

cinema and cultural theory

Spectatorship and Gaze

What is the male gaze?  
The male gaze is a concept in film theory that describes the way in which the male viewer is positioned as the subject of the film, while the female characters are positioned as objects of the viewer's gaze.

How is the male gaze constructed?  
The male gaze is constructed through a combination of camera work, editing, and narrative. The camera often adopts a male perspective, looking at women in a way that objectifies them. Editing and narrative often focus on the physical appearance and actions of female characters.



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What is the difference between the male gaze and the female gaze?  
The male gaze is centered on the male viewer's perspective, while the female gaze is centered on the female viewer's perspective. The male gaze often objectifies women, while the female gaze often objectifies men.

Why is the female gaze important?  
The female gaze is important because it challenges the traditional male gaze and provides a new way of looking at the world. It allows women to see themselves as subjects rather than objects.



How is the male gaze constructed in classical narrative cinema?  
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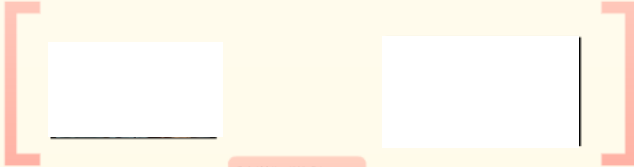
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Changing concepts of the gaze

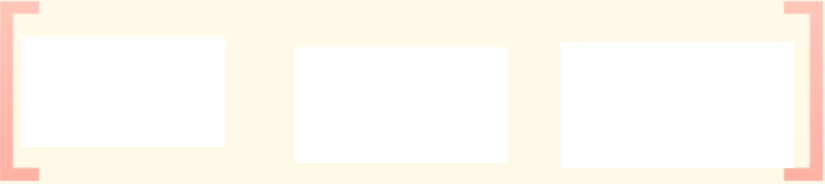
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Which theoretical/critical frameworks we have so far mentioned that RW fits into?  
From which aspects?  
Would you elaborate on how concepts such as scopophilia/voyeurism/exhibitionism might apply for our analysis of RW?  
Any other examples in the tradition of classical narrative cinema that you want to relate to?  
Any film in mind that could deconstruct the male look?



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# Althusser: interpellation

Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" (1972)

According to Althusser, ideology, functioning as the mediator, allows for hegemonic power to reproduce itself by obscuring traditional forms of repression and incorporating individuals into the power structure.

Interpellation is the constitutive process where individuals acknowledge and respond to ideologies, thereby recognizing themselves as subjects. In interpellation, we are "hailed" or summoned by ideologies, which recruit us as their "authors" and their essential subject; which also illustrates how subjects can be complicit in their own domination.

Althusser emphasizes the ubiquity of ideology and interpellation by noting how subjects are consistently constituted by **Ideological State Apparatuses** (ISAs) such as the family, educational institutions, and media such as literature, radio and television.

interpellation, and subjecthood, mutually reinforce each other so that "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: individuals are always-already subjects" (Althusser 1972: 176)

## Other theorists on Interpellation vis-a-vis media texts

“immovably, they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them. The misplaced love of the common people for the wrong which is done them is a greater force than the cunning of the authorities” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979:8)

David Gauntlett describes how “interpellation occurs when a person connects with a media text: when we enjoy a magazine or TV show, for example, this uncritical consumption means that the text has interpellated us into a certain set of assumptions, and caused us to tacitly accept a particular approach to the world.” (Gauntlett, 2002: 27)



stage 1: **1970s Film Theory**, Jean-Louis Baudry, Raymond Bellour and Christian Metz wrote about cinema as an apparatus and an imaginary signifier to explain what happened to the spectator as he (sic) sat in the darkened theatre gazing on to the screen. Highly relevant to psychoanalytic theories (Lacan's concepts etc.).



Lacan's  
"mirror phase/stage"

6-18 months, children go through a developmental stage that establishes fundamental aspects of their notion of selfhood and separateness from other human beings. They fantasize having control and mastery over the mirror-image, while recognizing the counterpart as an other. Mirror phase is believed to be an important step in infants' recognition of themselves as autonomous beings with the potential ability to control their worlds.

S & C: "There are two contradictory relationships here to the image--infants see that they and the image are the same, yet at the same time they see the images as an ideal (not the same). Hence, the mirror phase is also about recognition and misrecognition.



spectator as the "ideal subject":

The viewer undergoes a temporary loss of ego as he or she identifies with the powerful position of apprehending the world on the scree, much as the infant apprehended the mirror image. Independent of individual identity, the spectator is socially constructed by the **cinematic apparatus** (the traditional social space of the cinema that includes a darkened theater, projector, film, sound)[S & C] ... the cinematic apparatus interpellates the subject as effect of the text.

**Problem:** one-way; regressive/passive; male subject

stage 2: **post-1975 feminist film theory**, the 'natural' assumption, implicit in those first writings, that the masculine was the place from which the spectator looks and the 'natural' acceptance that each viewing was an unproblematic re-enactment of the Oedipal trajectory were strongly contested (in the first instance) by the critic and film-maker Laura Mulvey.

## Laura Mulvey's ground-breaking essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975)

In her essay she examined the way in which cinema functions through its codes and conventions to construct the way in which woman **is to be looked at**, starting with the male point of view within the film and, subsequently, the spectator who identifies with the male character or protagonist. She describes this process of viewing as **scopophilia** - pleasure in viewing (**exhibitionism: pleasure of being looked at**). **Voyeurism** is the pleasure in looking while not being seen, which carries a more negative connotation of a powerful, if not sadistic, position.

## the gaze (le regard)

the gaze as the viewing relationship characteristic of a particular set of social circumstances.

According to Mulvey, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness."

for Mulvey, the camera is used as a tool of voyeurism and sadism, disempowering those before its gaze. What happens to the female spectators? Mulvey could only conclude that she must either identify with the passive, fetishized position of the female character on screen (a position of unpleasure, her lack of a penis signifying the threat of castration) or, if she is to derive pleasure, must assume a male positioning (a masculine third person).

[male gaze in art history]


John Berger: "men act, women appear".

He notes that the tradition of the nude in painting was almost exclusively about images of nude women who were presented for male viewers.

stage 3:refute the phallogentrism of Mulvey's argument; extensive work on revising, reworking and extending Mulvey's propositions.

feminists were considering the possibility that the spectator was not so rigidly positioned in relation to sexual identity but that it was possible to postulate the bisexuality of the spectator's positioning whereby she or he would alternate between the two—suggesting a fluidity and heterogeneity of positioning rather than an 'either/or'.





Silence of the Lambs, 1991,  
Dir. Jonathan Demme

Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) knows she is being watched (by FBI agents, by Hannibal Lecter and by her supervisor), but she uses these looks as the source of a performative empowerment.

changing concepts of the gaze

# changing concepts of the gaze

discussions on gendered practices of looking should also taken into account various (ethnic) sexual identities; as well as the social and historical conditions of spectatorship.





Rear Window, 1954, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock

The audience is absorbed into a voyeuristic situation within the screen scene and diegesis which parodies his own in the cinema. In his analysis of Rear Window, Douchet takes the film as a metaphor for the cinema. Jeffries is the audience, the events in the apartment block opposite correspond to the screen. As he watches, an erotic dimension is added to his look, a central image to the drama. His girlfriend Lisa had been of little sexual interest to him, more or less a drag, so long as she remained on the spectator side. When she crosses the barrier between his room and the block opposite, their relationship is re-born erotically. He does not merely watch her through his lens, as a distant meaningful image, he also sees her as a guilty intruder exposed by a dangerous man threatening her with punishment, and thus finally saves her. Lisa's exhibitionism has already been established by her obsessive interest in dress and style, in being a passive image of visual perfection; Jeffries' voyeurism and activity have also been established through his work as a photo-journalist, a maker of stories and captor of images. However, his enforced inactivity, binding him to his seat as a spectator, puts him squarely in the phantasy position of the cinema audience.

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