiences. Compared to scarcity of lesbian representation earlier, since the 1980s there has been a trustworthy exposition of lesbians in film, to name a few like *Desert Hearts* (1985), *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), *Go Fish* (1994), *Bound* (1996), and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Increase of television interest came with images *Ellen* (1994-98), *Tripping the Velvet* (2002), *The L-Word* (2004), and *Sugar Rush* (2005), as bring the examples Chaudhuri.[809] Important critique and concerns were raised by some theorists regarding this lesbian visibility as serving again to the perverse heterosexual male pleasure and titillation. One such voices is Jill Dolan essay "The Dynamics of Desire" where she asserts lesbian performance and pornography in lesbian magazines which "produce new meanings about visual space meant at least theoretically to be free of male subordination"[810], offering liberative fantasies and representations of sexual pleasure based on lesbian desire, which is not fixed, male-owned commodity.[811] As for de Lauretis herself, she stresses that circulation of lesbian figure functions as commodity but she focuses more on lesbian visibility in modern culture which for her brings the "risk of blurring lesbian specificity", and "appears to turn lesbian desire into a desire just like any other".[812]

In filmic context, *Desert Hearts* (1986) is now considered a lesbian classic independently produced and directed by Donna Deitch, and further selected for distribution by the MGM Hollywood studio. Vivian Bell (played by Helen Shaver) who is a college professor travels for a quick divorce to Nevada where she meets and is seduced by Cay Rivers, the openly lesbian (played by Patricia Charbonneau). The movie, set in the 1950s, uses the iconography of the Western, and in de Lauretis view, is more "honorable" than other films merely exploiting the lesbian trend and fashion, with Deitch openly declaring it as "a lesbian film" which suggest a

[808] Ibidem.
[809] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey…, op. cit.,* p. 77.
[810] Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference…", *op. cit.*, p. 397.
[811] Ibidem.
[812] Ibidem.

social responsibility of her part.[813] However, by using "lawful narrative genres", such as the Western and the romance, as de Lauretis points out, its love story – even though happens between two women – is presented like any other. So, heterosexual presumptions of the Oedipal narrative, where an "active masculine subject pursues and overcomes a hesitant feminine object, are left unbroken".[814] According to de Lauretis, together with "its seamless narrative space, conventional casting and characterization", *Desert Hearts* simply "transposes lesbianism into Hollywood conventions without re-signifying those conventions in any way".[815] Thus it does not provide another, and different kind of visibility which makes a strategy of reading against the grain problematic[816], as stresses Chaudhuri.

However, as Chaudhuri notes, lesbian spectators might have and benefit pleasure from viewing a woman taking place of the man as the active chaser of romance which brings reading films subversively and against the grains.[817] Such study of audience reactions was delivered by Elizabeth Ellsworth who took the Hollywood movie *Personal Best* (1982) as the case, which features a lesbian relation of two athletes filmed in a voyeuristic style, providing a good example. While mainstream media reviews trivialized the cinematic lesbian relationship favoring heterosexual romance, lesbian reviewers interpretative strategies were devised and enabled resistance to dominant, preferred re-readings. Some totally rewrote the interpretations and made the lesbian relation central, "refusing to take the heterosexist ending on its own terms" and "imagining an alternative ending where the women reunite".[818]

Since the lesbian visibility is still often structured conventionally in cinema, with the "female body held up to the male gaze", as de Lauretis claims after Mulvey, and "his gaze alone bears the power to signify desire, while the woman is either narrative enigma to be 'pursued, investigated, found guilty or redeemed by men' or possessed as 'fetish object of his secret identification'".[819] De Lauretis signals that films need to represent lesbianism in ways that change such customary frameworks and re-create the conventions of seeing. For her:

Simply casting two women in a standard pornographic scenario or in the standard frame of romance, and repackaging them as commodity purportedly produced for lesbians, does not seem to me sufficient to disrupt, subvert, or resist the straight representational and social norms by which 'homosexuality is

[813] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey…, op. cit.,* p. 78.
[814] Ibidem, p. 78.
[815] Ibidem.
[816] Ibidem, p. 79.
[817] Ibidem, p. 78.
[818] Ibidem, p. 79.
[819] Ibidem.

nothing but heterosexuality' – not a fortiori sufficient to shed light on the specific difference that constitutes a lesbian subjectivity.[820]

The aim is not just to make the invisible visible but, rather to flow between different regimes of visibility. This is what is accomplished by Sheila McLaughlin's film *She Must Be Seeing Things* (1987), as de Lauretis believes. Instead of denying lesbian desire or adopting it to conventional narrative and romance, the movie places itself into the contemporary North American lesbian community, both historically and politically.[821] Its originality lies, as de Lauretis writes, in "foregrounding that frame of reference, making it visible, and at the same time shifting it, moving it aside, as it were, enough to let us see through the gap" and "to create a space for questioning (…) what we see in the film".[822] A similar argument, as Chaudhuri points, can be made for another independent, groundbreaking film *Go Fish*.[823] Written by Guinevere Turner and Rose Troche and directed by Rose Troche was premiered in the Sundance Film festival in 1994, launched the career of both, and was the first film to be sold to a distributor Samuel Goldwyn during that event.[824] *Go Fish* has become a groundbreaking, trendy, low-budget comedy which earned 2.4 million dollars proving the marketability of lesbian issues for the film industry. It was ranked by *Indie Wire* on its list, it in 5th place of the 15 Greatest Lesbian Movies of All Time. The movie portrays and celebrates lesbian community in Chicago, as well its sexual and social specificity at all levels.[825] As Chaudhuri writes:

Despite its girl-seek girl romantic comedy premise, it slices up the linear flow of the narrative romance with interludes in which characters comment on its progress, enabling the audience, too to cast a defamiliarizing glance as its standard frames of reference, creating the possibility of seeing differently or otherwise.[826]

In the beginning of the 1990s both theory and cinematic lesbian representations have become finally visible, re-discussed, and re-written in opposition to psychoanalytic concept of (hetero)sexual difference which tended to create representations of masculinity and femininity in a universalizing binary fashion of cinematic visibility.

[820] Ibidem.
[821] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey…, op. cit.,* p. 79.
[822] Ibidem.
[823] Ibidem.
[824] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Go_Fish_(film)
[825] Ibidem.
[826] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey…, op. cit.,* p. 80.

4.4. Queering Desire

4.4.1. Queer as political concept

Queer as a concept evolved from heterosexual limitations and denial of difference other than heterosexual. This denial of other sexual difference not based on binary model, mentioned before in the thesis, was also discussed in a sense of disappointment, and was further provoked by Mulvey's "Afterthoughts on VPNC inspired by *Duel in the Sun*" written in 1989. She responded there to various readers and theorists who were repeatedly asking about VPNC limited approach concerning the focus on heterosexual dominant male spectator, and subsequently she tried to address the issue of women in the audience and the woman-as-protagonist in the melodrama genre. Nicholas de Villiers, who was both disappointed but inspired and provoked by Mulvey's essays and its heterosexual limitations refers to VPNC as truly transdiscursive text, which disappointments led to important discussions in the field of other genders, as was mentioned in the beginning of the chapter.[827]

This transdiscursive disappointment with Mulvey's gendered dichotomy brought the development and in consequence appearance of gender studies, lesbian/gay studies, or queer studies, to name the basic lines of new academic trends. Nicholas de Villiers himself, underlines Mulvey's function as the trans-discursive author important to his own work and reflects over its meaning in his own "Afterthoughts…" to his book *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes and Warhol,* mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. His focus on queer white man and further reflections about "queer opacity" on female and transgender figures is developed in his article where he directly refers to Mulvey and relates to newer and more diverse examples of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer tactics of "opacity" that offer, according to him, "alternatives to the confessional metaphor of coming out from the closet".[828] He further suggests about the insistence on transparency of gaze that "homophobia can involve anxiously insisting on knowing rather than refusing to know about the sexuality of gay people demanding transparency to the gaze of interrogator, indicating a fear of the hidden and the unknown".[829] The same demand on transparency of the gaze of interrogator he applies to other genders offering queer opacity as an "alternative to the hermeneutic tendency of 'the

[827] Nicholas de Villiers, "Afterthoughts on Queer Opacity", published online: April 18, 2 014 in *Invisible Culture IVC*, Issue 22: *Opacity*, accessed on: March 12, 2022, available at: https://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/afterthoughts-on-queer- opacity/
[828] Ibidem.
[829] Ibidem.

closet"[830], suggesting that it is indeed a "visual metaphor" which tries to envision other proposals to overwhelming commands to be "visible" but also "transparent" to the gaze that seeks a well-defined, responsible identity. This kind of new queer policy of "investment in opacity, imperceptibility and escape" becomes an important counter-idea in the light of global surveillance, dataveillance and other secretive forms of recognitions.[831]

Queer is the concept that has constantly been invented, claimed, criticised, imagined and re-imagined, copied, and re-applied for the last 30 years until it has become successful in mobilizing political action and reflection on sexuality and more broadly on society. Even if it has become very trendy today in certain artistic and academic circles, as a concept it carries the painful history of derogative term to address mostly homosexual men, their exclusion, marginalisation, and struggle of sexual minorities and never has been restricted to a neutral academic perspective. This aspect remains even more important today, as stresses Jacek Kornak, due to many essays and books that currently use "queer" as a sign of protest against academic politics.[832] As Chaudhuri argued:

The modern epoch's investigation into the 'truth' of sex through medical, legal, and other discourses have initiated the multiplication and proliferation of sexual identities, the incitement to discourse has aroused rather than repressed sexuality, strengthening diversity by implanting 'perversions' into individuals. (...) "Homosexuality', for the first instance, was invented as a category by nineteenth-century medical discourse, first recorded in 1870 German article. The term 'homosexual' designated a sexual identity, replacing what was formerly known as a series of acts (sodomy). According to this view, homosexuality is category of knowledge, discursively constructed in society, rather than a fixed knowledge. [833]

As for lesbianism, it is often said that "Queen Victoria thought that there was no need to make lesbianism illegal because she did not believe it existed"[834] and Foucault himself also "overlooks the social construction of female homosexuality in favour of male homosexuality"[835] which was associated with invisibility of lesbian culture, as Chaudhuri notes. Until the 1990s the adjective queer has been functioning in many English-speaking countries as an abusive term for homosexuals and other sexually non-normative persons. In the end of the 1980s the term was picked up many activists and academics as a tool of political resistance

[830] Ibidem.
[831] Ibidem.
[832] Jacek Kornak, *Queer as Political Concept,* Academic Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2015, p. 202, accessed: March 9, 2022, available at: https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/publications/queer-as-a-political-concept
[833] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey..., op. cit.,* p. 77.
[834] Ibidem.
[835] Ibidem.

and engagement and remains one of the central concepts in academic debates concerning sexual minorities, as indicated Kornak. He explores various academic discourses in which the term was used and related to multiple topics, and stresses that it was to address topics such as identity, discrimination, but more significantly, to develop complex analyses that created new politics of sexuality and developed research in the field of gender studies. Yet, Kornak overlooks its important roots in feminist film studies with Mulvey's gendered gaze theory working both as controversial and productive binary logic of exclusion.

Even today, as Chaudhuri notes, the term queer raises a number of questions what is queer and who is queer. She asks: "Is being lesbian or gay the same as being queer? Can straight people ever be queer?" and brings the dictionary definition that include "eccentric", "homosexual".[836] Carrying the spirit of critique of normativity and questioning what is "normal", de Lauretis coined the phrase "queer theory" unsettling existing satisfactions, highlighting the dynamic of unpredictable nature of desire and offering a "throughgoing critique of heterosexual assumptions of most feminist theorizing on film", with inclusion questioning clinical and other institutional discourses that frame gay and lesbian sexualities an unnatural deviation[837], stresses Chaudhuri. She recalls queer emergence from pejorative historical context:

'Queer' was once a derogatory, homophobic word; its victims reclaimed it as a term of self-empowerment in the late 1980s. In today's queer theory, especially that which follows the work of another gender theorist Judith Butler (b. 1956), it is an 'umbrella' term for the diverse range of lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender (L-G-B-T) behaviours, identifications, and cultures. The common alliance between these positions was given a real urgency by the late 1980s AIDS crisis in the West and the accompanying tide of homophobia affecting queers of all sexes.[838]

For de Lauretis, the new "Queer theory" was intended to create and displace old labels, including "homosexual", which was rejected by many gays and lesbians as a clinical and derogatory term, as well as the "lesbian and gay" phase which couples the two terms and in "common usage glosses over them"[839] missing important differences and particularities of experience which disappear. Instead, the queer theory "emphasises the social construction of lesbians and gay sexualities" and brings "interrogation of essentialist, universal, or transhistorical notions of sexual 'identity'".[840]

[836] Ibidem, p. 75.
[837] Ibidem.
[838] Ibidem, pp. 75-75.
[839] Shoshini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey…, op. cit.,* p. 76.
[840] Ibidem.

It needs to be stressed that it was thanks to the critical feminist academic discourse, firstly male and female homosexual ones, later the queer one and finally via gender performativity concept which brought new transdiscursive perspectives to the gaze concept in film and visual studies. Today, queer does not relate any more to homosexuality as Kornak notes. Yet it has its primarily roots in gay homosexual movement, but now it functions on a wider platform in opposition to "homonormativity" as well, according to Halberstam.[841]

4.4.2. Feminism and gendered genealogy of Queer theory

In discussions about what is queer and what is not, opinions depend on understanding of genealogy of queer theory language and cultural context of specific countries, as Tiina Rosenberg says. She brings a historical reflection on the word queer and its feminist genealogies which were made in 1991 by Teresa de Lauretis, who points to the fact that she was not aware of Queer Nation's activist group existence at the time she launched the term *queer:*

The term 'queer' was suggested to me by a conference in which I had participated and whose proceedings will be published in the forthcoming volume, ed. by Douglas Crimp and the Bad Object Choices, 'How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video.' My 'queer' however, had no relation to the Queer Nation group, of whose existence I was ignorant at the time. As the essays will show there is very little common between Queer Nation and this queer theory.[842]

Teresa de Lauretis serves here as a very important link between Mulvey's concept of the dominant male gaze in cinema, further criticism illuminating female homosexual gaze and desire in lesbian cinema in which she played the fundamental role, and subsequently came her invaluable meaning in coining queer term in academia, that created the passage into queer theory.

The year 1990 was exceptional, Queer Nation[843] distributed its manifesto entitled "Queers Read This", Judith Butler released *Gender Trouble,* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick published *Epistemology of the Closet* and Teresa de Lauretis launched the theoretic category Queer at the University of California conference in Santa Cruz. The word queer with reference to gender, was first discussed in 1991, in a special edition of a feminist journal *Differences: A Journal of Feminist*

[841] Ibidem.

[842] Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities. An Introduction", in *differences*, Volume 3, no. 2/ 1991, p. xvii, footnote 2, quoted in Tiina Rosenberg, "LOCALLY QUEER. A Note on the Feminist Genealogy of Queer Theory" in *Graduate Journal of Social Science* - 2008 - Vol. 5 Issue 2, *op. cit.,* p. 6.

[843] Queer Nation is LGBTQ activist organization founded in March 1990 in New York City, by HIV/AIDS activists. The four founders were outraged at the escalation of anti-gay violence on the streets and prejudice in the arts and media. The group is known for confrontational tactics, its slogans and practice of outing. available at: www.en.m.wikipedia.org, accessed on: March 23, 2022.

Cultural Studies, that included the papers presented earlier at the conference and its earlier use recalled by a historian George Chauncey in a book entitled *The Gay New York, Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940.*

Rosenberg stresses in her article that a phenomenon of queer may appear from a non-American perspective as a uniform idea while the discourse within Queer theory is far from that unity. She reflects on various reception of the category itself and underlines the strong impact and genealogies of queer issues in lesbian-feminist theory, which focuses critically on heteronormativity and heteronormative ways of looking.

Queer theory is neither a homogenous nor systematic school of thought, it has evolved from numerous studies reflecting critically on heteronormativity, structures, institutions that support heterosexuality as coded and natural norms embracing nascent sexuality. As a theory it recalls lesbian feminist theory and gay studies which refer to theoretical discussions about dominant structures and norms shaped by heterosexuality and cultural homophobia in Western societies.

Visual culture interpretation, textual analysis and politics have become the common ground in the early days of queer theory in the 1990s, and most analyses had their starting point in feminist theory, lesbian and gay studies, and later women's studies. Nonetheless, queer scholar Judith Halberstam points out that "when it comes to queer historiography and queer biographies, it is rather pointless to study lesbians and homosexual men as a group".[844] Another very important turning points in feminist discussion on sexuality which enriched queer studies later on, was a very special place made by the introduction of the term "heteronormativity" in the 1990, which happened as a direct inspiration of Mulvey's binary concept of the gaze. Thanks to Mulvey sexuality started to be discussed as a gendered representation influencing differently the narrative, identity construction and has become a field of analyses of diversified gendered gazes, leaving behind previous dominant assumptions of essentialism based on biological, inborn, and natural inclination features.

A rebellion against the censored female viewership and feminine desire seen via masculine lens, regardless of the other viewer's gender identity or sexual orientation came with Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble.* Her idea of "gender performativity" has become even more famous than Mulvey's concepts which originally inspired her, and brought new, controversial perspectives

[844] Tiina Rosenberg, "LOCALLY QUEER…", *op. cit.*, p. 10.

on gender identities created by social norms.[845] Gender, for Butler, is "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame (…) to produce the appearance", it can be fluid for her and in this sense, one can never become a woman because there is no "ontological woman", only a "substantive appearance"[846]. Even if it does not refer directly to Mulvey's concepts of woman as spectacle she develops the idea of spectacle as performativity for other genders, not only women.

Finally, came lesbians of color and the decade of the 1980s and 1990 have changed feminist perspectives bringing more diverse, inclusive, and liberal discussions for all genders. Eve Oishi, biracial, queer, feminist scholar and curator of experimental film and video by queers of color makes her positions in "direct response and sometimes in contradiction to that of the generation that set the terms for the fields in which she works: Asian American studies, women's studies, queer studies, and feminist media".[847] Being Mulvey's student she discussed her project with her regarding uses of the erotic in lesbian film and video and she cites Mulvey's comments about sexuality at the time of writing VPNC:

When I was discussing this project with Laura Mulvey (one of my professors at graduate school), she insisted that her generation was simply not ready to analyze their own "erotic charge" as they unveiled dominant systems. However, she admits that they certainly set the stage for later scholars to do so. Feminist film theory has a difficult time understanding women's sexuality in general, not to mention of feminist film critics.[848]

As Juhasz stresses, the enormous importance of women-of-color feminism and gay and lesbian studies has altered totally in the 1980s and 1990s the terms of woman studies and has made it for almost impossible today not to think through the interconnections of class, race, sexuality, desire, and gender. This kind of adaptative and mutable feminism with its flexibility, which Oishi represents, is often called "postfeminism" , to contrast feminism of 1970s considered as dangerous or liberatory.[849]

[845] "Mulvey and Butler Psychoanalysis. Exposing Foundations: Psychoanalysis and Gender in Mulvey and Butler" – Internet Public Library , accessed on: 23 March 2022, available at: www.ipl.org
[846] Ibidem.
[847] Alexandra Juhasz (ed.), *Women of Vision….*, *op. cit.*, p. 307.
[848] Eve Oishi, in Alexandra Juhasz (ed.), *Women of Vision. Histories in Feminist Film and Video*, University of Minnesota Press, New York 2001, p. 308.
[849] Alexandra Juhasz (ed.), "*Women of Vision….", op. cit.,* p. 308.

4.4.3. Transgender looks and queering Black feminist film practice

Reference to Mulvey's thought and her "ignorance" of other genders both in VPNC and in *Afterthoughts*, still mistakenly repeatedly occurs in analyses of homosexual aspects of viewing, as in the following comment concerning homosexual looking in the movie *Love, Simon*:

In her follow-up chapter, "Afterthoughts", Mulvey addresses some of the counterclaims to her previous work. In this work, she recognizes the possibility of a heterosexual female spectator, but she argues that women will be in a struggle between the active and passive roles in the film. Mulvey believes that "Hollywood genre films structured around masculine pleasure, an identification with the active point of view, [allowing] a woman spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity" (124). So, while a female spectator is possible, Mulvey argues that there is still a link between a woman's viewing of a film and masculinity. In both of her arguments, Mulvey ignores anything that isn't a heteronormative viewing of a film.[850]

Another example of work drawing on the limitations of Mulvey's VPNC is *Towards a Fluid Cinematic Spectatorship and Desire: Revisiting Laura Mulvey's Psychoanalytic Film Theory* by Taylor Ashton McGoey. The whole research rarely notices that concepts used to critique Mulvey for, like binary gender, heteronormativity, race, queer, transgender, did not exist in film and visual culture of the 1970s and appeared thanks to response or critique of VPNC assumptions. It probably results from the lack of knowledge about such, often indirect, dependence, which reason lies in a wide dispersion of materials, various problematic inter-connections, influences, or dependence of contemporary culture concepts on primarily heteronormative Mulveyian notions. No one supposed that VPNC published in 1975 will work like a fuse for the exploration of visual pleasure concerning other genders which did not have a right to exist in 1970s, race/ethnic groups, women of colour representations, artistic, sociological, or anthropological revisions.

Even though McGoey appreciates Mulvey's fundamental meaning he does not notice its inspirational function in further evolution of the gaze concept and its final, both fluid, racial or intersectional concepts creation which he notes but treats them as independent contemporary issues. He refers to the latest Mulvey's book *Afterimages* but still critiques her for the lack of personal response to queer or transgender ways of looking. The reflection appears whether Mulvey needed or needs today be engaged, refer, or respond to all paths of thinking that her essay generated. She does it, anyway, as was mentioned above in the case of consultations of i.a. Eve Oishi project concerning the use of erotic in lesbian film. Additionally, it seems

[850] Abigail Paskert, „*Love, Simon* is Rethinking Mulvey and the Gaze in Film, *Gender and Diversity in Film*, Xavier University, Spring 2018, accessed: January 9, 2023, available at: https://engl359.home.blog/analytic-blog-posts/homosexuals-laura-mulvey-and-love-simon

impossible regarding numerous fields that VPNC influenced and areas of polemics it provoked. McGoey refers to i.a. Judith Halberstam article "The Transgender Look" but he still does not observe its dependence and interconnection with Mulvey's primarily notions of the heteronormative gaze, and which connection Radkiewicz points in her book about Queer cinema, calling Mulvey's "classical theory of looking" and referring variously to its foundational meaning in contemporary gendered filmic trends.[851]

But what needs to be stressed, various critics still do not observe VPNC hereditary values, as if today's ways of seeing were existing independently or maybe for some the 'male gaze' influence for visual culture seems so obvious that irritating to refer after 50 years of its over-usage. In 1997 Jane Gaines, in the middle of discussion about VPNC took up a chance to revise the first single-authored book by Chris Straayer *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies* and see how far "we have come and where we still need to go if we are to produce a feminist film theory that can imagine a plurality of sexualities".[852] Straayer brings to our attention a strategy of juxtaposition a sociology of queerness deviance with the assumption of sexual variegation and gender indeterminacy. As Gaines refers to Straayer's notes about Queer and feminism connection:

These are sexualities that "pressure" feminism. Sometimes it is hard to locate feminism in relation to the new troublemaking upstart, queer theory. Queer theory is not antithetical to feminism because feminism is a kind of base line for it. Neither is queer theory just one of the many feminisms. Queer theory is feminism and more.[853]

However, Queer gaze has become so trendy in contemporary cultural analyses both in art, literature, and cinema that even recent writing about Hollywood place 'queer gaze' in the spotlight as Tre'vell Anderson writes in Los Angeles Times referring primarily to the movie "Love, Simon" by Greg Berlani. Anderson stressed that the 'male gaze' coined by Mulvey "describes how film – and art of all sorts – is created through the lens of a heterosexual man. Such a gaze has manifested itself in stereotypical roles for women and minorities, including the busty dumb blond and the sassy black woman."[854] He stresses the risen awareness of the "female gaze" with women been given more "opportunities to write and direct their own

[851] Małgorzata Radkiewicz, *Oblicza Kina Queer, op. cit.*
[852] Jane Gaines, "Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies. Queering feminist film theory", *Jump Cut*, No 41, May 1997, pp. 45-48.
[853] Ibidem.
[854] Tre'vell Anderson, "What Hollywood can gain by placing the 'queer gaze' in the spotlight", posted March 16, 2018 *Los Angeles Times*, accessed: May 7, 2023, available at: https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-ca-mn-lgbtq-filmmakers-love-simon-20180316-story.html

narratives with female characters at the centre".[855] As well as the boom of women behind the scenes in television with examples "from the all-female directing teams of "Queen Sugar" and "Jessica Jones" to the writers rooms of "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" and "Jane the Virgin" – for representations of women toppling patriarchal conventions. Referring to still less known "queer gaze" he writes:

The "queer gaze", meanwhile, remains less known and discussed as a creative perspective. A direct response to the oft unspoken of yet ever-present "straight gaze," the queer gaze recognizes how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people create and view art. Moreover, it challenges binary notions of existence and storytelling employed in many - male gaze versus female gaze - conversations where the context is nearly always heterosexual.

Karen Tongston, a Filipino-American cultural critic, writer, and queer studies scholar, says that "A Queer gaze can help decenter what we prioritize in storytelling, decentering where stories usually happen and finding them in places we don't usually look".[856] It is a vantage point, as she says, that plays out "perhaps most notably in instances of desire on screen".[857] "The male gaze and straight gaze have a particular way of understanding what sex and intimacy looks like"[858], she continues and adds: "What a queer gaze makes possible is a different rhythm to how we might play out and choreograph that intimacy, a different style of looking that sometimes moves beyond the configuration of bodies in intimacy and focuses on the connection and intimacy itself".[859] She adds that "there is a certain ephemerality and innuendo to [the queer experience] because for so long queer people have not had a public culture accepting of queer desire".[860]

As for filmic practice that refers to queer representations of pleasure and intimacy, the lesbian black writer-director Angela Robinson claims that while the existence of the queer gaze is important to excavate, it is also necessary to highlight that this perspective interacts with other identities which the filmmaker may carry.[861] A similar confluence of identities has a trans filmmaker Sydney Freeland being a transgender American woman, notes Anderson. Robinson stresses that filming *Professor Marston and the Wonder Woman* her queer and female gazes intersected in creating the film's more intimate scenes and she was obsessed with:

[855] Ibidem.
[856] Ibidem.
[857] Ibidem.
[858] Ibidem.
[859] Ibidem.
[860] Ibidem.
[861] Tre'vell Anderson, "What Hollywood can gain by placing the 'queer gaze'…", *op. cit.*

The notion of consent and agency for the female characters and so the camera is on their faces as they change consent (…) usually it's about the act and the male [but I wanted] to have the camera not on their body parts, but to show that a woman was in charge of each step in the escalation of the sexual relationship.[862]

Moreover, as Queer director Andrew Haigh says, the queer gaze is in part about empathy:

What resonates with me is difference and characters that are struggling with difference, in whatever way that is, because at the heart of the queer experience is feeling alone and disconnected from the world around you but desperately looking, in the things around you, for love, belonging and sex.[863]

Even if Mulvey herself did not refer to Queer gaze directly in her writings, her recent involvements in intersectional, cross-race and cross-gender projects prove that she is updated with all trends she provoked writing VPNC 50 years ago. One of examples is the book *Feminisms*, where Mulvey was invited to be one of editors of, collection of essays, which include articles from the fields like "Uncommon Sensuality: New Queer Feminist Film/Theory" by Sophie Mayer, "Destroy Visual Pleasure: Cinema, Attention, and the Digital Female Body (Or, Angelina Jolie is a Cyborg)" by William Brown, or "Sound and Feminist Modernity in Black Women's Film Narratives" by Geetha Ramanathan. Long lasting cooperation with Isaac Julien and bell hooks also shows her engagement in social and racial notions of the cinema which effected with a publication of Julien exhibition catalogue at MoMA "Isaac Julien: Riot" with Mulvey reflecting on his work at lengths, as stresses Makiko Wholey.[864]

Fluid identity concept concerning cross gender, queer and race mobile identifications has become one of the most important challenges to Mulvey's paradigm rooted within psychoanalysis, which was the theory of "film's homology with fantasy as the mise-en-scene of desire" which was discussed by Elisabeth Cowie in 1984 who suggested that spectators do not "necessarily take up predetermined or unitary positions of identification".[865] However, as Patricia White claims, "while making room for identification across gender and sexuality, such accounts tend to overestimate fantasmatic mobility, downplaying the constraints of socio-sexual identity on spectatorship".[866]

[862] Ibidem.
[863] Ibidem.
[864] Makiko Wholey, "Portrait of an Artist: *Isaac Julien:* RIOT", INSIDE/OUT A MoMA/MoMA PS1 BLOG, posted December 2013 , accessed: January 17, 2023, available at: https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2013/12/19/riot/
[865] Patricia White, "Feminism…", *op. cit.,* p. 121.
[866] Ibidem.

In Mulvey's recent book *Afterimages* she also opens the introduction with the main focus of on race issues which she was accused to "omit". The conclusion about invisibility of connection with Mulvey's concepts is that discussion evolved so intensely and has become so transdisciplinary that many contemporary film and cultural critics do not always trace its historical influence having its roots and connection to VPNC. As Mulvey writes in *Afterimages,* there was a time of craze provoked by the essay and she stopped giving the rights to republish it. Later, she has changed her mind since she noticed that article started to live its own life, independent of her.[867]

4.4. Fluid pleasure identifications. Conclusions.

Mulvey's heterosexual concept of visual pleasure and female cinematic spectacle, being considered in terms of female representation and "to-be-looked-at-ness" as dominating on screen, provoked answers that brought homosexual male spectacle on theoretical stage. Thanks to derogatory terminology, coined by American psychiatry and adjacent heteronormative legislation, male as gay erotic object was long considered by twentieth century culture in terms of fear and deviation which all created kind of social "homosexual panic". Finally, this field of visual pleasure found its place in the 1980s both in cinematic practice and serious theoretical reconsiderations which resulted in critical analyses of previous representations showing male homosexuality as monstrous, ridicule, disavowed, or mocked on the screen. Male homosexual nude brought the male body also to a public scene that also served to women, which proved that gaze and visual pleasure can be fluid and detachable of actual sexual preference. What is more, enormous resistance to Mulvey's bisexual paradigms were risen by homosexual women, who did not want to be incorporated into binary or gay perspective of pleasure, without stressing lesbian own specificity. Since the 1990s filmic lesbian presence is noted and respected in cinema which together with male homosexual gay(z)e fused the concepts and appearance of Queer theory and New Queer cinema. Reflexions and re-visions of non-heteronormative representations of desire and visual pleasure, rooted in VPNC psychoanalytic binary concepts, were of invaluable significance that led to the concept of fluid identification, which works today as the political concept concerning contemporary models of sexuality.

[867] Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages…, op. cit.*

CHAPTER V

Visual Pleasure and Racial Gaze

5.1. Black Male Intersectional Representations

5.1.1. Race, decolonial frames and male nude

Issues concerning race and colonialism which came into light in the late 1980s have emerged partly from ongoing debates in feminist film theory where representation and gender have become central. An Australian philosopher Barbara Creed notes that Laura Mulvey and later film feminists raised questions about a narrative crisis which elucidated Grand Narratives as the white male. Both Mulvey and Claire Johnston first articulated and re-valued the female absence within modernist theoretical frames as Creed stresses.[868] Directly or indirectly, postmodern concepts operating on this gendered absence opened up in the 1980s theoretical space for new research and projects on race and colonialism not only in feminist film theory but in general, although humanities were somewhat slow to undertake such work in images.[869] As Mark Sealy notes "It is evident within British photographic history that the 1980s represent a seismic shift in the cultural landscapes of photography politics, race and representation".[870] The narrative of that time was well encapsulated in the title of photo-journal *Ten 8*, published in 1992: "Critical Decade: Black British Photography in the 80s", as recalls Sealy. Stewart Hall, Jamaican-British post-colonial culture identity critic wrote in its introduction:

A clear understanding of the complex debates which have taken place ... offer an insight into a range of key issues, such as the meaning of blackness, gender and sexuality in a discourse of racial difference, the role of racial representations in popular culture, documentary and its relation to realism and authority, and the politics of the constructed image. ... Critical Decade seeks to provide the ground for new critical responses in the 1990s.[871]

The undeniable fact is that by the end of the 1980s cultural institutions and people managing photographic collections were little aware of the work being produced by black photographers or black directors based in Britain. But even today, famous institutions as Black Archives based in London, Brixton, does not provide or initiate exhibitions which would be inclusive and representative for Black artists living in London.[872]

The question about not mentioning race in VPNC was frequently asked and Mulvey herself stated that today she considers it important omission and looking back she finds it strange that

[868] Barbara Creed, "From Here to Modernism: Feminism and Postmodernism", *Screen,* Vol 28, No 2, 1987
[869] Lola Young, *Feminism and Film,* ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press 2000, p. 311.
[870] Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time*, Lawrence & Wishart 2019, p. 222.
[871] Stewart Hall, cited in Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time,* Lawrence & Wishart 2019, p. 223.
[872] Conversations with Maja A. Ngom Polish-Senegal visual artist and photographer based in London, Brixton, March 2023.

that she "did not then think of studio-system Hollywood as an apartheid cinema" as she thinks now. Answering this question, which often has functioned as an indictment she writes:

Although I was reasonably aware of American history and culture and had a definite interest in African American literature and music, it was some time before I began to realize that the whiteness of the Hollywood screen was due to a conscious implementation of racist policies in the film industry. The structure of the gaze around gender, however, was obvious to me and could be conceptualized psychoanalytically. To address the question of racism would have demanded a much more historically informed and serious engagement.[873]

What is more, as she stresses, the cinema was a particular subject to racist taboo and the Hays Code of the 1930 formally prohibited any depiction of interracial romance: "the threat of interracial desire had to be erased from spectatorship, creating yet another rationale for black performers' exclusion from the screen".[874] Her later involvement and appreciation of non-white cinema and art can be traced in "Fetishism and Curiosity" (1996) were she analyses artistic production and writings of Jimmie Durham, who explores the mythology of the United States that disavows its colonial violent heritage and erases Native Americans culture. She criticizes colonial religious fetishistic imagery and iconography produced after Spanish and English conquest of America and refers to Franz Fanon, an iconic figure of post-colonial studies[875] even if his theories were not gender inclusive. In the same book Mulvey makes analyses of a Senegal film (1976) and African fetishism in an article entitled "The Carapace that failed: Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*". Further cooperation with colonial identity critics such as Manthia Diawara, Bell Hooks, Stewart Hall, Kobena Mercer, B. Ruby Rich brought the intellectual autobiography of Isaak Julien Riot published by MoMA in 2013 as well as analyses of *Daughters of the Dust* directed by Julie Dash, *Under the Skin of the City* by Rakhshan Banietemad, or *Ten Thousands Waves* by Isaac Julien in the context of displacing spectator (2010).[876] And finally the publication that gathered all recent trends and directions of white and black women's film theory as well and the New Queer feminist film theory published in 2015 and entitled *Feminisms.*[877]

[873] Laura Mulvey, *Afterimages. On Cinema, Women and Changing Times*, REAKTION BOOKS LTD., London 2022, p. 243.
[874] Ibidem. p. 244.
[875] Laura Mulvey, Postscript. Changing Objects, Preserving Time in Fetishism and Curiosity, British Film Institute, London 1996, pp. 155-175.
[876] Laura Mulvey, Afterimages. On Cinema, Women and Changing Times, REAKTION BOOKS LTD., London 2022.
[877] Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers (eds.), *Feminisms*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2015.

5.1.2. Robert Mapplethorpe and Glenn Ligon's intersectional model of identity

The first one to bring interracial homosexual desire into visibility was Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), who was creating in the 1970s and 1980s until his death in 1989 caused by AIDS. Being parallel in his production to Mulvey's VPNC and surrounding its counter discussion, he proposed male nude representations that made the political, religious, censorship and cultural American scene explode. First erotic homosexual S-M portraits and later nude studies of Black men in his *Z Portfolio* brought him fame as highly controversial, scandalous, and pornographic artist. But as Mapplethorpe observed, it is about seeing "I'm looking for the unexpected. I'm looking for things I've never seen before".[878] But he was "looking for trouble", as British Black studies historian Kobena Mercer wrote in his analysis of Mapplethorpe artistic work after his death in 1991. Male nude entry into scopic economy of photography not as a classical ideal nor normative representations was brought into focus in 1978 when a scholar Margaret Walters published *Nude Male,* one of the first books positioning a male nude in the history of art.[879]
Yet it was Mapplethorpe who made a black male a desired object of the gaze, which was historically and culturally projected by White Western culture narratives as fear, deviance, or danger in visual violence of images.[880] Professor of Art, Ken Gonzalez-Day recalls him as a gifted photographer who brought "rigorously formal composition and design, and an objectifying 'cool' eye, to extreme subject matter. In doing so, he sparked a firestorm of outrage that led to debate about the public funding of art in the United States".[881]

Mapplethorpe, who studied painting, drawing and sculpture at Pratt Institute, started making black and white photographs already in 1970s, encouraged by Sam Wagstaff, his long-term intimate partner, mentor, and art curator. He began exhibiting widely with help of Wagstaff and quickly gained a reputation of extraordinary photographer. Some however regarded him a pornographer especially after publishing *X Portfolio* (1979) centered around S&M practice and later *Z Portfolio* (1981) which focused on black male nude. What is important, Mapplethorpe

[878] Citation from Art News 1988, Tate, "The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe. From portraits of iconic figures in the art and music world to powerful and moving self-portraits", accessed March 31, 2023, available at: www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/robert-mapplethorpe-11413/photographs-robert-mapplethorpe
[879] Julia Stachura, „Przestrzeń negocjacji. Fotograficzne autoportrety Paula Mpagi Sepuyi jako refleksja nad obrazem czarności i nagości", in *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej,* accessed on March 14, 2023, available at: https://www.pismowidok.org/pl/archiwum/2020/28-wyobrazenia-rasy/przestrzen-negocjacji
[880] Mark Sealy, "Violence of the Image" in *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time,* Lawrence and Wishart, London 2019, pp. 106-117.
[881] Ken Gonzalez-Day, "Mapplethorpe, Robert (1946-1989)" 2002, reprinted from http://www.glbtq.com, accessed on: 18th March 2023, available at: http://www.glbtqarchive.com/arts/mapplethorpe_r_A.pdf.

was the first to present visual pleasure as fluid and inclusive for both homosexual and heterosexual subjects and for white and black audiences.

In the same decade as Mapplethorpe was producing his homoerotic photography with representations of white and black nude bodies with masculine genitals exposed to visual pleasure of the viewer, Lacan wrote *La signification of phallus* (1977) in which neither interracial nor people of color sexual identification nor even its existence were noted. His previous *Mirror Stage* psychoanalytical assumptions did not include a Black subject because for him a black male creative subject or a positive object of the look did not exist. Time also seemed to play a critical role for many intellectuals such as a black philosopher and psychiatrist Franz Fanon who wrote a famous *Black Skins, White Masks* in 1952, but his approach of post-colonial studies and race perspective were to come into considerations three decades later, at the end of 1980s, together with accusations of Mulvey for being "colour blind".[882] It was also Fanon who, before Lacan, noticed manifestation of a black phallus as a sexual obsession in white Western colonial culture and science.

Professor of Cultural Theory and African film scholar, Mathia Diawara was the first one to make Black spectators and black representations in Hollywood visible, underlying the impact of Mulvey's essay, Christian Metz' *Imaginary Signifier* and Stephen Heath's *Difference* and inspiration of Freud's and Lacan's gendered spectatorship concepts. He emphasized that thanks to these authors debates in the 1980s began to focus on sexuality and gender but still "prevailing approach has remained color-blind" and this narcissistic form of identification did not include experiences of black spectators. Diawara suggests that these "components of "difference" among elements of race, gender and sexuality give rise to different readings of the same material". Black spectator reluctance to identify with the dominant readings of *The Color Purple* by Steven Spielberg (1986) and *The Birth of a Nation* by DW Griffith (1915) with their encoded racist ideology and racial stereotypes, present the South with its ban on inter-racial marriages, black "inferiority" and Otherness, and support perceiving race as potentially representing evil, danger, rape and chaos with black skin characters whereas white ones as those who need protection and gain sympathy of the viewers. "Whether black or white, male or

[882] Mathia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance", accessed on: March 15, 2023, available at: https://www.oddweb.or/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/29-4-66.pdf

female, the spectator is supposed to identify (…) with the white hero".[883] As Janet Maslin, *New York Time* film critic, wrote in 1985 after Spielberg's *The Color Purple* release:

Spielberg has looked on the sunny side of Miss Walker's novel, fashioning a grand, multi-hanky entertainment that is as pretty and lavish as the book is plain. If the book is set in the harsh, impoverished atmosphere of rural Georgia, the movie unfolds in a cozy, comfortable, flower-filled wonderland.(…) His film is an upbeat, affirmative fable in which optimism, patience and family loyalty emerge as cardinal virtues, and in which even the wife-beating villain has charm. (…) From another director, this might be fatally confusing, but Mr. Spielberg's showmanship is still with him. [884]

Diawara quoting Mulvey's concept of identification with the male white hero and Rita Dandridge response and resistance to the racist ideology in Spielberg's *The Color Purple*, recalls Dandridge arguments about Spielberg's racial stereotypes: "Spielberg's credentials for producing *The Color Purple* are minimal. He is not a southerner. He has no background in the black experience, and he seems to know little about feminism".[885]

In his references to feminist writings on (female) punished and disciplined representations Diawara recalls images of punished and disciplined black men in contemporary films such as *Rocky II* (1979), *A Soldier's Story* (1984), *Forty-Eight Hours* (1982) and *The Color Purple* (mentioned above). He disagrees with / questions Mulvey's concept of pleasure being made for the male spectator and discusses the dominant image of 'castrated' black man in Hollywood films:

It seems to me that re-inscription of the image of the 'castrated' black male in these contemporary Hollywood films can be illuminated by a perspective similar to that advanced by feminist criticism. Laura Mulvey argues that the classical Hollywood film is made for the pleasure of the male spectator. However, as a black male spectator, I wish to argue, in addition, that the dominant cinema situates black characters primarily for the pleasure of white spectator (male or female).[886]

Mapplethorpe visual representations of a black male nude functioning in his photography for visual pleasure of a homosexual male and a heterosexual female put a white man in a position of being "castrated" by a black man nude image. Mapplethorpe artistic practice set the example of opposition to Mulvey's assumption of identification as constructed heterosexual norm where lesbian, homosexual, inter-racial or Queer identification had no place. Mulvey responded to this

[883] Ibidem.
[884] Janet Maslin, "The Color Purple", https://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/18/movies/film-the-color-purple-from-steven-spielberg.html
[885] Rita Dandridge, "The Little Book (and Film) that Started the Big War", *Black film Review*, vol 2 no 2, 1986, p. 28 cited in Mathia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance", accessed on: March 15, 2023, available at: https://www.oddweb.or/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/29-4-66.pdf
[886] Mathia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance", accessed on: March 15, 2023, available at: https://www.oddweb.or/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/29-4-66.pdf, pp. 70-71.

argument in 1981 with a proposal of possible "perverse" identification with the male gaze[887] and re-considered the female spectator and her pleasure as "more deep-rooted and complex" pointing to female inability to achieve sexual stability (assumption rooted in Freud's theory of femininity).[888] She also points out to the process that "leaves women also shifting between the metaphoric opposition "active" and passive". The correct road, *femininity,* leads to increasing repression of "the active"[889], as Mulvey expands her previous argument.

In this sense a homosexual gaze of Mapplethorpe, the same as Hollywood films structured around masculine heterosexual pleasure, offers an identification with the *active* point of view which allows a woman spectator "to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity".[890] This female trans-sex identification and fantasy is for Mulvey a *habit* that very easily becomes *second nature* but "does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes".[891] Even if Mulvey was criticized again for this generalization and not evolving that line of thought about transvestite female spectatorship in "Afterthoughts…", the outrage raised after Mapplethorpe exhibitions in the USA showed that trans-sex, cross race, homoerotic and female identification with her fantasies and desires became one of the most important political issues.

His photographs were inspired by Michelangelo sculptures and "perfection in form" with persistent themes of explicit, often extreme male sexual objects combined with rigorously formal composition and design.[892] Strong sexual aura is also conveyed in his other, non-sexual images. David Leddick, writer and editor of photographic books, claims that:

The young Mapplethorpe emerged to blend many facets of male nude photography from the past into a new style. Strongly influenced by George Platt Lynes, Hoyninger-Huene, Man Ray, and Horts P. Horst, his very well photographed subjects were soon to display more of the maleness than had ever been displayed before. [893]

However, for majority of male critics and curators in the 1980s shows dedicated to male nudes were unacceptable and they were perceiving a male nude as the "province of homosexuals or

[887] Thomas Elsaesser, Malte Hagener, *Teoria Filmu: wprowadzenie przez zmysły,* Universitas, Kraków, 2015, p. 134. Org. title *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses.*
[888] Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)" in *Visual and Other Pleasures,* 2nd edition, Palgrave Macmillan 2009, p. 31.
[889] Ibidem, pp. 33-34.
[890] Ibidem, p. 34.
[891] Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'", *op. cit.*, p. 35.
[892] Ken Gonzalez-Day, "Mapplethorpe, Robert (1946-1989)" 2002, reprinted from http://www.glbtq.com, Accessed: March 13, 2023, available at: http://www.glbtqarchive.com/arts/mapplethorpe_r_A.pdf
[893] David Leddick, *The Male Nude*, 2nd ed. Taschen, 2015, p. 300.

women who wanted to view man in a reduced way, stripped of power."[894] As David Leddick writes about the critics (all of them were male in the 1980s), they were shocked, disgusted and offended, and the New York Times considered it to be a feminist idea to "make men look ridiculous and unworthy respect" since a clothed man was equated with respectability. One of male critics of the New York Times wrote: "Nude women seem to be in their natural state, men for some reason, merely look undressed".[895] Most American male critics looked and wrote exactly as was described by Mulvey, who exposed heteronormative masculine perspective of looking for naked women as unique acceptable visual pleasure.

Rare exception was writing of Gene Thornton, writing for New York Times, who precisely summed up the attitude of the time:

There is especially something to be said for old fashioned prudery when the unclothed human body is a man's body. No one denies that men's bodies are sexually attractive to most women and also to some men. Nor does anyone deny that the place of the male nude in art is an old and honorable one. Nevertheless, there is something disconcerning about the sight of a man's naked body being presented primarily as a sexual object.[896]

For a Professor of Arts, Ken Gonzalez-Day, Mapplethorpe gaze is "particularly noteworthy for its cool detachment even when recording scenes of intense sexual activity. The artist presents masculine bodies as objectified icons of desire"[897], but Mapplethorpe's black male body has become particularly controversial after the publication of *The Black Book* in 1986 and accusations of racist objectification and fetishization.[898]

These extended readings of his photographs outside Mulvey's binary terms of objectification and fetishization of women, diverted the dominant assumption of the male heterosexual white gaze and brought the focus on the black male subject as the object of the erotic gaze. But the critique of Mapplethorpe objectification and fetishization of a male white/black body as something negative does not have its justification in practice of looking and transgressive fantasy of both white/black gay or heterosexual female. It works as the liquid, processual or contemporary even Queer visual pleasure, with fetishization and objectification as components

[894] Ibidem.
[895] David Leddick, *The Male Nude, op. cit.,* p. 299.
[896] Ibidem, p. 300.
[897] Ken Gonzalez-Day, "Mapplethorpe, Robert…", http://www.glbtqarchive.com/arts/mapplethorpe_r_A.pdf
[898] Ibidem.

of fluid visual desire and fantasy.[899] "This combination of formal elements and desire is Mapplethorpe signature contribution as an artist"[900], as Gonzalez-Day points out.

In 1986 professor Kobena Mercer, a British black cultural critic, belonged to those art critics who first recognized the photographer as the "major force in the art world"[901], addressed critique of Mapplethorpe fetishism regarding Freud and Mulvey's assumption of heterosexual white male identification. Amelia Jones. feminist curator, a theorist and historian of art, considers Mercer's argument an opening of interpretative history of Mapplethorpe series that:

precisely enacts the shift from a negative, critical approach to fetishism to an approach that acknowledges spectatorial desire and investment – and activates the contingency of interpretations in a way that points towards future models of identification. This allows us to look backwards at dominant models of fetishism and identity politics in 1980s, and forwards to what would become other artists and directors concern about complexities and the fluid nature of identification.[902]

Mercer, to define his position as a "neutral" reader of Mapplethorpe two projects *Black Males* (1982) and *Black Book* published a harsh critique in 1986 in "Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe". He notes, using the concepts of feminist psychoanalytical visual theory and particularly these of Laura Mulvey, that Mapplethorpe photographs reduce the black male body to "Aesthetic/ Erotic Object".[903] He claims that the "photographs are not about black man but about Mapplethorpe", and as Jones stresses he is echoing Mulvey's arguments and opposes that artist's images are projections which "function to reinforce his mastery and the desires of the hidden and invisible white male subject behind the camera".[904] While sexual female as erotic object and fetish was widely theorized at that time, Mercer huge contribution, as stresses Jones was to "press these psychoanalytical arguments about *sexual* fetishism into the theory of *racial* fetishism".[905]

To do so, Mercer left race-blind terrain of most feminist visual theory and used concepts of Franz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, another key postcolonial theorist, noting that "while meaning of sexual fetish are hidden as a secret, skin color functions in the signifying chain of

[899] Conversations about male nude representations in contemporary arts and photography with visual artist and Professor of Arts, Hanna Nowicka-Grochal, and with photographer, Senior Lecturer at Royal College of Arts RCA London, Hermione Wiltshire, 2017-2023.
[900] Ken Gonzalez-Day, „Mapplethorpe, Robert…", http://www.glbtqarchive.com/arts/mapplethorpe_r_A.pdf
[901] David Leddick, *The Male Nude*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
[902] Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently*. *A history and theory of identification and the visual arts*, Routledge, London and New York2012, p. 133.
[903] Ibidem.
[904] Ibidem.
[905] Ibidem.

"negrophobia" or is hypervalorised as a desirable attribute in "negrophilia": the fetish of skin color is "the most visible of fetishes''.[906] The critique of Mapplethorpe finishes, being revolved around his most famous and critiqued image of a black man in a suit, *Man in Polyester Suit* (1980), with his semi-erect penis protruding. By citing Fanon, who commented Western white male obsession analyzed in explicit sexual writing of French writer and filmmaker Michel Cournot, Mercer agrees that: "No longer do we see the black man, we see a penis: the black man has been turned into a penis. He is a penis".[907] Finally, he returns to Freudian terms, and claims that Mapplethorpe works function as fetishistic disavowal of his knowledge[908] or one should rather add, disavowal of white man fears, using Freud's and Mulvey's model of fetishism.

Mercer's criticism of Mapplethorpe was revised after meeting the artist just before his death in 1989 and appeared in two subsequent articles: first "The Mirror Looks Back: Racial Fetishism Reconsidered" (an appendix in the Emily Apter and William Pietz (eds.) book *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse,* 1989) and second "Skin Head Sex Things: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary" (in *How Do I Look: Queer Film and Video,* 1991). As Jones points out, Mercer being a "key figure in theorizing the intersectional racial, ethnic, gender and sexual force of Mapplethorpe works"[909], radically revisited his views and reversed his opinion by sketching his own "shift from the 1980s theories of fetishism to the awareness, arising in 1990s art discourse, of intersectionality, relationality (the reliance of interpretation on what one thinks one knows about the artist)"[910] and nuances of how visual artwork can function in relation to "identificatory exchanges involving projection and desire".[911] Jones emphasizes the importance of Mercer's turn: "Mapplethorpe photographs can confirm a racist reading as easily as they can produce an antiracist one, the images can elicit a homophobic reading as much as a homoerotic one. It all depends on the identity that different audiences and spectators bring to bear on the readings they produce".[912]

[906] Ibidem.
[907] Franz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks, op. cit.,* pp. 209-211.
[908] Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently*…, *op. cit.,* p. 133.
[909] Ibidem, p. 125.
[910] Ibidem.
[911] Ibidem, p. 134.
[912] Kobena Mercer quoted in Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently*…, *op. cit.,* p. 135.

Black male nude entry into the scopic white economy provoked issues of race fetishization, objectification, victimization, or socio-sexual passivity[913] often referring to then dominant feminist critique of Mulvey's sexualized woman. Eurocentric psychoanalytical heteronormative white male visual pleasure concepts failed to apply.

The Culture Wars of 1989 in particular brought the crisis around Robert Mapplethorpe and the censorship of his work. Speaking in psychoanalytical terms his works converted suppressed white male racial sexual jealousy into a castration complex which burst out into the public political light of American Senate. The first American retrospective of artist's works was presented in New York in 1988, but the following year, shortly after his death, a traveling exhibition *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment* created a firestorm of controversy which demonstrated "how threatening images of gay male sexuality are, to many people" as recalls Gonzalez-Diaz:

Senator Jesse Helms actually destroyed an exhibition catalogue on the floor of the United States Senate, igniting a debate that ultimately decimated public funding for the arts and challenged First Amendment rights. In a shocking capitulation to political pressure, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C. cancelled the show just prior to its opening. In 1990, the exhibition travelled to Cincinnati, where Contemporary Art Center director Dennis Barrie was indicted on charges of obscenity and child pornography. Both Barrie and the museum were subsequently acquitted.[914]

Controversies around Mapplethorpe's photographs have not settled and even though his works were presented i.a. at the exhibition *Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography* in Barbican London (2019) its female curatorial team and sponsor Calvin Klein "politically" omitted presentation of inter-racial, homoerotic, black full-frontal nude male in Mapplethorpe's works. It seems as if organizers, knowing about scandals of the 1980s, did not want to look for any trouble.

In 1993 came a black artistic response to Mapplethorpe projects created by Glenn Ligon and entitled *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book.* The installation was exhibited during the 1993 Biennial and was a room-sized piece with hyper sexual photographs of naked black men from Mapplethorpe's 1986 *The Black Book.* In Ligon's work these images are framed and mounted on the wall in two rows of photographs separated by panels of texts taken from Franz Fanon,

[913] Curatorial academic walk and discussion at Havana Museum of Contemporary Cuban Art with Professor of Gender and Audiovisual Culture at Havana University Karina Paz Ernand, June 2019.
[914] Ken Gonzalez-Day, „Mapplethorpe, Robert…", *op. cit.*

Kobena Mercer or Ligon himself. The artist "appropriates previous art works and recontextualizes them with critical text, a deconstructive strategy of critique or reversal common to the best-known feminist artists of the 1980s", as Jones describes it. His attention to intersectional arrangement of complex identifications marks a "shift towards attention to the intersectionality of difference"[915] and as curator of the Biennial Thelma Golden stresses "it is an intervention into the homoerotic gaze. Ligon (…) wanted to simultaneously identify with the portrayal of gayness and critique the portrayal of blackness."[916] As Jones points out, Golden's argument represents the theory of intersectionality[917] just emerging in art and cultural discourse which started in the late 1980s and was flourishing in the 1990s. Its roots were grounded in psychoanalytical aspect of notions of fetishism, which was argued then as being inherent "binary model of subject formation".[918] The structure of Ligon's *Notes…* functions as addictive and critical discussions, indeed with elicited return to the feminists' models of fetishism. With placing the observations of figures like James Baldwin in closeness with highly eroticized and sexualized pleasures of Mapplethorpe's photographs, Ligon creates a kind of transfer between issues of race and sexuality on intellectual level and context. Seventy quotes by scholars, queer theorists, art critics and historians as well as religious figures, end with Fanon words: "it is one of the ironies of black-white relations that, by means of what the white man imagines the black man to be, the black man is enabled to know who the white man is".[919] As Jones points out, the dualities are still there – black/white, homo-/heteroerotic, even male/female with compositions in high symmetries deliberately fetishizing pictures.[920] But as Richard Meyer argues, Ligon with this work opens a space which is both critical and visual, oscillating between Mapplethorpe's black male nudes and the voices that respond or critique them.[921] Jones sums up, this opening can be "connected to the rise of queer theory and the very concept of *queering* culture".[922]

[915] Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently…, op. cit.,* p. 126.
[916] Ibidem.
[917] Intersectionality or intersectional theory is a term first coined in 1989 by American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. It is the study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination.
[918] Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently… , op. cit.,* p. 130.
[919] The description of Ligon's piece cited from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum website by Amelia Jones in *Seeing Differently… , op. cit.,* p. 131.
[920] Ibidem.
[921] Ibidem.
[922] Ibidem.

5.1.3. Entering the frame: Rotimi Fanni – Kayode photography.

Decolonial frames were brought by a Nigerian-born British artist Rotimi Fani-Kayode (1951-1989) to British photography. He moved to Britain at the age of 11 with his prominent family, who were the keepers of Yoruba Deities and priests of Ife, as refugees from the Nigeria's Civil War. He studied Fine Arts and Photography in New York's the Pratt Institute, where he was in close contact with African American community and returned to London in 1983. His stylised self-portraits were later compared to Robert Mapplethorpe works with whom he became friendly and admitted his great influence and inspiration. Kayode claimed that his ambition was to "create images to undermine the vision set out in the world", to demonstrate difference and otherness as well as highlight a "growing presence of a strong Africa" that was enclosed in his series *Ecstasy and Spirituality*[923] His whole artistic production was the first black male gaze exposed publicly against the assumption of a dominant White heterosexual male gaze vision of the 1980s. After returning to England, he shares his life and work with white photographer and filmmaker Alex Hirst (1951-1992) and becomes an active member of The Black Audio Films Collective thanks to him.

Even if not directly referring to Mulvey's VPNC Kayode authored a complex body of visual work (created between 1982-1989) which was exploring the tensions created by perception of black race, homoerotic sexuality, and the self that was against the Fanon's concept of black racial inferiority and the racial gaze with Black Slave/White Master "sociodiagnositcs" assumption.[924] As curator of Guggenheim Museum wrote:

Working during the "height of the AIDS crisis and responding to the homophobia of both Thatcherite England and his home country of Nigeria, Fani-Kayode produced images that exalt queer black desire, call attention to the politics of race and representation, and explore notions of cultural identity and difference.

Having as his leading theme a black male body as a subject of homosexual desire, Fani-Kayode focused on part-autobiographical and mythical portraits rooted in African symbolism. He combined the western classical style with the traditional Yoruba iconography, mirroring the rituals of whom he descended seeking to imitate the priests 'techniques of ecstasy'.[925] The black male body was the crucial point for an imaginative "exploration of the relationship between

[923] Jean Loup Pivin, "Rotimi Fani Kayode – Photo", *Revue Noir,* accessed March 30, 2023, available at: https://www.revuenoire.com/en/rotimi-fani-kayode-photo/

[924] Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination,* Polity Press with association Blackwell Publishing, Cambridge, Oxford, 2003.

[925] Hales Gallery, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode", http://www.halesgallery.com/artists/137-rotimi-fani-kayode/overview

erotic fantasy and ancestral spiritual values".[926] What motivated him throughout his life, was the status of an "outsider" with which he identified himself in terms of sexuality and geographical and cultural dislocation, but which brought–him, as he claimed:

the feeling of having very little to lose. It produces a sense of freedom from the hegemony of convention (...) It opens up areas of creative inquiry which might otherwise have remained forbidden. At the same time, traces of the former values remain, making it possible to take new readings on to them from an unusual vantage point. The results are bound to be disorientating.[927]

As Sealy claims, Fani-Kayode understood his family cultural heritage and never had "identity crisis", knowing exactly where he came from, what he represented, who he is and how his "lifestyle and work would affect those around him".[928] He adds that photographer spent most time in the West, so he was totally aware of the "systems he was trying to penetrate"[929] and conscious that he was someone who occupied historically troublesome and often contradictory spaces. Once Fani-Kayode said:

My identity has been constructed from my own sense of otherness, whether cultural, racial or sensual. The three aspects within me. Photography is the tool by which I feel most confident in expressing myself. It is photography therefore – Black, African, homosexual photography – which I must use not just as instrument, but as a weapon if I am to resist attacks on my integrity and, indeed, my existence on my own terms.[930]

His photographs very strongly interfere with the idea of decolonizing the camera, which was a crucial visual response to the white violence of black image and opened the "definite decade" of the 1990 that introduced him to the mainstream as the contemporary African photographer.[931] As professor Mark Sealy notes, this historical violence includes refusal to equal recognition, projections of an inferior or demeaning image which is internalized in consequence, causes psychic damage, the feeling of oppression and shapes distorted imagination.[932] Using Sealy's words, "it makes sense to read the past as always being in transition, constant redefining us in the present" and Fanni-Kayode makes his photographic practice such a constant transition and redefinition. In 1987, they both co-founded Autograph ABP, the Association of Black

[926]Fani-Kayode, R. "Traces of Ecstasy", *Ten 8* Magazine, No28: *Rage and Desire*, 2019, p. 235 cited in http://www.halesgallery.com/artists/137-rotimi-fani-kayode/overview

[927]Jessica Bocinski, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode. The Art of Being an Outsider", published online June 7, 2021, accessed April 1, 2023, available at: https://blogs.chapman.edu/collections/2021/06/07/rotimi-fani-kayode/

[928]Mark Sealy, "Portfolio Rotimi Fani-Kayode – Desire In Exile", accessed April 1,2023, available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-44-autumn-2018/portfolio-rotimi-fani-kayode-desire-exile-mark-sealy

[929] Ibidem.

[930] Elisa Rolle, "Alex Hirst and Rotimi Fani-Kayode", *LGBT reviews and ramblings since 2006*, 20th April 2015, accessed March 17, 2023, available at: ttps://reviews-and-ramblings.dreamwidth.org/3982020.html

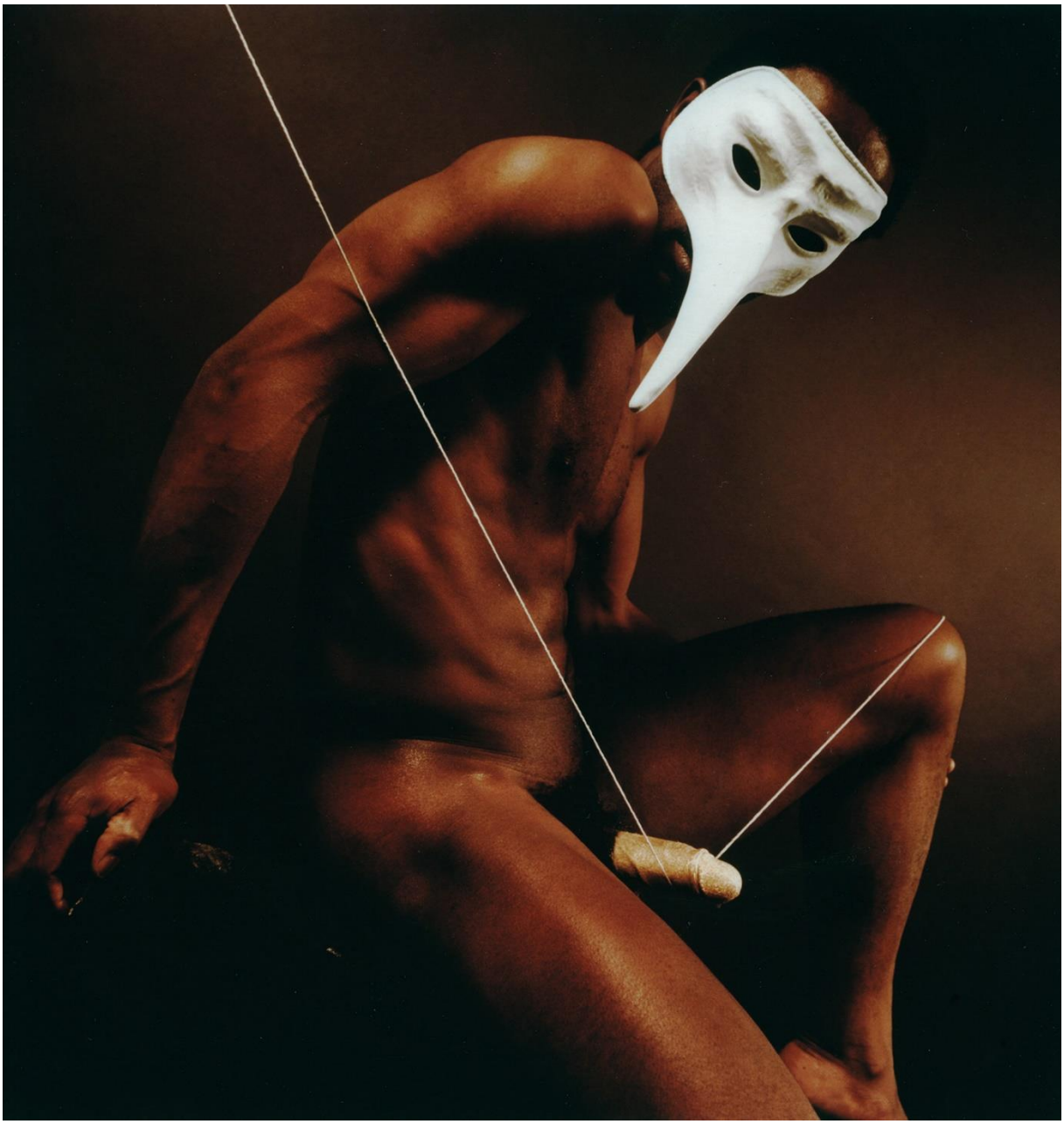
[931] Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 2019, p. 222.

[932] Ibidem, p.106.

Photographers in London, in which Sealy is a director today. Fani-Kayode took one step back to the African symbolism, went through imaginary and entered the domain of contemporary culture, which he did exactly as was suggested later on by Stewart Hall in 2008.[933] His way of focusing on sexuality and ancestry of Black subject is an exemplary of visual resistance to the victimization, fetishization and "process of photography and modernity's desire to forget"[934] or in Freud's term desire to suppress. As he believed it was time to "re-appropriate such images and transform them ritualistically into images of our own creation"[935].

ROTIMI FANI-KAYOD, GOLDEN PHALLUS, 1989, Edition of 10

933 Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera…*, p. 106.
934 Ibidem, p. 108.
935 Jessica Bocinski, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode. The Art of Being an Outsider", published online June 7, 2021, accessed April 1, 2023, available at: https://blogs.chapman.edu/collections/2021/06/07/rotimi-fani-kayode/



Key works of Rotimi Fani-Kayode that aimed to disrupt the domination of a white male gaze and present male Blackness, and which became first black visual examples opposing Mulvey's claims in VPNC that "the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification", were *Untitled (Offering)* 1987, *Snap Shot* 1987 and *Golden Phallus* c.1988-89. They explored a black male body, desire, and cross racial displacement of power. *Untitled (Offering)* and *Snap Shot* were presented at *Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography*, a blockbuster exhibition at the Barbican London in 2020. The section Reclaiming the Black Body was later considered as the best and the most interesting part of the show with various works loaned from

Autograph ABE collection. *Untitled (Offering)* belongs to the series *Bodies of Experience* and as curators wrote:

Imbued with violence, in Untitled (Offering) Fani-Kayode substitutes the legendary black phallus with pair of overlarge scissors, an act that not only turns an aspect of the black male body habitually appropriated by others into a threatening, even castrating, refusal, it also lends active agency to men more often glimpsed as the subject of another's erotic vision.[936]

This problematic relationship between a visual representation of an empowered black man body and historical victimized depictions of black men often lynched both for their homosexual desire and heterosexual desire for white women, is subverted consciously here by the symbolics of scissors which create a very ambiguous visual statement. As gay rights activist Bisi Alimi says for CNN, Fani-Kayode "work epitomized not just the reality of being gay, but of being a black gay man. It challenged the whole concept of black male masculinity and the importance of body empowerment."[937] But the artist stressed his homosexual image purpose:

Both aesthetically and ethically I seek to translate my rage and my desire into new images which will undermine conventional perceptions, and which may reveal hidden worlds. Many of the images are seen as sexually explicit – or more precisely, homosexually explicit. I make my pictures homosexual on purpose. Black men from the Third World have not previously revealed either to their own peoples or to the West a certain shocking fact: they can desire each other.[938]

Contestation of the European positioning of the black male body in Western imaginary comes in yet another "disorientating" photo of the show, *Snap Shot* which is an artist Black self-portraiture with a camera positioned in the place of his invisible genitals. Historically, as Sealy points out, the "black man with a camera clearly represented a visible threat"[939] Here Fani-Kayode challenges the queer black exclusion from the Western representation and confronts a frontal black male nude with a camera in his hand which can function symbolically as a gun, work as a symbol of black weapon, so eagerly used by white photographers as a symbol of masculine white power of the gaze and privileged masculine artistic creation. Taken in 1987 belongs to a "seismic shift in the cultural landscapes"[940] within the British politics of photography, race, and representation. Stewart Hall stressed this problematic image of the

[936] Untitled (Offering) Barbican London 2020, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode at Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography" accessed April 1, 2023, available at: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/rotimi-fani-kayode-at-masculinities-liberation-through-photography-barbican-centre/lQHPRDg0GULQEQ?hl=en

[937] Thomas Page, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode: Erotic Photography from the Ultimate Outsider", CNN, accessed April 1, 2023, available at: https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/rotimi-fani-kayode-gay-nigerian-photographer/index.html

[938] Mark Sealy,"Portfolio Rotimi Fani-Kayode…" *op. cit.*

[939] Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera…*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

[940] Ibidem, p.122.

racialised Black subject which Fani-Kayode *Snap Shot* epitomised: "Black self-portraiture, in this historical moment, has broken many of its links with the dominant 'western' humanist celebration of self and has become more the staking of the claim, a wager. Here, the black self-image is, in a double sense, an exposure, a coming out. The self is caught emerging."[941] The mere act of picking up the camera from a "condition of oppression becomes an act of transgressive liberation, almost as important as the making of the photograph itself"[942], as Sealy points out.

Fani-Kayode *Golden Phallus* photography, taken around 1988-89, moves the question of race into a wider socio-political cultural field and "helps with decoding the transgressive qualities of his project", as stresses Sealy.[943] Within the image, an athletic-looking black man seats positioned in a warm but dark non-space and looks as if he was to move and stand up. Muscular torso looks ready to be active and the man wears a white *commedia del'arte* mask with a long protruding nose. The bright mask emphasizes the contrast with the dark skin and symbolizes performance of a masquerade with the body "merging out from the dark" and being comfortable in the dark. As Sealy describes the scene "It is as if we are in an unconscious visual register of race and desire".[944] From behind his white mask, the man looks back directly at the viewer which recalls a psychological work of Franz Fanon *Black Skin, White Mask.*[945] His work investigates the way in which "black men, (…) internalize myths of blackness invented by the colonial society and damage their psyche in the process".[946] Here Sealy underlines the important symbolics of the mask used by Fani-Kayode:

Critically, through the presentation of the white mask, the work becomes a grotesque reflection of whiteness and desire. The mask presented as an object through which to look becomes both a shield and the mirror that reflects back a caricatured, racialised and distorted Eurocentric gaze.[947]

On the other hand, a white mask here can also symbolize the black people's dream or appropriation of Whiteness, their aspirations of positioning themselves into or absorbing without contestation Western thought, culture, and spirituality, as Fanon noted, pointing to a "dizzying doubling that fractures and fragments black subjectivity".[948] This constructed image

[941] Stuart Hall cited in Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera…, op. cit.,* p. 222.
[942] Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera…, op. cit.,* p. 224.
[943] Ibidem, pp. 224-227.
[944] Ibidem, p. 227.
[945] Ibidem.
[946] Gen Doy, *Black Visual Culture: Modernity and Post-Modernity*, cited in Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera…, op. cit.,* p. 227.
[947] Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera…, op. cit.,* p. 227.
[948] Taylor Ashton McGoey, *Toward a Fluid Cinematic Spectatorship and Desire: Revisiting Laura Mulvey's*

of Blackness as the "Other" shakes/upsets/disturbs the viewer, creating instability and frustration. One can draw a parallel of *Golden Phallus* to Mulvey's concept of "to-be-looked-at-ness" of black representation and black sexuality but from the point of the colonial nature of a spectator this "to-be-looked-at-ness", as Robert Stam notes, it is "nothing other than the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of spectators themselves, who become slaves (…) of their own appearance"[949], the "Whitened" one. So, the white mask here can serve as the psychic image of white superiority, condensed in the white gaze, which is imprinted inside the black person construction of identity.[950]

The title of the photograph refers to a golden phallus, which is a penis of a seated man, painted gold and suspended by a white cord running from the left upper side of the frame, holding the penis under, and disappearing over the knee. The golden phallus hanging here almost fully erect and hold by a white thread, which can be moved changing its positions, represents the trickster Yoruba god Esu, "the lord of the crossroads, sometimes changing the sign posts to lead you astray"[951] as explains Fani-Kayode. This golden glow of the penis exposed lights up everything within the frame and exposes the phallocentric obsessions ingrained in racial myths concerning the black male body, and it playfully constructs the penis as a drawbridge to a new place, perhaps hinting that in this different world desire and fantasy can roam freely, unfixed from the burden of culture and history".[952] The Yoruba-isation of creating photography was the critical point, as Sealy stresses, at which Fani-Kayode entered the process of self-fashioning and exposing the constructed nature of identities. This was a historical moment when a black African gay imagination was made visible and artists' articulation of a "hybrid identity that builds race, migration, sexuality and indigenous religion into a complex form of photographic staging".[953] His works announced something distinctively new in black photography, which at that time was concerned with the idea of documentary truth. He resisted a direct response to the tide of negative black imagery that traditional black policy was focused on, producing images of mere simpletons. And secondly, as recalls Sealy he resisted "being cast as an essential African subject"[954], functioning this way "within and outside of black cultural policies"[955] in which he

Psychoanalytic Film Theories, 2020. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 7401, p. 44. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/7401

[949] Ibidem, p. 45.
[950] Ibidem.
[951] Ibidem, p. 228.
[952] Ibidem.
[953] Ibidem, p. 229.
[954] Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera…*, *op. cit.*, p. 231.
[955] Ibidem.

could be charged as "being a purveyor of corrupt and decadent Western values"[956] as Fani-Kayode claimed himself.

Golden Phallus is one of rare photographs of the artist that show penis explicitly exposed, which seems striking in the context of a photographer recognized for his male nude images[957], as an American academic William J. Simmons points out adding that it must have been a conscious choice. All attempts to compare his photography to Robert Mapplethorpe phallocentric images of black male nude turned out false or simplistic comparisons as Sealy says. Adding that few critics had the capacity to decode or unload distinctively new work with unknown tropes and points of reference, negating generally difficult question of black gay desire. Probably this and other reasons created a strategy of Fani-Kayode that included explicit sexuality hiddenness in his works. An American researcher, William J. Simmons, returns to the question in his article "Where is the Dick, Honey?" Rotimi Fani-Kayode Sexual Politics of Hiddenness" stressing that "absent penis is loaded with cultural meaning as the penis on display".[958] He evokes the psychoanalytic legacy with 'fears of castration in the western imaginary' that change meaning when one "understands that the lynching of black man often included a very real castration".[959] Simmons asks to what extent Fani-Kayode aesthetic treatment adds value to the erogenous zone and refers to the purchase of black bodies in slavery or prostitution by the Establishment since the artist criticized these in comment:

It is no surprise to find that one's work is shunned or actively discouraged be the Establishment. The homosexual bourgeoise has been more supportive – not because it is especially noted for its championing of Black artists, but because Black ass sells almost as well as a Black dick.[960]

Avoiding explicit exposition of penis brings questions of de-exotication, de-fetishisation, de-pornographization, protection of HIV positive black body, or avoiding "the penis largely not on view in order to stave off the possibility of racist or pathological viewing"[961], says Simmons. This homosexual bourgeoise and gay male desire which is normatively rooted in penis here creates productive disorder in its hiddenness. As Simmons notes, we "might only be able to

[956] Ibidem, p. 229.
[957] William J. Simmons, "Where is the Dick, Honey?" Rotimi Fani-Kayode Sexual Politics of Hiddenness", Journal *Rotimi Fani-Kayode. Rage and Desire,* University of Southern California 2018, p. 37.
[958] Ibidem.
[959] Ibidem.
[960] Rotimi Fani-Kayode, "Traces of Ecstasy" 1988, cited in William J. Simmons, "Where is the Dick, Honey?" Rotimi Fani-Kayode Sexual Politics of Hiddenness", Journal *Rotimi Fani-Kayode. Rage and Desire,* University of Southern California 2018, p. 37.
[961] William J. Simmons, "Where is the Dick…", *op. cit.,* p. 38.

approximate an answer, and that is the revolutionary ambivalence of Fani-Kayode".[962] He is so productive with meaning that it is difficult to categorize his work but, as Williams sums up, "allowing the photographs to be resistant to our analytical and/or erotic gazes honors all the desire and intellect and yes, struggle, that went into their making".[963]

5.1.4. Interracial desire and visual pleasure. Case of *Looking for Langston* by Isaac Julien

The film and video movement in Britain of the 1980s brought the Sankofa Film and Video Collective[964]initiative, which was cofounded by Isaak Julien who by the end of decade was "already a crucial figure in the establishment of Black independent cinema when he released the revolutionary film *Looking for Langston*".[965] London-born Julien is a filmmaker and installation artist whose photography and film work has been celebrated over the years[966] and present in 2023 at Tate Britain in London 40 years survey show of the artist. But as Julien and Mercer wrote in the introduction to Special Issue on Race in *Screen* (1988):

Film culture in the 80s has been marked by volatile reconfiguration in the relation of 'race' and representation. Questions of cultural difference, identity, and otherness – in a word, ethnicity – have been thrown into the foreground of contestation and debate by numerous shifts and development (...) which have elicited critical acclaim and angry polemic in roughly equal measure.[967]

As a media researcher Daniela Berghahn stresses, their declared aim was to break up 'structures that determine what is regarded as culturally central and what is regarded as culturally marginal'. According to Mercer and Julien a future programmatic vision and film representations of race and ethnicity would no longer be allocated as a special issue because this itself is indicative in its marginalisation.[968] However Julien stresses that: "innovation in the

[962] Ibidem.

[963] Ibidem, p. 41.

[964]The Sankofa Film and Video Collective was dedicated to development of independent black film culture in the areas of production, exhibition, and audience. It introduced audiences to new film and TV with the aim of presenting diversity particularly from the British Black culture. It was funded by the Great London Council and Chanel 4 which was the new broadcaster of independent cinema and thanks to its funds Julien could spent sufficient time for research in archives of Harlem. Margaret Thatcher closed the funds in the end of 1980s and Channel 4 was closed.

[965]Stuart Comer, Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston,* published June 15, 2022, accessed March 27, 2023, available at: https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/747

[966]Christabel Johanson, "Isaac Julien: Looking for Langston", accessed March 31, 2023, available at: https://africanah.org/isaac-julien-looking-for-langston/

[967] Isaac Julien, Kobena Mercer, Introduction: De Margin and De Centre, *Screen*, Special Issue Race, Volume 29, Issue 4, Autumn 1988, accessed March 17, 2023, available at: https://academic.oup.com/screen/article-abstract/29/4/2/1646264 Screen 1988

[968] Daniela Berghahn, "De Margin and De Centre": Repositioning Race and Ethnicity in Diasporic European

moving image is taking place in the museums and galleries, not really in cinema. The cinema has a certain classicism if you like: I'm not against it as a form, and I rather like it when artists make films that venture into a more mainstream place, though I am not sure they can bring their aesthetics there. I like the idea of transversing different platforms and spaces".[969]

Looking for Langston (1989) is such an explicit transversion with non-linear narrative through the lens of fantasy and mixture of artistic photography, dance, and poetry. The forty minutes monochromatic movie is a cinematographic homage of Julien fascination with Langston Hughes (1902-1967), "peering in on his relationship to his fellow black artists and writers who were part of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s".[970] Langston was an iconic figure and one of the first black Americans whose work was vital and who made a living as a poet and a writer, a playwright, a novelist, and a journalist during the Harlem Renaissance in 1920s. As Julien stresses, he was also an 'emblem of the closet. A space that was enabling HIV infection, and AIDS (…) having sexuality not being articulated created terrible ramifications within these communities. And so, the whole question of bringing Langston out, so to speak, really united intergenerationally'.[971] Julien wanted to articulate problems that the poet Essex Hemphill was contesting: "What does silence look like? What does oppression look like in those spaces?" so his challenge was to "translate that filmically and give it a kind of space that would resonate visually".[972] The film has become the deconstruction of the black gay history becoming "culturally empowering reclamation of the past" as an art critic Alexander Glover comments.[973] He stresses that film is not a biography, it is an interpretation interspersed seamlessly with archival footage, an "essay composed of several narratives exploring the notions of memory, desire, expression and repression from a black gay perspective".[974] The film opens with Hughes's funeral interpretation, moves through to a series of gay black men dancing with each other, finely dressed and looking like an establishment. Then, sensual dream sequences display undressed gay men interacting intimately with each other. These pictorial inspirations for the film, Julien drew more from photography than cinematography. Trying to deconstruct

Cinema, accessed March 26, 2023, available at: https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/en/publications/de-margin-and-de-centre-repositioning-race-and-ethnicity-in-diasp

[969] Daniela Berghahn, "De Margin…", *op. cit.*

[970] Alexander Glover, "Isaac Julien: 'I dream a world' *Looking for Langston, Studio International",* accessed March 24, 2023, available at: https://www.studiointernational.com/isaac-julien-i-dream-a-world-looking-for-langston-review-victoria-miro-london

[971] Stuart Comer, Interview with Isaac Julien, Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston,* published June 15, 2022, accessed March 27, 2023, available at: https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/747

[972] Ibidem.

[973] Alexander Glover, Isaac Julien: 'I dream a world' *Looking for Langston…", op. cit.*

[974]Ibidem.

Mapplethorpe work was a problematic challenge but a productive experience for Julien.[975] As Glover notes: "The artist referred to Roy DeCarava's shots of Harlem, the sensual depictions of the male body by Mapplethorpe, and the homoerotic portraits of George Platt Lynes – as clearly seen in Julien's After George Platt Lynes, Nudes 1942".[976]

Isaac Julien, *Looking for Langston*, 1989

Looking for Langston allows for identification and admiration that goes beyond the binary gender, the black masculinity, the movie unites time and space. Desire and fantasy interfere here closely with the visual diegesis of the film, which was the main aim of the movie creation, inspired overtly by VPNC concepts, what Julien stressed various times. What he added to Mulvey's concept is a non-binary black ga(y)ze which in this case proves the mobility of the gaze in fantasy. As the chief curator of the Media and Performance, Stuart Comer, wrote about this film, newly acquired by MoMA: "*Looking for Langston's* investigation of desire made it a hallmark of what B. Ruby Rich called the New Queer Cinema, and a touchstone for African American Studies".[977]

As Christabel Johanson wrote later, without mentioning Kellgren: "The dreamy sequences of men being sensual with each other are sumptuous and tender, adding both a touch of eroticism and luxury to the narrative".[978] Such an appreciation of a female gaze in the area of shooting desire stressed by a black male filmmaker is very important and proves that the look itself in representations of sexuality is something more complex and dependent on many various elusive factors, other than binary gender gaze categorization.

[975]Stuart Comer, Interview with Isaac Julien, "Isaac Julien's *Looking for…", op. cit.*
[976]Ibidem.
[977]Ibidem.
[978] Christabel Johnson, Isaac Julian: *Looking for Langston*, published 05/02/22, accessed March 30, available at: https://africanah.org/isaac-julien-looking-for-langston/

5.2. Black female looks. Race and gender relations.

5.2.1. Race, psychoanalysis, and feminist film theory.

Historical invisibility and theoretical exclusion of women of colour took a long way to appear in cinematic and post-modern discourse. Questioning the Grand Narratives, along with post-colonial masculine both white and black interpretations as well as productions of white, orthodox feminism finally unlocked questions and brought new truths about black female experience, representation, and subjectivity in the end of the 1980s. It led (very rare then) black female scholars to re-think the conditions in which knowledge about race and gender was made with black female absence within this signifying processes.[979]

Key problems of debate on race and female representation that raised in Black film feminism were rooted in "orthodox feminist application of psychoanalytic models based on rigid binary understanding of subject formation"[980] but for "those concerned with race, these theories failed to account for racial and sexual difference beyond the closed Oedipal world"[981] as points it out McCabe. She stresses Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey as scholars who started the discussion about the lamentable female absence in mainstream patriarchal cinema which:

Opened up new avenues of inquiry based on possibilities afforded by resistance, absence and uncertainty which constituted in Black feminist literary criticism, histories of slavery and the control of imagination as well as post-colonialism and revisions of psychoanalytic paradigms.[982]

But amongst the first one to apply, psychoanalysis to the discourse on the colonial gaze and race relations was psychiatrists Franz Fanon - born on the French Caribbean Island Martinique - which he did in 1952 in his book *Black Skins, White Masks,* mentioned before in the thesis. His key interest in usage of models of psychoanalysis was his 'desire to tease out the effects of colonial rule and racial oppression on the Black psyche.'[983] But he focused, accordingly to his masculinized time, on male Black psyche. As McCabe notes:

Fanon viewed racism and its gazing structures as deeply rooted within the Imaginary. Understanding Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, with its importance of looking in constituting the ego, gave him the

[979] Janet McCabe, *Feminist Film Studies. Writing the Woman into Cinema,* Wallflower Press Book, London and New York, 2004, p. 65.
[980] Ibidem.
[981] Ibidem, p. 66.
[982] Ibidem, pp. 65-66.
[983] Ibidem, p. 68.

framework to suggest how the Black male (rather than female) body emerges as a site of hysteria around body image, sexuality, masculine identity, and racial otherness.[984]

Researcher Todd Ashton McGowan notes that while Fanon's work does not explicitly focus on racism in cinema and only shortly refers to the field, it is significant since it "outlines a psychoanalytic model that shows how Black people construct their identities around white gaze".[985] He stresses the lack of Black women's subjectivity and its critical consequences in feminist theory: "While Fanon's work is an important socio-psychological work that effectively analyzes issues pertaining to colonialism, it does not attempt to address Black women's subjectivity".[986]

One of many critical works that explore Fanon's exclusion of Black femininity is Gwen Bergner's *"*What is that Masked Woman? Or the Role of Gender in Fanon's *Black Skin. White Masks*" where she states that Fanon provides a psychoanalytic analysis only of Black "masculinity" and adds that women are considered almost exclusively as subjects in terms of their (hetero)sexual relationship with men, and with their "feminine desire defined as an overtly literal".[987] Bergner notes that "while it is not surprising that Fanon, writing in early fifties, takes the masculine as the norm, it is necessary not only to posit alternative representations of femininity but also to consider how his account of normative race masculinity depends on the production or exclusion of femininities".[988] McGoey argues with Bergner assumption that Fanon's work is inherently "masculine" and claims that Fanon's "psychoanalytical model for investigating racialized gazing can be applied to both men and women"[989] which is against bell hooks analyses.

Since Mulvey in her essay did not refer to any issues of the gaze in the context of race and racial issues as in the 1970s no one was discussing this perspective, the black female spectators were "left behind the margins" of debates and appeared much later in public discourse as a part of the black feminism of the 1980s and 1990s. First to discuss this omission with reference to Mulvey's VPNC were white academics Jane Gaines and Mary Ann Doane. As for Black female theorists, one of the first ones was bell hooks and her article "The Oppositional Gaze", that

[984] Janet McCabe, *Feminist Film Studies*…, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[985] Taylor Ashton McGoey*, Toward a Fluid Cinematic Spectatorship and Desire…, op. cit.*, p. 41.
[986] Ibidem, p. 40.
[987] Ibidem.
[988] Taylor Ashton McGoey, *Toward a Fluid Cinematic Spectatorship and Desire…, op. cit.*
[989] Ibidem, p. 41.

highlightened the right to have a perspective and *a look* according to the racial and slavery historical context. There is a power in looking, she says in the opening of the essay describing her childhood experience, and a ban on looking as well as a punishment for staring. *Looks* were seen as confrontational, as gestures of resistance, and the "gaze" has always remained political in her life. Amazed by reading in history classes about white slave owners who punished enslaved black people for looking, she asks how this traumatic relationship with the gaze influenced black parenting and black spectatorship.[990] The slaves looked and as she continues:

That all attempts to repress our/black people's right to gaze produced in us overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: "Not only will I stare: I want my look to change reality." Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, open up the possibility of agency.[991]

Critical, black perspectives in cinema were mainly concerned with issues of race and racism and the ways racial white domination determined representation of blacks. There were rarely gendered concerns then, as hooks points out. The same claimed Jane Gaines in the 1980s, writing that "Afro-American women have historically formulated identity and political allegiance in terms of race rather than gender or class."[992] Later came reflection over importance of gender within racial and post-colonial considerations and today is often regarded that both race and gender matter equally in visual and literary studies as claim Cuban academics Norma Rita Guillard Limonta and Dr. C. Maria Luisa Pérez López de Queralta.[993] Both researchers also stress that Western usage of the term Black Gaze is now regarded as Western/European racist perspective and such a term any longer is used in Latin American analyses, where "people of colour" function instead. From people of colour perspective, White is also regarded as a "different" colour of skin.

But considering the gaze historically, Black males were rebelling stronger in colonial times against white supremacy of looking and were murdered or lynched for looking at white women. "This gendered relation to looking made the experience of the black male spectator radically

[990] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze. Black female Spectators", in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992, reprinted in *The Feminism Visual Culture Reader*, ed Amelia Jones, Routledge 2010, p. 107.
[991] Ibidem.
[992] Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory", in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Feminism and Film*, Oxford University Press 2000, p. 341.
[993] Conversation with Cuban feminist writer, psychologist, and activists Norma Rita Guillard Limonta during Havana Film Festival December 2017 & 2018, and interview with Director of Post-Graduate Studies ISA Cuban University of Arts Dr. C. Maria Luisa Pérez López de Queralta, Havana, March & July 2021.

different from that of the black female spectator", says hooks. Most of black male independent filmmakers made representations of black women as objects of the male gaze: "black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within the cinematic context that constructs our presence or absence, that denies the body of the black female so as to perpetuate white supremacy with its phallocentric spectatorship where the woman to be looked at and desired is "white". [994] hook recalls her research:

Only a few of the black women I talked with remembered the pleasure of race movies, and even those who did, felt that pleasure interrupted and usurped by Hollywood. Most of the black women I talked with were adamant that they never went to movies expecting to see compelling representations of black femaleness. They were all acutely aware of cinematic racism-its violent erasure of black womanhood.[995]

She also points out that even when representations of black women appeared in the film "our bodies and being were to serve – to enhance and maintain white womanhood as object of the phallocentric gaze. And since cinematic identification comes through recognition, in the case of black women it cannot have place".[996]

This invisibility of racial and gendered looking became the subject of important polemics in various post-colonial fields which will be discussed in the following chapters. Muley herself found this issue as the most important question which was overlooked in VPNC admitting and justifying this lack of its reflection by white feminism which was a kind of social unconsciousness at that time.[997]

The first voices in the 1980s and very important attempt to bridge the gap between American White and Third World feminism [998], in the context of black female spectatorship and identity, were authored by Jane Gaines and Mary Ann Doane, white feminist theorists. Jane Gaines was one of the first ones to challenge in 1988 the "paradigm which dominated feminist film theory in Britain and the US for roughly ten years".[999] The same year as she writes, other feminist film critics "remarked about the gap in the field produced by the absence of the perspective on women of colour".[1000] Gaines claims that feminist film theory based on the "psychoanalytic

[994] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze…", *op. cit.*, p. 109.
[995] Ibidem.
[996] Ibidem, p. 110.
[997] Laura Mulvey, interview in *Do utraty wzroku…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-328.
[998] The Third World - term coined in 1955, contemporary regarded in postcolonial studies as very pejorative.
[999] Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory", in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Feminism and Film*, Oxford University Press, p. 336.
[1000] Ibidem.

concept of sexual difference is unequipped to deal with a film which is about racial difference and sexuality"[1001], and this blocks out considerations of race-gender configuration as different, applying white middle class norms and values as universal.[1002] Gender as sole determinant of women's fate is considered as ignorant to women in "different racial groups and social classes experience oppression".[1003]

Gaines refers to Mulvey's VPNC as the legacy of the Althusserian theory of the subject and as an influential essay in feminist film theory criticism, probably "reprinted more times than any other academic essay in English in a ten-years span".[1004] Apart from exclusion of women of colour in Mulvey's essay Gains points as well to cancellation of lesbian spectator whose "viewing pleasure could never be constructed as anything like male voyeurism".[1005] For her theorizing a lesbian spectator "significantly change the trajectory of the gaze"[1006] which "might even lead us to see how the eroticised star body might be not just the object, but what I would term the visual objective of another female gaze".[1007] Gaines notes that:

Consistently lesbians have charged that cultural theory posed in psychoanalytic terms is unable to conceive of desire or explain pleasure without reference to the binary opposition male/female. This is the function of what Monique Wittig calls the heterosexual assumption, or the 'straight' mind (...) organizing all knowledge. (...) Male/female is a powerful, but sometimes blinding construct.[1008]

All these locks us into modes of female spectatorship analyses which continually misinterpret the position of various women, who remain unassimilated like women of colour, lesbians or lesbians of colour. Black female experience of spectatorship was the one of "no-existence", with the background of humiliation and sexual violation of women in times of White colonization and slavery.

The first Western anthology of feminist Western film studies authored by E. Ann Kaplan[1009] included for the first time the race and the ethnicity problems in feminine representations and spectatorship only in 2000. In this essays collection titled *Feminist Film Theory*, Kaplan dedicates a separate chapter to "Race, Sexuality, and Postmodernism", and among most

[1001] Ibidem.
[1002] Ibidem, pp. 336-337.
[1003] Ibidem, p. 337.
[1004] Ibidem, p. 338.
[1005] Ibidem. p. 339.
[1006] Ibidem.
[1007] Ibidem, pp. 339-340.
[1008] Ibidem, p. 340.
[1009] E. Ann Kaplan, ed. *Feminism and Film,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000.

important essay contributors are-Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Nancy N. Chen "Speaking Nearby", with reprint of Jane Gaines "White Privilege and Looking Relations Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory" discussed above, Claire Pajaczkowska and Lola Young "Racism. Representation, Psychoanalysis", and Pratibha Parmar "The Moment of Emergence" which will be discussed in the part dedicated to black female film theory and practice in the following chapter.

One of the most important voices about female and racial historical aspects of looking was enclosed in the article "Mapping Male Bodies: Thoughts on Gendered and Racialized Looking", by Lola Young who captures postcolonial fears and reasons of privileges and rights concerning looking which are not permitted to women, regardless the colour of the skin. To raise questions how looking may be racialized, she uses both historical and contemporary examples and indicates how mysticism surrounding penis is being challenged by practices of women image makers.[1010] Examining the late eighteenth century, she writes how black women's bodies were publicly displayed in Europe for medical reasons. One of the documented instances of such degrading exhibitions was that of Sarah Baartman, born in Southern Africa and called Hottentot Venus. Her name was implicating comparison of what was held to be African aesthetic deficiency with "classical" European standards of female beauty. Since medicine has functioned as a kind of authority knowledge setting various cultural standards, most of medical investigatory work was done by male scientists but the results of such "research" were available to anyone who could afford to pay the price of the ticket to see women like Baartman. While the European male desire to demystify and control the white female body had limited acceptability, the institutionalization of black people's inferior status made such inhibitions not existing.[1011]

As for the white women wishing to exercise their privileged racial status through the right to look at black male bodies, the issue was unsurprisingly more contentious. White women who looked at black men were characterized as prurient sexual curiosity and "racial traitors", as Fernando Henriques put it in *Tibitis*:

Some years ago, we used to have large bodies of natives sent from Africa on military service or in some travelling show, and it was a revelation of horror and disgust to behold the manner in which English women would flock to see these men… a scandal and a disgrace to English womanhood. How then is it

[1010] Lola Young, "Mapping Male Bodies: Thoughts on Gendered and Racialized Looking", in *What She Wants. Women Artists Look at Men*, ed. by Naomi Salaman, Verso, London – New York, 1994, p. 39.
[1011] Ibidem, p. 40.

possible to maintain as the one stern creed in the policy of the Empire the eternal supremacy of white over black.[1012]

Here the links between black male sexuality and accepted norms of feminine propriety are made clear, as well as the suggested effects on the imperial project. As Young points out, a delicate English womanhood was not to be subjected to the debilitating effects of gazing upon the black male phallus and "the power associated with the right to looking upon the Other as a sexual object was a privilege which was strictly for white bourgeois men".[1013] According to her, there are indications that it is not acceptable for black women to look on black men's secrets as well:

The question regarding white women and African male bodies is a historical example, but the anxiety engendered by women seizing the (phallic) camera and using it to explore any man's body is still obvious in contemporary Western societies. As Richard Dyer has pointed out, the reversal of the look – that is, women looking sexually at men – violates the rules established by men's power base. Such a violation is intensified by looking upon nude male: being naked connotes powerlessness and a return to infantile vulnerability, not feelings commensurate with dominance and authority.[1014]

The prohibition on looking, especially in its erotic context adjacent to female visual pleasure has been the most strictly "cared" area in the cinema justified by need to "protect women", and present throughout the history since Renaissance. No matter the white or black female gaze was under the shield of patriarchal culture and laws imposed by Western society, both in visual arts and the cinematic production, which Young critiques and re-analyses, referring i.a. to Mulvey's white concepts, in the book *Fear of the Dark. 'Race', Gender, and Sexuality in the Cinema* (1996).[1015]

5.2.2. Spectacle of exoticization: representing Black femaleness

Mulvey's concept of women as spectacle was also be applied to usage of Black female body in cinema. Jane Gaines analysis of a movie *Mahogany* (1975) evolves Mulvey's and feminist film theory of the 1970s "omission" of racial difference context and black women representations functioning as decorative exotic spectacle. Here, in *haute couture* modeling, and which equates the photographic act with humiliation and violation of Black women, has become the exemplary cinematic example of black female post-colonial images of in feminist studies. Diana Rose plays Tracy, an aspiring fashion designer, who dreams of career in high fashion outside of

[1012] Lola Young, "Mapping Male Bodies…", *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[1013] Ibidem.
[1014] Ibidem.

[1015] Lola Young, *Fear of the Dark. 'Race', Gender, and Sexuality in the Cinema*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996.

Chicago. One day she loses her job but is discovered by a fashion photographer with whom she finally makes career as a model in Rome. Thanks to a wealthy Italian admirer Tracy realizes her ambition and starts her own business making and presenting her first collection of clothes. As Gaines notes about montage and narrative of the movie referring to Mulvey's concepts:

Mahogany invites a reading based on the alternation between the narrative and woman-as-spectacle as theorized by Laura Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. To the allure of pure spectacle these sequences add the fascination with the masquerade and transformation (...) but these transformations are a play on and against 'darkness' (...) Finally her body is powdered over (...) she becomes suddenly white.[1016]

Gaines stresses that *Mahogany* with its various connotative paths of photographer exploiting a black model, voyeur attempting to murder her, madman assaulting a black woman make us not notice immediately "white man as aggressor against black woman".[1017] Tracy becomes Mahogany and loses her black community identity, with this new exotic name she acquires richness, darkness of the skin as value, and becomes commodified blackness.

Another analysis referring to the Mulvey's concept of women of colour treated in cinema as spectacle, even if not directly expressed by the author, is included in the book *She is Cuba. A Genealogy of The Mulata Body* written by Melissa Blanco Borelli, New York based researcher with Cuban roots. Blanco analyzes the Cuban *mulata* body and dancing in terms of Mulvey's "woman as spectacle" category but without theorizing or criticizing its cultural consequences and representations. Here we trace, as in the case of *Mahogany,* colonial white, masculine fantasy for mythical *mulata* sexuality and desire which symbol becomes erotic, frenzy dancing. She refers to movies using such paradigms of desire/pleasure which were propelled in Cuban filmic productions like *Tam Tam o El Origen De la Rumba* (1938), *Mulata* (1954), *Yambao* or *Cry of the Bewitched* (1957), *I am Cuba* (1964), *Los del baile* (1965), and *Son y No Son* (1980).

Blanco opens the book with a description of Cuban doctor Benjamin de Cespedes: "there is no such civility, culture, beauty or flattery in the semi-savage type of the ordinary mulata who only possesses the art of moving her hips acrobatically".[1018] Being more interested in how imagination gets produced, reproduced, and circulated in cultural imaginary of island, Blanco

[1016] Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations" in *Feminism and Film,* ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press, New York 2000, p. 343.
[1017] Ibidem, p. 344.
[1018] Mellissa Blanco Borelli, *She is Cuba. A Genealogy of The Mulata Body,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 3-11.

follows the rumor heralded throughout Cuba for over the century about *mulata,* the mixed-raced woman of European, African, and Native ancestry, she writes:

They say her hips are bewitching, that those hips move with an agility, grace, and precision that, if you stare at them too long, you get hip-notized. It is this body and those hips that have been a Cuban siren call, beckoning admirers, and would-be-victims by their corporeal spell.[1019]

One cannot question this overused mythical Cuban representation of a feminine erotic identity and performativity of a *mulata body* dancing which over and over fulfills Western white masculine colonial fantasies.

Questioning and analysing the concept of spectacle in categories of racial or ethnic gaze have become crucial as new areas of gender studies appeared, other than its initial, dominant heterosexual division. It resulted in new concepts and constructions of identity, race and ethnicity taking the gaze analysis as the main methodological perspective, and finally, the concept of bell hooks' female "oppositional gaze" has become one of the first black female important voices. This process of emergence of the "oppositional gaze", aimed at the "decolonisation" of the camera and white masculine spectatorship ruling the visual codes, was introduced by bell hooks in 1992. Analysis included in her essay, stressed the lack of the black female theories and visual pleasure practices as strategies of construction the black female spectatorship. Thus, hook pointed out the need for deconstructions of black female myths, unmasking the rooted post-colonial gaze and creation of new positive representations with black female sexual agency.

All these support Mulvey assumption of black woman functioning as well as a spectacle for the male gaze on a cinematic screen but with a difference regarding female spectator who is immersed and lost in the image on screen without the distance to the body "needed to measure the degree of civilization" [1020], as Borelli stresses. Various feminist and later Queer theorists responded and developed Mulvey's concept evolving its content and illuminating the lack of black lesbian female and other genders voices in narrative, as well as in representation which all has created long lasting kind of existential absence or as in the case of women of colour their exoticization on screen. This discursive evolution of spectatorship, started by Mulvey's binary assumption of female as spectacle serving to male pleasure, brought cross-race and cross-

[1019] Ibidem.
[1020] Mellissa Blanco Borelli, *She is Cuba… op. cit.,* pp. 3-11.

gender identification, that assumes the fluidity of desire of the viewer[1021] and the "New Queer Spectator" with *queerer spectatorial experience* that follows openly various sexualities and their spectacle, and which was camouflaged in classic cinema for decades, as points Radkiewicz.[1022]

5.2.3. The Oppositional Gaze. Complicating Mulvey's "colour blindness".

One of the first challenges to the dominant paradigms of British feminist film theory and discussion that was sprked in *Screen* after Mulvey's publication of VPNC were voices of academics like Judith Mayne[1023], Teresa de Lauretis[1024], Jane Gaines (1975), Ella Shohat (1991), bell hooks (1991) and Jackie Stacey (1994) which remarked about the gap and marginalisation[1025] in the field produced by the "absence of perspective on women of colour".[1026] Gender, taken by Western feminist theory, as the "sole determinant of woman's fate"[1027] helped to reinforce white middle-class values and constructed ignorance for oppression experienced by women in different racial groups and social classes[1028], as feminist film theory was critically summarized in 1984 by bell hooks. First afterthoughts of feminist analysis based on seemingly fundamental male/female opposition, brought voices about misinterpretation of positions, firstly by lesbian women, and later by women of colour, with both groups remaining "unassimilated by this problematic".[1029]

The binary deterministic model of male/female division functions, says Sheila Rowbotham, like a "feminist base superstructure".[1030] Gaines writes in 1988 about academic construction of white privilege of looking by heterosexual Western feminism:

Feminist anthologies consistently include articles on black female and lesbian perspective as illustration of the liberality and inclusiveness of feminism, however, the very concept of 'different perspectives',

[1021] Małgorzata Radkiewicz, *Oblicza Kina…*, *op. cit.*, p. 253.
[1022] Ibidem, p. 300.
[1023] Judith Mayne, "Feminist Film Theory and Criticism", *Signs*, 11:1, Autumn 1985, p. 99. Cited by Jane Gaines in "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and gender in feminist Film Theory" published in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press, 2000.
[1024] Teresa de Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory", *New German Critique*, 34, Winter 1985, reprinted in *Technologies of Gender*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 138-139.
[1025] Susuana Amoah, "Feminist Film Criticism Without Borders: Decolonising Theory and Practicing Intersectionality", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2018.
[1026] Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory" in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 336.
[1027] bell hooks cited by Jane Gaines in "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory" in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 337.
[1028] Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations…", *op. cit.*, p. 337.
[1029] Ibidem, p. 340.
[1030] Ibidem, p. 342.

while validating distinctiveness and maintaining women as common denominator, still places categories of race and sexual preference in theoretical limbo. Our political etiquette is correct, but our theory is not perfect.[1031]

For purposes of historical analysis, it is worth noting that Afro-American women primarily emphasized identity and oppression more in terms of race than gender or class as determining factors.[1032] In the 1980s Diawara, Julien and Mercer raised the issue of race and marginalisation of black spectatorship which dialogued with Mulvey's essay and Fanon's notion of racialised looking[1033], but it was bell hooks in the 1990s who stressed and addressed powerfully black woman subjectivity. To voice her own black female oppositional gaze, she wrote an essay "Feminism as Persistent Critique of History" in which she returns to Fanon after twenty years of "keeping his writing at a distance", and which called her into "continuous state of revolution" provoking new strategies of resistance.[1034] As McGoey stresses, theorizing this critical resistance of black female spectatorship helped bell hooks to imagine revolution which was based hugely on Mulvey's white male gaze critique:

Again, complicating Mulvey's understanding of spectatorial relations and cinematic desire, hooks, like Fanon, gives a detailed account of how the desire to "whiten" impacts the Black psyche. In what bell hooks describes as an inherently "white-supremacist cinema", Black female spectators may be forced to desire white beauty standards in the hope of appealing to both the white gaze and/or the male gaze. This desire to "whiten" can manifest in the Black women spectator's psyche causing them to desire becoming like the image of the desirable white woman on screen.[1035]

The complexities of the black female cinematic experience complicate Mulvey's gaze theory bringing correction as some claim or rather development of essay accusation for "colour blindness". Until hooks wrote "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" in 1992, most voices in black independent cinema theory and production of the 1980s were masculine. Stewart Hall called for recognition of black spectators in his essay "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation", Manthia Diawara discussed with Mulvey's assumptions about modes of black identification[1036], Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien wrote about black independent British cinema, but all these voices were not concerned with gender inclusion in racial or cross-racial relations. Thus, watching a television, was one of the ways that developed female critical

[1031] Ibidem, p. 340.
[1032] Ibidem.
[1033] McGoey claims that "Fanon's notion of gazing initiating racial difference amongst Black and white people is comparable to Freudian theories regarding the construction of gender formation"
[1034] bell hooks in Taylor Ashton McGoey*, Toward a Fluid Cinematic Spectatorship and Desire…,* p. 56.
[1035] Taylor Ashton McGoey*, Toward a Fluid Cinematic Spectatorship and Desire…,* p. 57.
[1036] Manthia Diawara's "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance" in response to Mulvey, *Film and Media Studies*, accessed: May 7, 2023, available at: https://youtu.be/iXjR4PQIvK0?si=mz04RFAy5ZWykEKT

spectatorship to "unleash the repressed gaze" since cinema for many black women had no importance in their life since they assaulted with conventional representation which "have done violence to the image", as stresses hooks. Some of them "submitted to cinema's capacity to seduce and betray" but testified that "to experience fully the pleasure of that cinema they had to close down their critique, analysis, they had to forget racism".[1037]

hooks suggests that black looks were always interrogating gazes, since they were rooted in the context of "social movements for racial uplift" but still black male spectators were in a different, more powerful position than black women. What she stresses is the fact that black looks at the beginning of critical thoughts were mainly concerned with "issues of race and racism with the way racial domination of blacks by whites overdetermined representation"[1038], and were rarely concerned with gender. As spectators, black men could rebel against white supremacy by daring to look and by engaging phallocentric politics of spectatorship in the private realm of television screens, this space of black male responses to screen images could not be controlled as stresses hooks and adds that "major early black male independent filmmakers represented black women in their films as objects of male gaze".[1039] According to her, the long silence of black women as spectators and critics was a result of the absence, cinematic negation and cinematic racism with "violent erasure of black womanhood". She writes:

Black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within a cinematic context that constructs our presence as absence, that denies the "body" of the black female so as to perpetuate white supremacy and with it a phallocentric spectatorship where the woman to be looked at and desired is "white"… Even when representations of black women were present in film, our bodies and being were there to serve – to enhance and maintain white womanhood as object of the phallocentric gaze.[1040]

hooks refers to Mulvey's VPNC from a standpoint that acknowledges race and explains why black women place themselves outside the pleasure in looking by actively choosing not to "identify with the film's imaginary subject because such identification was disenabling"[1041], so the pleasure of resistance was chosen, and critical, oppositional attitude was constructed. For her, feminist film theory participates in the abstraction of women where they become fiction or fantasy, not protected from the violence perpetuated and advocated by discourses of mass

[1037] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze. Black Female Spectators", 1992 in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* London and New York, Routledge 2010, p. 110.
[1038] Ibidem, p. 109.
[1039] Ibidem.
[1040] Ibidem.
[1041] Ibidem, p. 112.

media, as she cites black moviegoer who comments on the absence of black critical analyses: "we are afraid to talk about ourselves as spectators because we have been so abused by the gaze".[1042]

Black critical spectators finally in the 1990s looked from a location that disrupted the acts of white feminist analysis and brought oppositional gaze via an understanding and awareness of the politics of race and racism, mirroring the erasure of black womanhood that had occurred in films, silencing any discussion of racialized sexual difference.[1043] The process of deconstruction resisted to culturally dominant images and the woman "subject" under discussion as being always white. hooks stresses the urgent need of deconstruction of Mulvey's white assumptions:

Looking at films with an oppositional gaze, black women were able to critically assess the cinema's construction of white womanhood as object of phallocentric gaze and chose not to identify with either the victim or the perpetrator. Black female spectators, who refused to identify with white womanhood, who would not take on the phallocentric gaze of desire and possession, created a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of "woman as image, man as bearer of the look" was continually deconstructed.[1044]

hooks accuses Mulvey of not including black female looking relations which were not important enough for her to theorize and goes further into more recent white film theorists who include an analysis of race but still show no interest in black female spectatorship. It must be stressed that later in next decades hooks, Mulvey, Diawara and director Isaac Julien worked together in various projects over new reconsiderations of issues of race and racism in cinema, reconsidering black masculinity and femininity representations, post-colonial black spectatorship notions as well as Queer visual productions in black cinema. Such revision was especially needed in the face of the fact which hooks critiques as tendencies of black male practices of cinema with representations of black women being replicated explicitly according to Mulvey's phallocentric gaze and patriarchal structures. The case of Spike Lee, as stresses hooks, makes him the perfect candidate to enter the Hollywood canon with his "investment in patriarchal filmic practices that mirror dominant patterns".[1045] She criticizes Lee's cinematic black female replications referring to his movie titled *She's Gotta Have It* where she contests his work since it mimics the cinematic construction of white womanhood as object, replacing

[1042] Ibidem, p. 113.
[1043] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze…", *op. cit.*, p. 112.
[1044] Ibidem.
[1045] Ibidem, p. 114.

her body as text on which to write male desire with the black female body. It is transference without transformation".[1046]

The example of black critical thought mentioned in the previous chapter, namely an academic and a film director Manthia Diawara focused primarily on black man spectatorship as hooks stresses. She recalls his suggestion of "components of difference" among elements of sex, gender and sexuality that gave rise to different readings and producing a "resisting" spectator, but his critical focus and discussion refer to black masculinity.[1047] From Richard Wright to Linton Kwesi Johnson, from Paul Robeson to Michel Jackson as count female authors of "Black Looks", stressing the same fact which illuminates hooks, that black has meant black men and when black culture has been finally recognized in the 1980s, when black perspective has been expressed, it has been overwhelmingly a male one.[1048] They focus on difficulties of transference positive representation from the arena of black British culture into the mainstream which have its dangers. White complacency occurs with producers and viewers saying "Look how wonderful, a black woman playing a doctor! Twenty years ago, she would have been cleaning the wards or a prostitute brought in because her pimp had beaten her up. See what progress has been made".[1049] But Roach and Felix claim that there is still problem with female credibility, with numerous factors reducing the chance of a black woman getting to be or playing a doctor, such as institutionalised racism and sexism, horrible educational provision, or urban deprivation.[1050]

All above reasons of can be enclosed and referred to white *illusory identity* as is pointed out by Claire Pajaczkowska and Lola Young in the article "Racism, Representation, Psychoanalysis". The illusory identity is highly "dependent on others to shore up its sense of security" and needs narratives that constantly reaffirm its fictitious centrality. This is "what is meant by 'androcentrism' and 'ethnocentrism' of cultural forms where emotional and intellectual distortions are created in order to shore up the narcissistic illusion of the centrality of White, masculine, middle-class identity"[1051], as claim both film theorists, referring this to the process of identification analysed by Laura Mulvey in VPNC.[1052] They compare this cultural

[1046] Ibidem.
[1047] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze…", *op. cit.*, p. 115.
[1048] Jacqui Roach and Petal Felix, "Black Looks" in *Female Gaze…, op. cit*., p. 130.
[1049] Ibidem, pp. 138-139.
[1050] Ibidem, p. 139.
[1051] Claire Pajaczkowska and Lola Young, "Racism, Representation…", *op. cit.*, p. 364.
[1052] Ibidem, p. 364.

phenomenon of narcissistic illusion to what Mulvey wrote about an audience at the cinema projecting itself onto characters in the narrative and being in a state of "heightened narcissism where both desire and sadism are displaced*"*.[1053] They bring example of the movie *Mona Lisa*, where film narrative revolves around the enigma of a young black woman, Simone whose sexuality is "investigated, controlled, possessed and finally destroyed".[1054] The visual style and narrative work to "reinforce contemporary ideologies of white, middle-class masculinity which are deeply destructive (…) and which deny the need to work together for social change based on interdependence and respect"[1055] which still often functions as a result of process of negative projection of fears, stereotyping and subordination of Blacks, as is further commented by the female co-authors.[1056]

Contemporary work of Argentinian American scholar Maria Lugones whose decolonial methodology has become very influential in decolonisation of white western feminist thought addresses issues related to the Western gaze and critiques its dominant forms of visual representation. "Coloniality critique" of Lugones, often examines the intersectionality of gender, race, and colonialism being the notion and concept primarily developed by Black feminists, as American academic Emma Valez points out.[1057] Lugones explores how the dominant Western gaze perpetuates certain standards of beauty, objectification, and marginalization of non-Western individuals. She critiques the Eurocentric perspective that informs most visual representations and challenges the exclusionary practices that diminish agency of non-Western women. While Lugones may not have explicitly referred to the concept of the "white male gaze" her work engages with similar concerns and related ideas which critique the Western post-colonial structures of representation within the context of colonial histories.

5.2.4. Imperial gazing and black female photography.

Racialised power relations and he politics of slavery were based on the rule that slaves were denied their right to gaze as recalls hooks. White slaves owners both men and women punished black people for looking and this historically traumatic relationship to the gaze influenced black

[1053] Ibidem, pp. 364-365.
[1054] Ibidem, p. 365.
[1055] Ibidem.
[1056] Claire Pajaczkowska and Lola Young, "Racism, Representation…", *op. cit.*, pp. 365-370.
[1057] Emma Valez, "Decolonial Feminism at the Intersection: A Critical Reflection on the Relationship Between Decolonial Feminism and Intersectionality", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2019.

parenting and black spectatorship. All these attempts to repress black peoples' right to gaze had produced an *overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze*[1058], as hooks describes its meaning as a site of resistance functioning globally:

By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: "not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality." Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.[1059]

As Young puts it, the prohibition on viewing is necessary because the reality simply cannot live up to the mythology and concludes that contemporary image-making concentration on men with overdeveloped musculature suggests rampant male narcissism rather than an attempt to engage with women's sexual fantasies and aspirations. She traces colonial history, as was mentioned before, in regard to attitudes towards black men looking at white women which are evident in contemporary culture and where prohibitions around interracial sexual relations are abundant. So historically, it comes evident, that whether under the guise of scientific investigation or the production of visual culture, it is white bourgeois men who have had privileged access to looking rights, both at white and black women.

To indicate how discourses on the black male body are racialized in contemporary visual culture, and to suggest how the historical circumstances of colonialism and racism still permeate contemporary discursive practices Young stresses that so few black men were featured on the *What She Wants. Women Artists Look at Men* exhibition (1994) which aim was to present the male nude in eyes of women artists. She finds non-presence and non-representation of black nude by women as striking and being uncomfortably close to the Freudian notion of white women's sexuality as the "dark continent". To be more specific, she claims that the meanings which have accrued to black male genitalia have produced a situation where women photographers with an awareness of the historical and contemporary material effects of racist ideologies – whether black or white – wishing to make work using black men are placed in a difficult position, and black men's bodies are effectively relegated to the status of forbidden territory, fraught with complex problems of the myth of black men's hypersexuality, European racial and sexual anxieties, all history and its interpretation around black male nude. So perhaps,

[1058] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators", 1992 in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* , second edition ed. Amelia Jones, , Routledge 2010, p. 107.
[1059] Ibidem.

she continues, it is not surprising to note that the complete male nude is apparently dangerous to depict for an artist who is acutely aware of the political implications of her image making.[1060]

The critical moment of history regarding black representation came with protests and outrage, sparked by the murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2019 in the United States. From this moment various Western art and photography webpages started trying urgently to catch up with what was regularly avoided in positive masculine Black representations and Black authorship both male and female, and as art critic Holland Cotter comments gestures of these suddenly woken artistic institutions that they have felt "both self-aggrandizing" and made it too late.

To "broaden the map of Blackness" and maleness contemporary, one can find only two but both with impressive oeuvres of black women photographers at *Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography,* Deana Lawson, and Liz Johnson Artur. As Daria Harper writes about Lawson's idea of photography and Black identity in general, in her article:

For centuries, Black and brown people were visualized by everyone except for ourselves. The job of image making was placed in the hands of those interested in constructing and maintaining stringent notions of racialized identity. And while early photographers from the African diaspora aren't widely known, they've always been present.[1061]

In South Africa, New York, and North Carolina, Lawson casts her subjects by visiting local hair salons, corner stores, nightclubs or on the train. In their homes or rented ones she rearranges their belongings and guides them into specific poses to stage 'a mirror of everyday life, but also a projection of what I want to happen', she says. 'It's about setting a different standard of values and saying that everyday black lives, everyday experiences, are beautiful, and powerful, and intelligent' – it is like reclaiming black maleness to Western visual culture. Lawson comments her *Nation* taken in 2017 for *The Cut*:

In the top right corner of the room] there's a picture of George Washington's dentures — it's <u>said</u> that his teeth were of slaves' teeth and other materials. I was interested in collapsing history and juxtaposed it with the two young men and the mouth piece [that one is wearing], which is a dental guide that I spray painted gold. I wanted it to somewhat imitate jewelry and perhaps a torture device. Photography has the power to make history and the present moment speak towards each other.[1062]

[1060] Lola Young, "Mapping Male Bodies…", *op. cit.,* p. 41.
[1061] Daria Harper, "These Photographs Use Staged Portraits to Create Truthful Visions of Black Identity", accessed: May 31, 2019, available at: https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-photographers-staged-portraits-create-truthful-visions-black-identity
[1062] Mary Dellas, "An Artist Explains the Staged Photo of Black Intimacy", The CUT, posted March 14, 2018, accessed May 7, 2019, available at: https://www.thecut.com/2018/03/deana-lawson-interview.html

Lawson underlines, in the conversation with another black visual artist Mickalene Thomas, the meaning of the direct gaze and the pose in her Black Body shots:

The direct gaze for me is definitely an expression of confidence or being in one's skin. It's recognition of looking, but also of being looked at. Also, confidence to say: "I know you're photographing me and I'm also engaging in this collaboration with you." It's one of power, actually, too. The power to say: "Yes, I am halfway in clothes; I have on a bra and some stockings; my stockings have a run. And I have a do-rag on my head. I look beautiful. Look at me." In addition to the direct gaze, the pose is so important. Sometimes the pose will make or break the photograph. What I'm interested in is expanding beauty or this idea of beauty and incorporating what you call "unapologetically raw" into a notion of beauty.[1063]

What is also unique and rare in her photography is the ability to connect to strangers on the level that make them to express themselves in such a raw way, allowing them to feel comfortable enough to explore themselves as Thomas says. Lawson admits herself 'I think it is a gift, and part of it is an honest curiosity on my part"[1064] and this is something so rare in femininity, connected to bravery of the gaze and the behavior, as well as shameless openness to strangers treated as a positive feminine conduct. Thanks to all these as a woman photographer she brings totally new readings to black male representation and identity, so difficult to Western post-colonial discourse, both theoretical and visual. However, her works depicting black sensual masculine intimacy and nude in heterosexual relation were surprisingly omitted here.

Another outstanding photographer at *Masculinities,* is Liz Johnson Artur born to a Russian mother and Ghanaian father who calls herself as a "product of migration", in her childhood living in Bulgaria called by her peers a "white negro" as she says in Artist Talk[1065] during her exhibition in NY titled *Dusha* (*Soul* in English). With impressive photographic work, mostly unknown and unsung, and after starting the *Black Balloon Archive* in London in 1991 she has been looking for and exploring the *sense of normal* which was not represented of black people and African diaspora. By illuminating and documenting facets of the Black British experience she wants to make it visible in mainstream culture that long ignored its existence. Artur's photo project created especially for *Masculinities* was titled *When You're Cool … the Sun Always Shines* where she wanted to approach the issue of masculinity from a woman's perspective. As

[1063] Monique Lang, "Deana Lawson and Mickalene Thomas on the Direct Gaze", *Documental Journal*, posted June 6, 2016, accessed May 10, 2019, available at: https://www.documentjournal.com/2016/06/deana-lawson-and-mickalene-thomas-on-the-direct-gaze/
[1064] Ibidem.
[1065] Liz Johnson Artur, February 10, 2020. *Artist Talk: Liz Johnson Artur*, accessed May 31, 2020, available at: https://camstl.org/video/artist-talk-liz-johnson-artur/

she says in the interview with Liam Freeman being asked what masculinity means for her today and if that idea evolved over time:

[When You're Cool… the Sun Always Shines] is a projection of the safe spaces — clubs and dance studios — I encountered when I took the photographs. One of the dancers I met said they started voguing to unlearn masculine movements. That was interesting to me — to break down every detail, from how you hold your hands to how you position your feet. What I want to say about masculinity here is that it can be delicate.[1066]

But she also adds that it is not a word that she uses that much, since she thinks that "every time we talk about masculinity, we need to talk about femininity. There has to be a balance." Artis itself is also famous for photographing queer circles of London but this visual project was not displayed at *Masculinities.*

5.2.5. Towards a fluid Gaze: women of color and Queer pleasure of Black women filmmakers

Among black women filmmakers are Camille Billops, Julie Dash, Katherine Collins, Ayoka Chenzira, Zeinabu Davis as points hooks and adds that she does not have to resist their images, even if she watches their work with a critical eye.[1067] But she also stresses that many black women do not "see differently" because their "perceptions of reality are so profoundly colonized, shaped by dominant ways of knowing."[1068] Preoccupation with the absence of black female gaze and the body representation also appear in Judith Wilson, "One Way Or Another. Black Feminist Visual Theory".

The first black female director Julie Dash, who belonged to LA film rebel group, constructs the "pleasure of interrogation" in her cinematic images and tries not to be seduced by narratives reproducing black female negation, as hooks stresses. As a director she watched mainstream movies "over and over again for the pleasure of deconstructing them".[1069]

[1066] Liam Freeman, *"3 Female Photographers on Defining Masculinity in 2020",* accessed June 7, 2020, available at: https://www.vogue.com.au/culture/features/3-female-photographers-on-defining-masculinity-in-2020/image-gallery/1b963e5df8fd8f4b974d0722009b3db

[1067] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze…", *op. cit.*, p. 116.

[1068] Ibidem, p. 115.

[1069] Ibidem.

First black female movies of Julie Dash, like *Illusions* (…) subversively problematizes the issue of race and spectatorship[1070], to quote hooks. They became voices against mainstream exoticization of black women on screen as well as against Western voyeuristic colonizing gaze which erased the experience of sexual victimization of black women by White men in times of slavery. *Illusions* identifies the terrain of Hollywood cinema as a space of knowledge production that has enormous power and via character of Mignon Dash suggests that: "Power of black women to make films will be threatened and undermined by that white male gaze that seeks to reinscribe the black female body in a narrative of voyeuristic pleasure where the only relevant opposition is male/female, and the only location for the female is as a victim".[1071] The movie problematizes the question of "racial" identity and calls into question the white male's capacity to gaze, to define and to know[1072] as notes hooks.

Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1992) independent film, written and produced by herself, is the "first feature film directed by an African American woman distributed theatrically in the United States", as notes Michael Martin. It places "black females at the center of the narrative"[1073] and has become iconic example of a Black feminist film which dismantles white patriarchal cinematic conventions and by placing a Black lesbian woman as the protagonist it is "able to limit Mulvey's (white) male gaze theory"[1074], as McGoey consents. Set in 1902, the movie has become first Black female cultural and cinematic perspective look into the lives of an African American family left on Saint Helena Island after being torn for slavery from their heritage in Africa. It tells the story of three generation of Gullah women who prepare to migrate out off the island. In McGoey analysis referring to Mulvey concepts, Dash's film:

Restricts the lure of the male gaze since heterosexual white male spectators are unable to derive pleasure from looking at a powerful and non-sexualized female character on screen and are also thwarted (by gender and race) from identifying with such a character. Since heterosexual white male spectators are overdetermined and can't identify with a female screen image, they are forced to watch the film through a non-authoritative spectatorial position.[1075]

Hooks, who theorizes *Daughters of the Dust,* notes that the film does not fascinate or fix white male spectatorial desire, but rather sets it "adrift", as she writes:

[1070] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze…", *op. cit.,* p. 116.
[1071] Ibidem.
[1072] Ibidem.
[1073] Ibidem.
[1074] Ashton McGoey, "Toward a Fluid Cinematic…", *op. cit.,* p. 66.
[1075] Ibidem, p. 66.

Clearly, the impact of racism and sexism so over-determine spectatorship - not only that we look at but who we identify with - that viewers who are not black females find it hard to empathize with the central characters in the movie. They are adrift without a white presence in the film.[1076]

Julie Dash film *Daughters of the Dust* is of double importance, it not only reinforces the Black female empowerment, but also normalizes non-binary cinematic desire. As Judylyn S Ryan notes about the lesbian desire exemplified in the movie through the use of the body language: "As a filmmaker, Dash does not simply depict or acknowledge silence. Rather, she uses camera work to enunciate silence in order to demonstrate its discursive efficacy. In *Daughters of the Dust,* for example she uses the silent vocabulary of embrace, touch, and gaze to narrate the lesbian text of Trula and Yellow Mary's relationship".[1077] Dash's work is revolutionary in its normalizing lesbian desire, presenting Black female images with their different experience and agency as well as in challenging cinematic racist and sexist conventions combating white male gaze and providing new transgressive possibilities of the formulation of Black spectators identities.[1078]

Dash's filmic work is one of many Black feminist cinematic and independent productions that platforms Black women and LGBTQ+ desires and visual pleasures together, crossing the binary code of gender. Other visual production of younger generation that focuses on Black women and their desires in a unique style, joining a hybrid narrative, documentary, autobiography, and comedy is that of Cheryl Duyne *The Watermelon Woman* (1996). Produced by Alexandra Juhasz, who describes the filmmaker's influences: "Duyne is less ready to embrace 'feminism' as an influence. She perceives feminism or the woman's movement to be the ancient, unresponsive tradition of older white women", which she adds a common perception shared by many of the younger women in her filmic and book project. Nonetheless, most of Black female directors interviewed by her, admitted the value of the 1970s theoretical feminist production and its inspirational significance for their work.

5.3. Black gaze. Conclusions.

Male homosexual black nude brought the racialised masculine body to a White Western public scene. The 1980s were the time when decolonial frames both in theory and in black photography

[1076] Ashton McGoey, "Toward a Fluid Cinematic…", *op. cit.,* p. 66.
[1077] Ibidem, p. 69.
[1078] Ibidem, pp. 68-70.

and cinema got strength and visibility, being also difficult times of AIDS crisis. Appearance of black male nude body in galleries and projects provoked political scandals and street protests in the USA. Crossing the racial and interracial line of visual pleasure represented, proved deep fears and sexual complexes of Western white society that kept colonial and postcolonial desires under the highest control. Race and psychoanalytical concepts were critiqued and re-evaluated, firstly from black male position, later in the 1990s came black female voices, both in theory and filmic practice, who critiqued Black male directors that catered to white male gazing. VPNC served as one of the main culprits and provocateurs that created new oppositional narratives to imperial gazing that included visual binary depictions of black "exotic" women produced for White male pleasure. Decolonisation of the frame, issues of Whiteness, Blackness, gender, and sexuality represented on screen brought projects which complicated Mulvey's assumptions but at the same time created new very important area in postcolonial polemics with intersectional identity concept that includes gender, race, class, personal experience, and visual pleasure that works in a cross-over way. Isaac Julien cooperation with Nina Kellgren as the director of photography, responsible for depictions of homosexual desire on screen in various Julien's visual production, seems to be the best prove of such fluidity of visual pleasure.

Conclusions

The aim of the thesis was to present the influence of the essay VPNC which was written fifty years ago, in 1973 by a British feminist theorist Laura Mulvey and published in Screen in 1975. Its concepts based on psychoanalytical categories like the male gaze, male visual pleasure, voyeurism and scopophilia, women as spectacle and passive objects of the male gaze, assumption of sadism in narration, male fear of castration affecting female fetishisation on screen, representation, female masochism, provoked discussion and criticism in film studies that lasts until today. In two years, Visual Pleasure will be celebrating its 50 years, as it was in the case of 30th and 40th anniversary of the essay publication. Over the decades the paper has become a manifesto, even if Heidi de Mare claims that it created one-dimensional system in feminist film studies.

Laura Mulvey stopped giving permission of its re-publication at some time because of the craze surrounding her provocative concepts, its reference to psychoanalysis, Freud and Lacan, controversies that her assumptions upraised, counter-voices to notions proposed and harsh disagreements with them, "omissions" that Mulvey "made", accusations of "cancellation" of other sexual minorities, "erasure" of race or her "blindness " for active female gaze existence. Today the essay lives its own life as the author claims, almost totally outside her knowledge. In decades following its publications she wrote many other articles and books as well as created various films, most of them with Peter Woolen. She referred numerously to the mostly asked questions regarding problematic areas of VPNC and have changed her lines of thinking about cinema with time. She also involved or was invited to various projects concerning lesbians, gays, queers, race or ethnicity, migration as effect of globalization cooperating among others, with Isaac Julien, bell hooks, Kobena Mercer, Eve Oishi and giving lectures across the world, from Australia to Brazil being invited to numerous conferences about cinema and sexuality. In 1992 the first translation into Japan was made and Japanese applications of Mulvey's VPNC have started. Despite her numerous works both written and filmic done after the 1975 she is worldwide known for VPNC with which she opened the Pandora's box in film theory and practice as well as in the area of visual studies.

The aim of the thesis was the focus of the most important problematic which appeared as a result of counter-discussion to VPNC terms and concepts and presentation of the invaluable meaning it brought to film and visual studies, as well as art, media and popular culture analyses.

The research carried proved its enormous, not fading with time importance to contemporary analyses of gender, visual language, and identity. New concepts were presented which have their genealogy in gendered terminology proposed by Mulvey in 1975, like female gaze, lesbian gaze, male ga(y)ze, Queer gaze, intersectionality, oppositional gaze, man as spectacle and fetish, visual studies, visual sociology, visual anthropology which all have changed the theoretical humanistic background and brough recently new research areas as pornography for women and Queer Studies with a pioneering, first ever programme of MA Queer History opened in 2017 at Goldsmiths University in London.

Research and analyses carried out were to verify three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' have become one of the most seminal theoretical works of Western humanities influencing areas of film theory and practice, visual culture, feminism, critical theories as well as black post-colonial studies in the last fifty years.

Hypothesis 2: Concept of Mulveyian male gaze and masculine visual pleasure influenced the radical changes in feminist film and visual theory which re-shaped and created new perspectives of analyses referring and polemising with Mulvey's disproportional gender binary gaze concept, and in consequence all these brought the female gaze to the forefront of contemporary polemics in the field of visual culture.

Hypothesis 3. Non-heteronormative ways of looking and Black/people of colour perspectives of seeing have become important part of discussion about fluidity of the gaze, pleasure, as well as intersectional identity concept which illuminated the dominance of White patriarchal visual politics of power.

The presented Ph.D. thesis study gathered and categorized the most significant directions of discussion and analyses in humanities generated by Laura Mulvey's VPNC which has become one of the most influential essays in the field of film studies and visual culture, and in development of contemporary thought and concepts at the end of 20th century. Written in 1973 and published in magazine Screen in 1975, it celebrates its fifty years of prolific "transdiscursive disappointment". The issues of visual pleasure and the male gaze concept together with the psychoanalytic perspective used by Mulvey created an explosive combination

that has changed perspective in most areas of humanities which thesis proves in its following chapters. The study presents the heat of numerous debates and new paradigms of thought with new paths of polemics created. VPNC "omissions", according to some, brought the visual pleasure and representation of various desires to the front of filmic discussions that embrace gender, erotic spectacle, and fetish on screen, (hetero)sexual difference concept, female gaze and spectatorship, fluid identity construction, as well as invisibility of race, ethnicity, class, and individual experience which all are presented in the thesis. Considered as the manifesto today, VPNC provoked strong disagreements and triggered re-reading and re-evaluation of heteronormative assumptions proposed by Mulvey in her publication, which are categorized and presented in the study. Firstly, the concept of female symbolic and visual pleasure as well as female film erotic practice has evolved immensely, both in theory and practice, which is discussed together with the creation of gendered gaze theory, Queer theory as well as creation of mobile and intersectional models of identification. As for the female film practice representing desire, it still remains less invisible than the male one, the reason being that it is often depreciated and not supported enough theoretically and institutionally.

The project also embraces rejection of ideological imperatives of VPNC Western white male gaze and heterosexual binary looking relations in film theory by presenting photographic work and visual projects of both gay, lesbian and people of colour, who responded directly or indirectly to Mulvey's theoretical assumptions concerning subjectivity of desire and visual pleasure. Even if responses to VPNC challenging categories are very scattered and hard to embrace, Mulvey's essay continue to inspire and provoke, and the polemic provoked is worldwide known and still vivid.

Presented in the thesis aims concerning verification of hypotheses were achieved. The title of the thesis is important from the point of view of influence which Mulvey's VPNC had on film, art and visual studies as well on other fields that often seem not to be directly related to the visual field.

After formal analysis of theoretical literature, materials from conferences and academic debates and seminars, filmic and visual works referring to visual pleasure concept as well as responses provoked but endless disagreements, I am aware that the trial of positioning its place in visual humanistic thought is not sufficiently explored since both the materials and problematic raised is so dispersed and widespread in various fields that it was not possible to gather its whole complexity.

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