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## Photography, Visual Culture, and the (Re)Definition/Queering of the Male Gaze

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David Nicholas Martin, Student

Dr. Anna Brzyski, Major Professor

Doreen Maloney, Director of Graduate Studies

Photography, Visual Culture, and the (Re)Definition/Queering of the Male Gaze

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the  
College of Fine Arts  
at the University of Kentucky

By

David Nicholas Martin

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Anna Brzyski, Professor of Art History and Visual Studies

Lexington, Kentucky

2018

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### Photography, Visual Culture, and the (Re)Definition/Queering of the Male Gaze

The traditional notion of the Male Gaze, first conceptualized by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in 1975, focused on the objectification of women through depictions structured to gratify a male heterosexual perspective. In this chapter we will revisit this concept and investigate how that gaze may have shifted away from a primarily heterosexual perspective to a socially dominant male perspective (maleness here referring to dominance rather than specific gender, just as “whiteness” might refer to privilege rather than race). With gender roles in an increasingly global and mobile society becoming more fluid and complex, opening up visibility to LGBTQ communities, along with a substantial post-feminist backlash, we will consider how the male gaze is shifting and how subsets of objectifying “gazes” might overlap.

I will explore whether the traditional heterosexual male gaze has shifted due to power backlashes and other developments. New gaze developments may take the form of the “bromance” as well as athletics and advertising. Included in an investigation of this “dominant gaze” will be an exploration into the possibility of a lesbian and transgender gaze – does each subculture have the propensity to fall into this pattern of objectified looking and if so, where is the evidence and what are the implications? That evidence will be explored through photography, film, dance, and other visual media as this subject is expanded through the emergence of variant sexualities and gender identities.

KEYWORDS: Visual Culture, Homosexual, Lesbian, Male Gaze, Photography, Transgender.

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## DEDICATION

To my husband, James. Thank you for your patience and support!

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I'd like to acknowledge my committee, Anna Brzyski, Ruth Adams, and Miriam Kienle for their feedback. You gave me great advice and support! I'd especially like to acknowledge Anna and her unending guidance and patience through this process.

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## INTRODUCTION

The traditional notion of the male gaze, first conceptualized by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in 1975, focused on the objectification of women through works that had been created to visually satisfy viewers who identified as both male and heterosexual. <sup>1</sup> Mulvey stated that looking was split between active/male and passive/female and that works of film were created largely from the perspective of the heterosexual male in a position of power. This placed the female subject in a submissive/passive or "looked-at" position of an object of the male gaze. This dynamic between the active looker and the looked object underpins the notion of the gaze and power relationship that is inherently sexualized. The related concept of scopophilia assumes that the looker derives pleasure (sexual or otherwise) from the act of looking.

In cinema, Mulvey's primary focus, filmmakers have frequently used costuming, framing, makeup, lighting, and other tools at their disposal to position women as the objects of the male gaze who are looked upon within this sexualized framework. This also extends to scriptwriters and directors, of whom Alfred Hitchcock can be seen as a classic example. Many of his works frame,

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema," *Screen*, September 1, 1975: 6-18.

illuminate, and present the female specifically to be gazed or looked upon. But this is not just about cinema. Since the 1970s, the concept of the male gaze has been extended to most other media and art forms.

There are several sources that directly discuss the evolution of the male gaze as defined by Mulvey to allow for other types of gaze. There are works that discuss her own view of the gaze, including her revealing interview with Sassatelli, where she discusses the “explosive fragmentation of the ‘male gaze’” together with her acknowledgment that there “surely are many gazes around” now.<sup>2</sup> Susan Bordo’s “The Male Body” eloquently discusses how the presentation of the male body to other men has changed in recent years.<sup>3</sup> There are also works by authors like Fegitz and Bindel that discuss the use of Lesbian Chic and the portrayal of women as tools for the sexual use of men.<sup>4</sup>

But these works do not explore the possibility of these gazes being used by men and women for themselves as new and developing gazes and nor do they explore the possibility that they can be controlled and exploited in different ways

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<sup>2</sup> R Sassatelli, "Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, gaze and technology in film culture," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2011: 123-143.

<sup>3</sup> S Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux., 1999).

<sup>4</sup> E Fegitz, "Consuming the lesbian body: Post-feminist heteroflexible subjectivities in Sex and the City and The L Word," in *Consumerism on TV: Popular media from the 1950s to the present*, 89-108 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

and by different people. My contribution to this field will be to explore and demonstrate that these gazes are, in fact evolving, and that while Mulvey's definition of the gaze may well have been relevant at the time, it is unstable and not relevant for today.

In this thesis, I will explore how the gaze has shifted away from a primarily heterosexual perspective to a more fluid and less securely anchored position. With gender roles in an increasingly global and mobile society becoming more fluid and complex, opening up visibility to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) communities, along with a substantial post-feminist backlash, I will show how the male gaze is shifting. In particular, this thesis will investigate how subsets of objectifying overlapping gazes are taking its place, with the development of a lesbian, bisexual, and transgender gaze. Finally, I will also explore the question of whether each subculture has the propensity to fall into this pattern of objectified and controlled looking and if so, where is the evidence and what are the implications?

I will do this by examining photography, film, dance, and other forms of visual culture, and how the evolution and acceptance of non-normative genders and sexualities have affected and controlled the creation, delivery, and consumption of visual culture and media. Recognizing that sexuality and gender issues are often culturally specific, my methodology (and correspondingly the

reflected results) will include looking at specific examples of visual culture primarily from the United States and Europe from the range of 1975 to 2016, contrasting media examples from today with older examples, and also examining how audiences respond to media and visual culture representations in different ways. I will also be using examples that are primarily from mainstream culture and mediums (network television, Pay Per View television, cinema, main stage theatre, and mainstream art galleries), and focusing on how the gaze has evolved in the mainstream as opposed to subculture. This thesis will examine and discuss how different groups react to the shifting of gender roles in certain areas of visual culture, such as video gaming, sports broadcasting, dance, and television. I will demonstrate that the traditional heterosexual male gaze has shifted since Mulvey first wrote her article and that male bodies are also now objectified and even deified through the rise of dating apps, the selfie, and the presentation of the body through photography. This male deification and objectification aligns with the arrival of a homosexual male gaze that appears to be more overt and accepted, yet which reaches back foundationally to previous eras celebrating or shaming male beauty ("Greek love", Oscar Wilde, F. Holland Day, Robert

Mapplethorpe). This gaze may also take the form of the 'bromance' as well as athletics, self-adulation, and advertising. <sup>5</sup>

The outcome of this research and analysis will be to show that Mulvey's original concept of the gaze is inherently unstable and incompatible with the way that society has evolved in its acceptance of visual representations of gender and sexuality. A singular concept of the male gaze is too simplistic for a world where gender expression is finally becoming tolerated, if not universally acceptable. As the world has opened up to gender nonconformity and alternative expressions of sexuality, arts, media, and culture, along with the methods of presenting them to the viewer, have developed in different ways to embrace these emerging identities. That, in turn, has led to an awareness of how visual culture can be used, controlled, and even manipulated for many different purposes to reflect, defend, and support gender and sexual identity. This evolution has, either deliberately or not, created new multivalent gazes and necessitated a change or re-evaluation of Mulvey's original concept of a singular gaze.

#### THE GAZE MOVES ON: COMPLICATING THE TRADITIONAL MALE GAZE

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<sup>5</sup> In this context I am using the term 'bromance' to refer to a very close relationship between two men who are heterosexual that may appear to be sexual in nature but in actual fact is not.

It is now more than 40 years since Mulvey published her essay "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema." As already discussed, gender roles are very different today to what we saw, performed, lived, and sheltered under in 1975 and earlier. Mulvey wrote her piece at what appeared to be a time of great change in gender politics. However, she could not have imagined or predicted the changes that would occur over the next 40 years.

In an earlier publication, I have argued that the male gaze is rather a dominant gaze and that "those who are concerned with upholding that dominance might not be biologically male, rather they will have an investment in the status quo."<sup>6</sup> They state that as our society becomes more and more media driven and saturated that this controlling gaze of maleness as dominance may continue to objectify the other against itself, whatever itself is at that specific moment.

The singular gaze is evolving into a web of gazing that is replacing the traditional Mulvey concept of the binary form. The various gazes that have developed now allow people who were originally not in control to obtain control,

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<sup>6</sup> David N Martin, Suzanne Szucs and James W Koschoreck, "Photography, Visual Culture, and the (Re)Definition of the Male Gaze and Unqueer, Lesbian,Trans: Shifting Gazes in Photography and Visual Culture Today," in *The Routledge Companion to Photography and Visual Culture* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2018).

and in certain cases, now allow those who were once gazed upon as controlled subjects, to control their own viewing, looked-at-ness and gaze.

#### IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN: WHIPLASH, FEMINISM, AND THE GAZE.

The evolution of the gaze has not been easy or straightforward, particularly with regard to global feminism and the shifting role of women in media. Much has changed since Mulvey wrote her article when the world was grappling with Second Wave Feminism. Today we are in the throes of Fourth Wave Feminism, led by social media, the #MeToo moment, and the multiple justice for women movements that exist. The visual culture landscape is almost indescribably different from what it was in 1975.

While women have achieved at higher and higher levels in many areas, including the first woman to be nominated by a major party for President of the United States and the increasing growth and visibility of women's sports, the backlash has been palpable and, thanks to the internet, very easy to observe, especially towards women daring to enter historically male territories.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, the case of Ines Sainz, a female sports journalist who encountered online

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<sup>7</sup> (Martin, Szucs and Koschoreck 2018, 28)

abuse due to her choice of clothing while working on the sports field and during an encounter with the New York Jets baseball team, is particularly interesting. Sports journalism enters many areas of visual culture: the tv studio, printed media, generalized entertainment in the form of sports commentators/journalists like Erin Andrews who also work on shows like ABC's "Dancing with the Stars" and others.<sup>8</sup> In 1975 it would have been unheard of for a female to be such a high-profile sports journalist, let alone an observer and reporter from the field. But sports broadcasting is still a traditionally male dominated area, even with the advances made over the last 15 years and it is also reasonable to assume that the viewership is still majority male, in the original, sex-based definition of the word.

Women in sports "have been token or beautifiers and always referred to as interlopers."<sup>9</sup> Even the movie "A League of Their Own" referenced in the title of this section, though based on a true story, is about women being used as substitutes for men who are off at war.<sup>10 11</sup> Perhaps the most shining example of this can be seen in the use of the Ring Girl, typically seen in wrestling, boxing,

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<sup>8</sup> "Dancing with the Stars" is a reality television show in America where celebrities are paired with professional dancers, learn to dance, and compete for a trophy

<sup>9</sup> (Martin, Szucs and Koschoreck 2018, 29)

<sup>10</sup> *A League of Their Own*, directed by Penny Marshall, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> "A league of their own" is a movie about a female baseball league that was set up during World War II as so many men were away at war.



and other combat sports.<sup>12</sup> Brought on to carry a placard indicating which round will be coming next, they epitomize the placement of women in male dominated sports as a distraction, entertainment, or simply a visual add-on. It is not surprising, then, when women enter the sports arena as direct competitors to their male counterparts, either as players, journalists, or reporters, that they are seen as either titillation, combatants, or a combination of both. Despite the fact that her role was intended to be *purely* about sport, the response from the audiences and other sections of the media was to treat Sainz as an item of sports visual culture to be looked at. Sainz was subjected to a barrage of abuse about her dress, ability, body, and other visual aspects, and was also accused of seeking attention. These are the same things that many women experience in their daily lives, especially when they move into male dominated areas. Sports journalism particularly, together with the competitive atmosphere of the playing field perhaps magnifies the unpleasantness of this due to the hyper-masculinity of the environment.

In terms of impacting the gaze and its development, this environment cannot be understated. On one hand, we have someone (Sainz) who is being placed into a traditional submissive role and is being viewed in a classic Mulvey-esque

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<sup>12</sup> A "Ring Girl" is a female who carries a marker indicating which round is about to begin in a boxing match. They are usually scantily clad and are there for audience viewing and visual entertainment.

way. As a non-player in a game day situation, she is also automatically relegated to a secondary spot, one that is possibly lower than that of any male colleagues, due to her sex and the fact that the players on the team are all the opposite sex. Male colleagues of Sainz were not relegated or viewed as visual additions to the scenes and did not have their dress or looks critiqued. This turning of the commentator into a visual object was reserved solely for Sainz as the female. Yet, on the other hand we have someone who is now available as a representative model for other woman to look at in a positive light, and even, if desired, in a powerful and consensual non-heteronormative sexual way. This is an important shift and one that could not be possible without the advances made by women over the last 40 years. The very idea that women could look at other women in sports, either as civilians or as players begins to show that the binary idea becomes less stable and that Mulvey's framework is less relevant.

#### IT'S NOT ALL FUN AND GAMES: GAMERGATE AND GHOSTS

The previous section deals with the backlash that women can encounter when they move into male dominated fields. Comparisons between sexes also become an issue as we saw in the recent Olympics in 2016, where female athletes such as Simon Biles were compared to Michael Phelps, even though they

compete in completely different sports. Social media venues are "notable for both who is allowed to be an active player in contemporary culture and who should remain passively on the sidelines".<sup>13</sup> As this crossover and backlash continues to grow and the stability of the gaze concept in these venues is challenged, "objectification of female bodies has increased, alongside of violence, whether physical or virtual, directed towards women who attempt to infiltrate too far into the world of men."<sup>14</sup>

This also exists in virtual as well as physical worlds. For examples of virtual worlds, we can turn to the world of video gaming. Relevant here are both the games themselves and the culture that surrounds them and in which they are developed. Computer gaming has evolved at a rapid pace over the last few decades. As technology has evolved, so too has the ability to depict and characterize people. Just as with any other art form, our ability to express, develop, and evolve our ideas in the medium has changed at a startling rate. It is a testament to this speed of growth that the video game industry has already been through numerous retro styles, with graphic styles of 8-bit gaming such as Minecraft becoming surprise hits in today's 64-bit worlds. Yet, at the same time, the visual representation of the body in games such as Halo, Grand Theft Auto,

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<sup>13</sup> (Martin, Szucs and Koschoreck 2018, 30)

<sup>14</sup> (Martin, Szucs and Koschoreck 2018, 30)

and Gears of War have become so photo-realistic that it can be difficult to tell when a game is switching between live rendered action and pre-recorded imagery. So much so that we are now seeing lawsuits by celebrities such as Lindsay Lohan, that are testing whether depictions of the body in video games can be classified as defaming. In her failed lawsuit against the publishers of the video game "Grand Theft Auto V," Lohan claimed that the video games "creators used her likeness without permission."<sup>15</sup> Of particular relevance to this discussion is the way the imaging of the character of the girl that Lohan claims was based on her was presented and discussed. The character, Lacey Jones, was presented with "reddish-blond hair and is seen in one image cited in the suit wearing a red bikini, holding a cell phone, and flashing a peace sign."<sup>16</sup> As reported in numerous publications at the time of the law suit, a "similar real-life snap of Lohan did make the media rounds"<sup>17</sup> So, not only do we have the question of the image of a personality being used, but also the type of image as well, an image described by the ruling judges in their decisions as beings "indistinct, satirical representations of the style, look, and persona of modern,

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<sup>15</sup> Chris Dolmetsch, *Lindsay Lohan's Pursuit of 'Grand Theft Auto' Lawsuit Stalls*, March 29, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-29/lindsay-lohan-s-pursuit-of-grand-theft-auto-lawsuit-stalls> (accessed 04 29, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Leslie Katz, *Lindsay Lohan loses Grand Theft Auto V lawsuit on appeal*, March 30, 2018, (accessed 2018).

<sup>17</sup> (Katz 2018)

beach-going young woman”<sup>18</sup> The concentration on the female in the case was obviously on the visual imagery as it related to a video game, but the overall tone to the judgement and its narrative about the female form, body, and representation as visual adornment is unmistakable. It also clearly demonstrates, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, that the role of the female is typically used as a visual object placed as an adornment to the overall video game aesthetic. While there have been strides to rectify this representation of women with games such as “The Last of Us” and “Gone Home” which feature strong female leads, the prevailing trend still seems to be to portray women as visual fluff to be either collected or protected.<sup>19,20</sup>

Turning to where and how the games are developed, we can look at the controversy known as Gamergate, which took place in 2014 and dealt with sexism and harassment in video game culture. Women who were involved in video game culture, either as developers, designers, or critics, began to call for more inclusion and recognition in gaming. Women also began to more forcefully denounce the portrayal of females in video games, where they are

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<sup>18</sup> (Dolmetsch 2018)

<sup>19</sup> “The Last of Us” is a zombie video game from 2013 where the main character is female and is tasked with protecting others from Zombies.

<sup>20</sup> “Gone Home” is a 2013 video game featuring a soundtrack from almost exclusively female bands. Players also take on the character of woman in the game.

often presented as sexual objects or in situations of sexual violence or male gratification. As more women started to speak out, the dominant culture in video gaming - white, heterosexual, males - began to mobilize and group together, criticizing, threatening, and in some cases issuing rape and death threats, along with publishing the real names and addresses of female video gamers and critics.

This online war that developed is a remarkable example of how tensions become inflamed when the status inherent in Mulvey's original definition of the gaze is challenged. In the Gamergate example, we see the dominant group attempting to continue to control the group who would be traditionally gazed upon in the gaming community. Only this time the way that this control is manifested took place in online spaces, with the hashtag *#GamerGate* and the harassment taking place predominantly online. This shows that the concept of the gaze being rooted in power is very real and that it is not just about the visual objectification or idealization in visuality.

Continuing this exploration of how women are allowed (or not) to move in and out of roles that are historically occupied by males, a similar reaction occurred during the recent remake of the movie *Ghostbusters*. The original movie, from 1984, featured four male lead characters. Firmly embedded into 1980s culture, the movie can be considered a classic and an enormous financial

success, having achieved a cumulative worldwide gross of over \$291m on a budget of \$30m as of April 2018.<sup>21</sup> The reboot of the series took place in 2015 and recast the four lead characters as female. When the announcement of the all-female cast was made in 2015 there was an immediate backlash against both the cast, the director, and the concept of the movie. Sequels and reboots (of which this example is classified) are common in the film industry today, and the casting of the leads as female was almost seen as "a challenge to the traditional order."<sup>22</sup> With film and television being "heavily dominated by males (and) with women in media still grossly underrepresented," the film became a lightning rod of controversy and backlash, dominating social media channels, entertainment magazines, and TV news segments.<sup>23</sup> Twitter, as a platform and as a company, became heavily involved in the argument with one of the Ghostbusters cast members, Leslie Jones, being subjected to a continuous stream of racist and sexist hate posts about her casting as a lead in the movie. This resulted in the banning from Twitter of Milo Yiannopoulos, a writer at the conservative news site Breitbart who "rallied and directed" twitter commentators to "hurl racist and sexist remarks" at her online presence.<sup>24</sup> This gives us a very tangible example

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<sup>21</sup> IMDB, *Ghostbusters*, 2018, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0087332/> (accessed 06 2018).

<sup>22</sup> (Martin, Szucs and Koschoreck 2018, 31)

<sup>23</sup> (Martin, Szucs and Koschoreck 2018, 31)

<sup>24</sup> Mike Isaac, *Twitter Bars Milo Yiannopoulos in Wake of Leslie Jones's Reports of Abuse*, 07 20, 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/20/technology/twitter-bars-milo-yiannopoulos-in-crackdown-on-abusive-comments.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/20/technology/twitter-bars-milo-yiannopoulos-in-crackdown-on-abusive-comments.html?_r=0) (accessed 03 26, 2018).

of what happens when the gaze is deliberately manipulated or flipped. By taking a movie that conformed to the original Mulvey view of the gaze, with women relegated to secondary or supporting roles, and turning that upside down to where women were now in charge and empowered, the reactions made it clear that some felt that men were being relegated to a secondary status.

Social media has given us a new opportunity to see how the gaze can be challenged. Previously it was much harder for people, especially women and other marginalized groups, to have visibility or voice to challenge the status quo. Social media platforms have changed this balance and now these groups have access to voice their concerns and call for equality as and when they see they need to. In turn, however, that also means the groups that feel challenged have a very visible platform to display their disapproval, often in even more hurtful and confrontational ways.

All these points show how the traditional male gaze is still very prevalent in our visual culture today. They indicate that although things may be changing, there is still much that needs to be examined and challenged as to how views other than the typical male vantage point is handled. In subsequent sections and chapters, I will look at how some of these challenges have occurred and whether



they have been successful in altering the gaze, "queering" the gaze, and ultimately showing it as unstable.

CHAPTER 1. THE UNQUEER IN VISUAL CULTURE: THE REFIGURING OF THE "BROMANCE", MALE BALLET, AND THE MALE NUDE IN FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

The opening-out of gender and the growing visual representation of non-conforming sexual expressions has led to many new things being seen, photographed, made, or represented in an increasingly visual world. The visual arts have always been in the vanguard of breaking new ground and two pieces in particular have an important role to play in this evolution of the gaze.

The first of these is Matthew Bourne's retelling of the classic ballet "Swan Lake"<sup>25</sup>. Premiering in London in 1996, it had an immediate impact in many areas: dance, theatre, queer culture, and gender studies to name a few. In essence, Bourne had taken the original Tchaikovsky ballet from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and recast several roles that were typically portrayed by female dancers to be danced by men. In the original, the prince meets a group of female swans, falls in love with a white swan named Odette, is seduced by her alter ego, the black swan Odile, is forgiven by Odette, and is united in the final scene with Odette. In the Bourne recasting, the prince meets a group of hunky muscular male swans, dances with the Swan (the male leader), then dances with the alter ego black

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<sup>25</sup> K Drummond, "The queering of Swan Lake: A new male gaze for the performance of sexual desire," in *Queer Theory and Communication: From Disciplining Queers to Queering the Discipline(s)*, 235-255 (New York, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2003).

swan the Stranger, and ends up dying with the Swan at the hands of the other swans. The result is a powerful visual experience that appears to cross gender lines and roles in almost every way.

At the time of the London premiere and subsequent transfer to Broadway, there was much discussion as to whether this was a gay ballet. The discussion centered around the fact that instead of beautiful female ballerinas being the center of attention, and therefore the piece revolving marvelously around the theory behind Mulvey's Gaze, ruggedly beautiful men were now the centerpiece of the work. But did that make this piece a gay romance? Drummond points out that the male version of the black swan, the Stranger, not only dances suggestively with the prince, but also attempts to seduce his mother, the queen. In fact, not only does the Stranger attempt to seduce the queen, he also dances suggestively with many of the other women in the ballroom, a significant departure from the original, as Odile only dances with Siegfried. It is this (amongst many other points) that makes Bourne's retelling so much more than just a gay retelling of Swan Lake. Instead it is a work of visual art that utilizes the male body in an entirely different way. While there are clearly homoerotic charges to the whole production, Bourne is elevating the maleness of the dancer and specifically the interaction between males as not only a dance component

but also using it as a sexually charged component, widening the possibilities that it brings to the audience.

Ultimately it does not even matter whether it was a gay or straight ballet in its retelling. What is important in the context of the male gaze and visual culture is that there is something different occurring in the way that the gaze is developing and being used. No longer is the viewer necessarily a heterosexual male and no longer is the viewing experience centered and controlled by that philosophy. It could now be anyone who is either gender fluid or non-conforming and so the principles of Mulvey's theory are thrown up into the air. A new kind of gaze is operating here, a gender fluid non-conforming gaze, from the people who attended the show willingly, and a get me out of here gaze, from the people who were dragged along unwillingly by their partners and who are unwilling to allow their somewhat fixed gazes to evolve.

The second important piece of visual culture to reflect on in this development of the male gaze is the 2005 motion picture *Brokeback Mountain*.<sup>26</sup> Directed by Ang Lee and adapted from a short story by Annie Proulx, the film tells the tale of two men, Jack and Ennis over a twenty-year period in the American west. The story tracks their relationship together, sexually and emotionally, together with the relationships that they have with others, while at the same time weaving in

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<sup>26</sup> *Brokeback Mountain*, directed by A Lee, 2005.

the background of the American West, both figuratively from the landscape and socially and culturally through their familial relationships and work lives. The motion picture, a critical and financial success, was arguably one of the first mainstream movies to successfully subvert and twist the traditional view of the heteronormative male gaze into something completely different. It also stands as another milestone in the representation of gay men in mainstream visual culture and photography. Notably different from previous Hollywood displays of gay men, such as 1969's "Midnight Cowboy", which presented the sexually confused Joe Buck, played by John Voight, as a sad, lonely, sex-fueled, hustler, one of Hollywood's tropes for dealing with homosexuality, Brokeback Mountain deals with the issue of gay men, and specifically cowboys, in a different and more accessible way.<sup>27</sup>

The film offers a great example of what I will refer to as the "*unqueer*" representation of gay men. This is not meant at all as a pejorative classification, and I use this term as openly proud, queer author. The term refers to the characters that the actors were playing: they were portrayed as ordinary people who could 'pass' as straight men in their everyday lives, and indeed did. Whether or not they should have to 'pass' is not the question for this discussion. What is relevant here, both in the context of the male gaze, visual culture (and queer

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<sup>27</sup> *Midnight Cowboy*, directed by John Schlesinger, 1969.

cinema), and photography is that the male characters of Jack and Ennis were eroticized as untouchable sex objects as well as being presented as unqueer men. For gay men, they were the ultimate desire; they seemed to (mostly) have it all in terms of sexual desire, acceptance in terms of "passing", and family lives. For women, they were everything that they could not have while looking like everything that they may have wanted. For straight men, they represented something that they either did not understand, resonated with a part of them that they could not (or would not) touch, or hated because it threatened them in some way.

Next, let us look at how the audience for this movie changes the male gaze from its traditional base as defined by Mulvey. In Mulvey's original theory, she argues that movie making is typically focused from a male perspective and a patriarchal point of view. As I have already mentioned, the viewer is assumed to also be heterosexual in respect to the male gaze. Just as in our example of the retelling of Swan Lake, *Brokeback Mountain* introduces new things into the mix. In his article "Queer Persona and the Gay Gaze in *Brokeback Mountain*: Story and Film" Clifton Snider, discusses that the gaze is dual, in this instance, between heterosexual women and homosexual men.<sup>28</sup> The author writes about how

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<sup>28</sup> C Snider, "Queer persona and the gay gaze in *Brokeback Mountain*: Story and film," *Psychological Perspectives*, 2008: 54-69.

Brokeback Mountain "caused a collective response from gay men that had not been witnessed before," possibly because of this readdressing of the traditional male gaze.<sup>29</sup> But what made it so different? The first and most obvious difference is that the photography and storytelling in this motion picture brought the issue of gay male love and same sex attraction directly onto the screen in a very visual way, but the less obvious difference is that it was being done in a way that had not been done before - in a heterosexual shrouded way.

The normative male gaze asks us to accept that what we are looking at is for the heterosexual man's pleasure and utility. In this movie, we see what could be considered the usual trappings of heterosexuality: rugged, male figures, towering landscapes, rodeo riders, and cowboys. Yet, the gaze that is provided to us is sexually geared towards one man loving another. In the midst of all of this heterosexuality, the male sex that is portrayed is homosexual. There is always a possibility that any heterosexual man in the audience watching is lulled into a false sense of security and caught unawares by Jack and Ennis kissing. This is, of course, assuming that either they forgot what the movie was about (or did not know in the first place). Still, the fact remains that the scenes that Lee has constructed are ruggedly heterosexual in their context. This provides a stark visual contrast to the emotional presentation of the love that is conveyed

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<sup>29</sup> (Snider 2008, 65)

between the two men that goes much further than your average 'bromance' movie.

So what, if anything, does this do to the gaze, and what does it show us? It shows us that certainly from a film making perspective (and for performing arts in general), that the traditional theory of the male gaze that Mulvey presented in 1975 does not necessarily map to today's more open and adapted acceptance of non-normative sexualities and gender expressions. We even have the development of what I will call the "unqueer gaze", a gaze that writers, artists, and others could use that allows them to communicate in safe ways to gay and non-normative audiences, while maintaining a somewhat normative visual approach. While it may seem odd to refer to a theory as recent as 1975 as the traditional theory, this evolution is, perhaps, as it should be. The acceptance of such pieces like Bourne's Swan Lake would likely have been much different in 1975 from that of 1996. Irrespective of whether his telling of Swan Lake is gay or not, the acceptance of such blatant male on male eroticism in visual media was at a far different position of tolerance in 1996 to 1975. To understand this difference, one only has to examine the issues that revolved around the artist Robert Mapplethorpe to get a glimpse into how far this issue has evolved.

Robert Mapplethorpe was originally intending to be a graphic designer. He studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and then, after discovering photography



as his preferred medium, became one of the most famous, and perhaps notorious, photographer of the male figure of the 1970s and 1980s. He was a portrait (self and others), flower, and statuary photographer, amongst other things, in his (short) career, but in the context of this thesis what is important is the work he did in photographing the nude, both male and female.

Mapplethorpe did not shy away from explicit imagery in his photography. With a bold use of contrast and tone, and later color, he chose his subjects to portray the world as he saw it. He wanted to record the world and then, as he said, "One must ease the public into it – that's an art in itself".<sup>30</sup> With that, he set out to record a catalogue of images, particularly of men, that would shake up the landscape of figure photography in the 1980s like no other artist had done with subject matter like this before. He photographed himself in sexual positions, other men in sexual positions (on their own and with other men), he photographed them plainly naked for the camera, and he photographed them engaged in sadomasochistic acts. He pulled no punches in what he showed the world with his camera regarding male sexuality. The biggest punch of all, though, was that he himself was gay and so were most of his male models.

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<sup>30</sup> J P Caponigro, *22 quotes by photographer Robert Mapplethorpe*, November 5, 2013, <http://www.johnpaulcaponigro.com/blog/12366/22-quotes-by-photographer-robert-mapplethorpe/>.

Why is that so important in a visual culture discussion about the male gaze and its evolution? It is important because unlike the *un queer* representations that we have dealt with in the previous examples, this was queer representation with a capital Q and clearly identifiable as gay. There could be no ambiguity in a self-portrait of a man with a bullwhip stuck in his anus or of a man hanging upside down, bound by his feet, while his lover gently holds his crotch. The previous examples deal with a change in the male gaze that is not directly about sex, or at least not in the stunningly visual sense that Mapplethorpe's work was. When Mapplethorpe's work arrived in galleries, it caused a stir for many reasons, but as Beth Eck in her article "Men are Much Harder: Gendered Viewing of Nude Images" from 2003 stated, female nude images are prevalent in society and "the opposite is true of male nudes".<sup>31</sup> Eck also cites Susan Bordo and her 1999 book "The Male Body" in stating that "For many men, both gay and straight, to be so passively dependent on the gaze of another person for one's sense of self-worth is incompatible with being a real man".<sup>32</sup> This means that when visual culture takes a trip into the realm of male nude focused art, all bets are off and the world gets turned upside down very quickly. Why? Because so much of art is still controlled from a male dominated, heterosexual perspective. If that art also

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<sup>31</sup> B A Eck, "Men are much harder: Gendered viewing of nude images," *Gender and Society*, 2003: 691-710.

<sup>32</sup> S Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux., 1999).

starts to deal with sex and sexual acts, then it becomes even messier. Sex is always political, primarily because it is about power. When the sex is non-normative, or in this case, homosex, people get upset even faster, as was the case with Mapplethorpe's work.

To more clearly understand why the public reaction to Mapplethorpe's work was perhaps so visceral, let us look at how the traditional male gaze functions when looking at artwork that subverts it. In her 2003 article and associated study, Beth Eck an Associate Professor of Sociology at James Madison University showed groups of men and women a selection of nude images of men and women.<sup>33</sup> These images were broken down into four main categories: art, informational (medical), pornographic, and advertising. She recorded the responses of each person to the images and analyzed the data, language, and vocabulary that they used. Interestingly, some of the images that were shown to the participants were Mapplethorpe pieces. She found that when viewing images of women, men and women responded very differently, but generally in line with Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. Men respond to the nude female image by reaffirming their status as men through their power position to "encounter and pass judgement on the female form."<sup>34</sup> Women responded in a

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<sup>33</sup> (Eck 2003)

<sup>34</sup> (Eck 2003, 697)

similarly evaluative way, which is, as Mulvey offers, through the way that males evaluate women. However, as Eck states, they are also evaluating their own bodies at the same time.

Eck points out that things become far more complex when men view images of male nudity, with most men either “implicitly distancing themselves from homosexuality” (even if the images are not homosexual in context) and some who “reactively construct their heterosexuality through a disavowal of interest in male nudes”.<sup>35</sup> The women in Eck’s study also find it difficult to talk about the images of naked men that they were shown, although less so than the men.

So how does this manifest itself with the reception to Robert Mapplethorpe’s work? His work caused such a public outcry that some museums that had already committed to exhibiting the work refused to show it, and others who did, notably the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, became embroiled in an obscenity lawsuit that dragged on for months. This was even after Mapplethorpe’s own death from AIDS. The wrangling would also have ramifications in the art funding world with implications for the National Endowment of the Arts and their funding process. Even before his death, his work was the subject of much infamy and media attention because of the subject matter and we can now see, from our analysis of how the original theory of the

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<sup>35</sup> (Eck 2003, 702)

male gaze works, some of the reasons why. Asking a predominantly heterosexual male political ordered world, and a predominantly heterosexual male ordered art world to look fondly on such works was a stretch from not just an aesthetic perspective, but it also challenged everything that people had been conditioned to expect in their viewing of artwork. His work did, however, expand the possibilities for continued exploration of these themes by other artists and ultimately led the way for the ongoing development of a different type of gaze that would accept works like Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake over seven years later.

## CHAPTER 2. RE-EROTICIZING THE MALE BODY: ADVERTISING, "GAY-VAGUE" AND KISSING TO BE CLEVER.

In the previous chapter, I began to explore how Mulvey's traditional notion of the Male Gaze has undergone a significant shift away from a focus on the objectification of women through images meant to appeal primarily to a male heterosexual audience. Now, instead, I contend that the gaze itself has broadened to include a multiplicity of objectified patterns even as the social contexts have become more fluid and complex. This section continues to explore the complexities of the gaze through photography and visual culture.

Advertising as a discipline is always developing. It is also something that is a great marker and reflector of what is happening in the world around us when it comes to examining visual culture. Most of us will, at some point, have laughed at some old advert or commercial that we have seen describing a product, services, or concept that today seems ridiculously out of date. A glance back through the archives of automobile ads reveals much just from looking at the imagery, without even resorting to the text - men, cigars, pipes, family positioning, etc. So many of these symbols are indicative of the social values that were prevalent at the time the ad was created. Promotional materials for household appliances and, in particular, cleaning products, can bring gender divides and roles to the forefront of any discussion regarding gender identity or

sexuality. The male gaze (along with rampant sexism) seemed to have been in place in advertising long before Mulvey ever commented.

But in the context of the evolving gazes, how does advertising, and specifically the body, fit in? In his article on the "Gay Male Gaze", Mitchell J Wood states that "gay men report the highest level of body dissatisfaction".<sup>36</sup> There can be no doubt that this is something that has been picked up on by advertisers and marketeers over time and has been used to influence campaigns. One look at adverts for companies who run gay cruises will show the number of muscled hunks and beauties who are allegedly populating those boats. Presumably the advertisers' idea is that it will directly attract some people to book passage, while motivating others to work out more so that they feel that they can go. But Wood also points out that straight women have high levels of body dissatisfaction too. It offers up the idea that this may be because both groups are attempting to be sexually attractive to men. How does this play into the fact that male body appears to have undergone a change in the way it is used in advertising over the last few decades? The recognition of the Pink Pound or Dollar in terms of spending may be one factor, as is the continuing financial

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<sup>36</sup> M J Wood, "The gay male gaze: Body image disturbance and gender oppression among gay men," in *Gay Men Living with Chronic Illnesses and Disabilities: From Crisis to Crossroads*, 43-62 (New York, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2008).

independence of women. But is it just related to gay men and heterosexual women?

I have already touched on the issue of the *unqueer* in the discussion of Brokeback Mountain. But, the *unqueer* gaze can also be found in advertising too. Over the last few decades there has been a curious phenomenon of highly charged, erotic (some subtle and some not) photographs of men that have been used to sell items of clothing and other products. Calvin Klein, Jockey, Gucci, Structure, Abercrombie and Fitch, American Eagle, and other outlets have all produced images that feature semi-naked men adorned in the latest fashions or miming the act of wafting the latest fragrance toward us. These adverts, when using males, feature mostly hairless, chiseled, young men, embodying the hunky buff boy we referred to earlier. Whether they are gazing out at the viewer or gazing at each other, the intent is clear - buy or use our product and you will be like us. It is an age-old marketing method that has stood the test of time, but now it comes with a twist. The casual flick of a man's nipple by the other man in an Abercrombie and Fitch advert invites the viewer to not only investigate the clothing on offer, but also to cogitate on the sexuality of the models displayed.

The male body is no stranger to being portrayed in art though it has often moved between a status of revered and rejected. Art history is littered with examples of the male body being glorified and beautified and outside of the art



world one only has to look at sports to find the male body as thing of worship, albeit often in a non-sexual way. It is an interesting paradox that it becomes safe for a male to gaze upon another male in a pair of Speedo swimming trunks as he prepares to break a world record, but not necessarily while he models them provocatively in a photograph in a magazine. So, this return to visual adulation is not new. However, the twist of sexuality that is brought with it, is. This is not Mapplethorpe's portrayal of queer. Nor, in the fewer examples where women's bodies are employed in this manner, are these the standard attempts at turning lesbianism into a heterosexual male fantasy. Yes, these images do, in a way, give the passing consumer the opportunity to see something that once would have been hidden away behind the wrapper of a top-shelf magazine. But, that would imply that these are intended to be presented as pornographic or adult. They are not, since they are to be found in the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, *Men's Health*, *Attitude*, and other "lifestyle" publications. This changing use of the body and sexuality and advertising marks a new branch in the *un queer* use of imagery, and in certain cases also plays into the whole 'kissing to be clever' phenomena. A phrase often used by the British pop singer Boy George, it refers to straight boys/men who kiss other boys/men to enhance their own appeal or to make themselves seem more adventurous and attractive to others. What is particularly new in this use of the body, whether male or female, is that these

men and women do not look like the typical gay or lesbian person that the media has previously used in their portrayals. Gone are the slightly fey men, or, on the other extreme, the hyper masculine male. Similarly, blurred are the traditional lines of lesbian representations of masculine and femme. Instead they have been replaced with masculine, feminine, powerful, confident, and privileged people. These people are, in the eyes of the advertising executive, everything that you always wanted to be. Even when they are fully clothed, as in the 201x Ray Ban "Never Hide" adverts, the messaging is strong and powerful. Clearly, in the light of research such as Wood's, this presents as an appealing prospect.

But such adverts that feature "Gay Vague" characters, show that visual culture and the male gaze have moved far beyond traditional representations of sexuality and gender to a much wider and fluid world than we have seen before. In the context of Mulvey's gaze, what is the wider implication here? Who are the images that are being used aimed at? If they are being aimed at gay men and lesbians, then they are perhaps in line with the body image discussion. If we apply original Mulvian principles here, then we are left with a conundrum; are these really being targeted at, or intended to be viewed from, the perspective of the heterosexual male? That brings 'kissing to be clever' sharply to the forefront, if so, and makes the male heterosexual the plaything of the advertiser. It allows

them to sell a product through glamorous imagery, but also through the proposition of sexual experimentation.

Bordo states in her book "The Male Body" that the male in a Calvin Klein ad that initially made her go weak at the knees, was not staring "at the viewer challengingly, belligerently, as do so many other models in other ads for male underwear."<sup>37</sup> She states that "He offers himself non-aggressively to the gaze of another."<sup>38</sup> This, as we have just indicated, immediately comes into conflict with our telling of the traditional male gaze. If everything is supposed to be about how the heterosexual male sees the world, and if everything is oriented toward the heterosexual male gaze, we must ask what does the look that this model is giving the supposedly heterosexual man mean? If he is indeed offering himself to the viewer, to whom is he offering himself becomes the question. This is the subtle re-engineering that provides the marketing frisson that is perhaps sought.

Of course, there is always the simpler explanation that the gaze is being developed in different areas and that the models are being chosen to target different groups and segments. I am not suggesting that advertisers are attempting to turn the whole world bisexual, despite the arrival of bisexual and gender-free fragrances such as the CK line. After all, why shouldn't gay men,

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<sup>37</sup> S Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux., 1999).

<sup>38</sup> (Bordo 1999, 171)

lesbians, and bisexual viewers be treated to models gazing out at them from the pages of clothing and fashion magazine? We have come a long way from the days of the Sears catalogues being the only place where adolescents could catch glimpses of people in underwear and advertisers have certainly realized this. This catering to, and developing of, other gazes is an intrinsic part of how visual culture reflects all aspects of our world. As attitudes toward sexuality and gender have evolved, and so too have the visual representations in all forms of the creative arts.

### CHAPTER 3. LOVE FOR SALE: TITS AND ASS WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE

The role of the body and its position in society, art, culture, and media has always been controlled by many forces. We see this indicated throughout history and we can see that this has ebbed and flowed with a change in the status of different kinds of male bodies. Kadir and Tidy point out that how bodies are viewed has always been the product of "historically contingent power/knowledge struggles".<sup>39</sup> They deftly point out that "gender, sex, and sexuality are all constructed through discourses" and that "these constructions are unstable and historically conditioned".<sup>40</sup> Central to Foucault's notion of the *docile body*, this can also apply to how the gaze functions and indeed evolves, both passively and actively <sup>41</sup>.

Kadir and Tidy use the example of the television show "How to Look Good Naked" in their example of how some of these forces exist and can be manipulated (for good and bad) to sway people's perceptions of the male body, and thus manage the way that the gaze functions. <sup>42</sup> <sup>43</sup> Although, as they point

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<sup>39</sup> Shaira Kadir and Joanna Tidy, "GAYS, GAZE AND AUNTY GOK: The disciplining of gender and sexuality in How to Look Good Naked," *Feminist Media Studies*, 2013: 177-191.

<sup>40</sup> (Kadir and Tidy 2013, 179)

<sup>41</sup> (Kadir and Tidy 2013, 180)

<sup>42</sup> "How to look good naked" is a British Television show from 2006 (that also aired in the US in 2008) that encouraged women (and men) to review their body in different circumstances to boost their body self-esteem.

<sup>43</sup> (Kadir and Tidy 2013, 180)

out, the show is primarily focused on helping women manage the way that they look and their comfort level with their body image, the show took a detour in one episode and had a male participant called Simon. Simon, along with all the other previous participants, was unhappy with how he looked and presented for various reasons (that are out of the scope of this writing) and wanted to change what he felt was his undesirable presentation. Simon identified as a heterosexual male. By following a similar pattern to that which was followed with his female participants, the show host, Gok, went through a process of stripping Simon down (literally and metaphorically) and then re-building him up to a stage where he supposedly became comfortable with his appearance.

Simon was an interesting choice for the participant in this show. As someone who was thin and uncomfortable in his body due to medical issues, he used to wear multiple layers of t-shirts to bulk his body up. Gok removed these layers, chiding him for the process, but then later in the program "provided Simon with a power vest, an acceptable replacement for the layers of t-shirts designed to accentuate Simon's existing musculature".<sup>44</sup> While women in the show were being apparently educated to accept their body types, Simon was being taught to conform to a predefined form of visual maleness that is being praised above another in the same way that we are used to seeing with female bodies.

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<sup>44</sup> (Kadir and Tidy 2013, 186)

This raises two important issues. First, we have the question of Simon being maneuvered into a position where he is being told that to be desirable or comfortable in the world, he needs to forsake the skinny look for the muscled, or more defined look. Even if we take the skinny versus muscles out of the equation, he is being told that there is a visual framework that he needs to adhere to in order to achieve happiness or acceptance. Second, this is a television program that is primarily geared towards women and caters (for better or worse) to how women perceive themselves visually in a patriarchal society. By introducing Simon into the mix, we see the producers of the program change the gaze of the program. Now, a show that is watched mainly by women, has a male character to judge. Simon is judging himself by male standards (and those that he perceives are the standards of the women he wants to catch), but to the women he has become a visual curiosity for them to watch. In the same way that men judge women, women now get to mold, criticize, and question a man.

Disturbingly, this is all done, as Kadir and Tidy infer, under the moderation of an openly gay man. It is a time-honored tradition to place gay men into safe compartments on television and the media in general, so as to allow the public to be able to comfortably deal with them (the camp man, the drag queen, the confirmed bachelor, etc.). By having Gok play the role of manipulator in this show in a similar way to how it was done on "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," the use

of non-normative sexualities to change how the gaze functions becomes less threatening.<sup>45</sup>

This manipulation and development of the gaze on television programs takes many forms and can appear to be subtle, benign, or overt. In media, generally, it has been occurring for several years, but with the current popularity of reality TV, together with the continuing breakdown of gender and sexuality boundaries, it appears to have given new license to program makers, whether they take advantage of it intentionally or not. Although reality TV is not a new spectacle, with the genre having first appeared in the early 1970s with "An American Family" in the United States and "The Family" in Great Britain, reality television in recent years has focused more on issues that lend themselves to around gender, sexuality, and "lifestyle".<sup>46 47</sup> One program that merits discussion here is "The Bachelor/Bachelorette." As programs that have captured the attention of millions of viewers worldwide in their different franchises (for better or worse), they provide a fascinating insight into how the gaze has shifted and developed in a mass culture medium since the turn of the century.

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<sup>45</sup> "Queer eye for the Straight Guy" is a television show in the United States from 2003 where a group of gay men gave advice to straight men on fashion, interior design, style, and other things.

<sup>46</sup> "An American Family" was a US television program from 1971 that followed the life of the Loud Family over a number of episodes.

<sup>47</sup> "The Family" was a British television program from 1973 that followed the life of the Wilkins family over a number of episodes.



These shows revolve around the (supposedly) simple premise of finding love. On "The Bachelor," a single man is presented with (or to, depending on your perspective) a selection of women who he interacts with, interviews, eats dinner with, and does various other things with, in an attempt to find the one that he will ultimately fall in love with and marry. "The Bachelorette" is the same, but with a single female interacting with men. Over a series of weeks, contestants for the hand in marriage are eliminated by the Bachelor/Bachelorette, until finally it is revealed who they have fallen in love with and will propose to. The show is full of laughter, competitiveness, tears, fighting, arguments, drama, and, very importantly, beautiful, sexy people. The success of these marriages (where a proposal is made and accepted) is variable. Wikipedia maintains a running scoreboard of the relationship states of the winners. The results speak for themselves; marriage by TV show does not have a wonderful record of accomplishment.

These shows present many areas for discussion. On the surface they appear to be very normative, but a deeper dive reveals that there is much more to explore, including the very real possibility that the producers of these shows deliberately employ the "unqueer gaze" that I discuss in an earlier section. In a piece that is about the gaze, how it changes, develops, and is manipulated, there are a few areas here that are of specific interest. First, and perhaps most

importantly, is the fact that there are two versions of this program. One which has a male as the epicenter and one which has a female. This could, at first thought, indicate that makers of the show are intending to cater equally to male and female viewers. But is it easy to say that "The Bachelor" is for straight, female television viewers and that "The Bachelorette" is for straight, male television viewers? Perhaps not. So, who is watching these programs? Audience data is difficult to come by unless you are a TV insider or a subscriber to Neilson data reports. Audience data that is broken down by sex or gender is even more difficult to obtain for the outsider. But it is probably not too wild to assume that there are a portion of viewers who are watching these shows from a different assumption than the obvious opposite sex position. Certainly, I myself have watched a few episodes from the opposite "normative" intention of the show and in discussing with friends I know that I am not the only one who has done so. However, outside of such non-data driven, circumstantial "chit-chat" based evidence, how can we further this assumption? By taking a quick detour to the world of pornography and statistics. Pornhub, the world's largest online pornography service, compiles a report at the end of every year that examines the demographics, habits, searches, and peccadillos of its users, pulled from the massive amounts of data it collects each day. It reveals a fascinating insight into the lives of people who use the website and what they look for. While most of

the specific data is not really directly relevant to this discussion, some high-level data points can be used to illuminate the fact that people indeed do not operate within the strict gender or sex-based lines that we may be traditionally accustomed to.

The main example of this is in the section of their 2016 insights reports that breaks down the most viewed categories by gender.<sup>48</sup> Of note, the category of "Gay" is missing from both the women and male section. However, the categories of "Lesbian" and "Big Dick" are present in both categories. It is also reasonable to surmise from the inclusion of separate categories for "Gay" and "Lesbian" that "Gay" refers loosely to men having sex with other men and "Lesbian" to women having sex with other women. From this, it is reasonable to assume that their users do not view Pornhub as a major repository for gay porn, as such. However, users of both sexes do use Pornhub to search for, and to presumably to view images, of both the same sex and the opposite sex, while not specifically choosing to identify that as gay. The wider implications of that may be explored in a different essay, but for now it does allow us to postulate that the people consuming other visual media may also be watching and consuming it for different reasons than traditional binary definitions would have us believe.

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<sup>48</sup> Pornhub, *2016 Year In Review*, 2016, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2016-year-in-review>.

So how does all of that relate to TV programs like “The Bachelor/rette” and the gaze that it is either intended for or watched by? It will not have gone unnoticed by anyone who has watched either of these shows that the contestants are all generally handsome and successful people. This kind of reality TV has no room for the people who are not desirable. After all, it is not just the Bachelor or Bachelorette who needs visual stimulation in these programs; so does the viewing audience, and the makers of the program are likely well aware that the majority of their viewers want to watch good-looking contestants. Ugly and normal people do not generate advertising dollars, as has been discussed in other areas of this paper. Without doubt we can assume that many people watching “The Bachelor” are heterosexual women, but it is also safe to assume that there may well be a significant amount of heterosexual men watching it too, either because they want to, because they are watching it with their female partners, or because, according to the data from PornHub and the like, they are engaging some visual fantasy that revolves around lots of women and perhaps the inclusion of one man. The same is also most likely true for “The Bachelorette” as well. An audience is likely made up of heterosexual and bisexual women, together with heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual men, based upon data in the PornHub reports and others, such as this from the search site

PornMD, cited in an article from London's Daily Telegraph newspaper (that said that "in Kentucky, the most popular search term was "Free gay porn".<sup>49</sup>

So, who is in control of the gaze in this instance? Is this something that is controlled by the makers of the program? Are they deliberately creating a show that caters to mankind's seemingly expanding and extending sexuality or is this just a lucky evolution of the gaze that is benefitting the producers? It is unlikely that we will ever actually know, as the groups identified here would probably not answer direct survey questions on such a personal topic. But it is interesting to ponder what may be going through the minds of the people watching these reality shows in the light of the visual sexual proclivity data that is available.

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<sup>49</sup> The Daily Telegraph, *The world's top porn search terms revealed*, March 13, 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/internet/9927535/The-worlds-top-porn-search-terms-revealed.html> (accessed 06 11, 2016).

#### CHAPTER 4. LESBIAN CHIC AND THE SHIFTING GAZE

The term *lesbian chic* as a signifier of various social phenomena has had a circuitous—and at times ironic—evolution. According to Merryn Johns, *lesbian chic* was originally coined in the early 1990s “to describe the sudden emergence of fashion-conscious gay girls who saw style not as patriarchal oppression but as a tool for empowerment”<sup>50</sup>. As such, it represented a post-feminist response to the second-wave feminism of the 1970s and 1980s that had viewed feminism as a collective response in opposition to the patriarchal dominance of society. Now lesbians had the chance to ‘glam it up’ and to socialize with other women, not because men wanted them to, but rather as self-directed enablement of their own desires. Nowhere was this given greater expression than at the Café Tabac, a fashionable bar in the East Village in New York that created a space on Sundays for glamorous, well-dressed lesbians, activists, and straight celebrities, including—amongst others—Madonna and Naomi Campbell.

It was not long, however, before this phenomenon would be co-opted by the dominant, heteronormative culture for its own pleasures and desires. What was, at its inception, a post-feminist political and non-normative expression that

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<sup>50</sup> M Johns, *The birthplace of lesbian chic. Curve.*, September 24, 2014, <http://www.curvemag.com/Culture/The-Birthplace-of-Lesbian-Chic-169/> .

resisted and rejected male oppression, became instead an entirely different phenomenon that was appropriated by the dominant culture and subjected to male desire and to the male gaze. *Lesbian chic* became a tool of the patriarchy to titillate men and to make money<sup>51</sup>. Advertising and marketing quickly became an area where *Lesbian Chic* found fertile ground.

The process of sexuality based cultural appropriation is beyond the scope of this chapter and thesis. What is important is that in its transition from an authentic performance of lesbian desire, *lesbian chic* becomes transformed into a kind of “faux lesbianism” devoid of its original intent to transgress gender and sexual norms.<sup>52</sup> It has undergone, in the words of Ella Fegitz, a “domestication of the political and commodification of resistance”.<sup>53</sup> In this popularization of woman-on-woman sexuality intended for the male gaze, representations of the actual lesbian body are rendered irrelevant and are replaced by this pseudo-lesbianism that is constructed for other reasons and intents.

As Fegitz points out in her article “Consuming the Lesbian Body,” “the commodification of homosexuality has participated in constructing queer identity as the most stylish of lifestyles on sale, the “hot lesbian” (Gill, 2008), the

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<sup>51</sup> J Bindel, *The Daily Mail*, March 6, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2575270>.

<sup>52</sup> (Bindel 2014)

<sup>53</sup> E Fegitz, “Consuming the lesbian body: Post-feminist heteroflexible subjectivities in *Sex and the City* and *The L Word*,” in *Consumerism on TV: Popular media from the 1950s to the present*, 89-108 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

“lipstick lesbian” or the “femme lesbian” becoming representative of lesbianism as a whole”.<sup>54</sup>

This erasure of the actual lesbian body creates the space for the insertion of idealized female bodies that appeal to the imagined (or manufactured) male audience. We also know that the media falls short on inclusivity and honesty when it comes to portraying the actual lives of women.<sup>55</sup> As we’ve seen with the 2016 USA Presidential election, typical media representation tends to discredit powerful women, while lesbian and queer women are treated to their own special version of invisibility or denigration. Whereas lesbian and bisexual characters are showing up more often, especially in cable produced shows where bi-sexuality in particular has a strong presence (again, perhaps due to normative male desires), this non-heteronormative sexuality tends to follow a hetero-standard. Lesbians on shows like the “L-Word” (2004-2009) could mostly pass as straight.<sup>56</sup> They are stylish and their community self-contained, with little room for demonstrably butch or transgressive characters. To be viable, the show needed to capture a hetero audience and the sex needed to appeal to the male gaze. Nevertheless, Lesbians generally loved the show, often gathering in

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<sup>54</sup> (Fegitz 2016, 89)

<sup>55</sup> R Randazzo, K Farmer and S Lamb, “Queer women’s perspectives on sexualization of women in media,” *Journal of Bisexuality*, 2015: 99-129.

<sup>56</sup> “The L-Word” is a US television show that depicted the fictional lives of a group of lesbians living in Los Angeles.



watching parties, desperate to see their community represented, even if certain aspects reinforced patriarchal stereotypes or created problematic scenarios purely for entertainment value.

At the other end of the scale sit shows such as the current affairs/chat show format based "Ellen DeGeneres Show". DeGeneres, a high-profile lesbian and fierce campaigner for equality and lesbian rights, famously came out to the world on her own comedy show "Ellen" and on the "Oprah Winfrey Show". While demonstrably queer, so therefore certainly not sitting in the "unqueer gaze" space, DeGeneres sits in her own unique space that represents Lesbian identity as acceptable, non-confrontational (unless crossed), and safe. While this does not erase the Lesbian body in the same way as lesbian chic portrayals may, it may have the effect of further diluting the presentation of Lesbianism in the media.

Lesbian photographer Kelli Connell's project "*Double Life*", literally reflects upon this lack of diversity in lesbian representation.<sup>57</sup> Her photographs of two women experiencing moments in a relationship, are actually one woman duplicated through photographic manipulation – she is literally making love to herself. Whereas the project is focused on self within a relationship, it does

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<sup>57</sup> M Maloney, *Kelli Connell and the intimate other*, March 7, 2013, <http://www.inthein-between.com/kelli-connell/>.

reiterate what many projects from contemporary lesbian and gay photographers attempt to do – assimilate for a heteronormative audience. One can look at Connell’s work and see a direct link between Laura Letinsky’s *Venus Inferred* photographs of lovers in their intimate spaces.<sup>58</sup> Letinsky’s tableaux depict a rather normalized version of sexual relationships, as do Connell’s, despite the digital, self-reflective twist. This trend towards an acceptance of a normalized version of same-sex relationships mirrors the gay marriage rights efforts of the past two decades. Advocates turned the conversation away from gay marriage as a civil right and towards the sharing of narrative stories that promote the sameness, rather than difference in gayness. The slogan *Love is Love* equates gay love with any other kind of love, reiterating that ‘we are more like you, than unlike you.’

This is a far cry from the photographic investigations of Mapplethorpe and the early work of Cathy Opie.<sup>59</sup> Both artists presented raw, extreme images that challenged a heteronormative lifestyle. Like Mapplethorpe, Opie pushed boundaries, rising to prominence by showing a community, in her case leather dykes, that had little visibility in the dominant culture. Her vivid portraits of this community looked back at the viewer with defiance and self-containment. A

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<sup>58</sup> K McGuire, *Laura Letinsky : Venus Inferred*, October 11, 2012, <http://pressblog.uchicago.edu/2012/10/11/laura-letinsky-venus-inferred.html>.

<sup>59</sup> B Salisbury, *Catherine Opie: "Leather dyke" artist no more*, September 2006, <http://www.fnewsmagazine.com/2006-oct/catherine-opie.php>.

demarcation also shows in her work – a departure from the celebration of difference, to portraits of Lesbian family life in her series “Domestic” that celebrate the normalization of the Lesbian family. Although Opie still maintains her right to be a pervert, this work might suggest a shift in representation – from gayness as a societal challenge to normalizing same-sex relationships, mirroring the similar transformation of the broader gay and lesbian communities for the sake of securing marriage rights.

## CHAPTER 5. LOOK AT ME, DON'T STARE – SCREAMING FOR ATTENTION IN A SOCIAL MEDIA WORLD

Mankind is always evolving in the way it communicates ideas. In the world of visual art, although some conventions have persisted for centuries, others are revisited and evaluated. Artists have developed new ways to put paint on canvas, photographers have shaped their art form to capture and tell stories in multiple ways, and film, media, and theatre artists evolve their ways of communicating with audiences on an almost daily basis. However, few forms of communication and expression have seen the rapid evolution and development as that of social media in the last decade. At times it appears that we have gone from an outwardly focused media to an almost totally inward focused media, with applications, websites, and broadcast platforms all screaming “me, me, me,” as people jockey for visibility in a world that is becoming more and more saturated with readily accessible platforms.

But while the growth of social media is a great topic for study, what is more interesting for us here is how, and if, social media has helped evolved the gaze. As it appears that we have become more obsessed with the visuality of the body, and importantly, our own bodies, has that had an impact on the evolution of the gaze in social media? Who is the body on social media now aimed at or controlled for? Is this exposure and parading of the body on social media porn,

voyeurism, narcissism, or all these things? How does the gaze function for the creators of these apps and platforms and for the users? These are all interesting questions that in fact tie not only to social media, but also to how other media platforms consequently continue to evolve and influence the gaze. To answer some of these questions, we will look at a few applications and platforms:

Instagram, YouTube, Tinder, Twitter, and Facebook.

Instagram is a platform that exists for the primary purpose of displaying photographs that users have taken. Developed to allow users to quickly upload to the internet pictures taken with their cellphones and to be seen by other connected users, the platform has also become a space for emerging and established artists to display their work, together with the ordinary person to display their latest meal or snaps from the beach. Instagram can therefore be broken down into categories that fall roughly along the traditional breakdowns of painting/photography: landscape, still life, portraiture, and architecture. For the purpose of this thesis, I am concerned mainly with Instagram's use as a platform for the human body or figure – something that today could, it seems, almost cut across categories in the post-modern world. A glance through an Instagram feed may reveal any number of images with the body present, whether it be a traditional image of a person (whatever that may mean), a selfie, or a more studied, and perhaps artistic composition. However, the central point

here is that Instagram feeds are, by and large, curated and somewhat controlled by the user. Instagram feeds may start off with a few suggestions, but as users add other users who produce work that they are interested in following or seeing, then the users feed adapts according to the services algorithms to show images that are deemed to be of visual interest to the feed or account owner. Users also curate their own feed by adding to it from other locations as well. At its simplest form, Instagram can be seen as a self-created magazine, art gallery, or picture book of thematically related images, driven by a few, machine driven, though human-initiated, core threads.

If we are concerned with images that contain just the body, what we have within Instagram is a device that starts off as a blank slate, but becomes a collection driven by the wishes and the direction of a user defined or selected gaze. Unlike traditional media, Instagram has no preconceived ideas or determination of gender issues for what you should or should not be viewing. If you begin to direct your account in one direction, Instagram algorithms do not appear to gender-correct you toward another, at least regarding images that are seen. If I, as gay male user, choose to follow people who photograph and display the male form, and, most importantly, interact with those images in some way, Instagram will continue to modify my feed to show content that it deems to follow that line. It will not suddenly present me with images that conform to a

“Mulvey-esque” viewpoint of the gaze; it will, instead, give me what I want, as the owner of my own individually determined gaze.

It would be great if we could say that writers of the algorithms that power Instagram had sat down and decided that they were going to deliberately return the control of the gaze to the viewer, but alas this is more likely to be the result of systematic programming and calculation than anything else. Giving people what they want is, after all, one way to maintain interest in your product and if you ignore the wishes of your users many will simply leave the platform. As can be seen with other instances on Instagram, if you happen to love and interact with a lot of images of road diggers, you will thusly end up with a feed that begins to skew toward showing more ‘road-diggerly’ things. The possibility of the gazes that could be created and manipulated are endless.

One important aspect of Instagram though must be commented on and that is the rise of the selfie. But this is a different kind of “selfie” than that which we referred to earlier when we talked about Robert Mapplethorpe’s work. By no means confined to Instagram alone, the selfie as a phenomenon has risen hugely in popularity and probably tracks closely to the continuing development of cameras in cellular telephones. As the ability to take quick photographs of ourselves has evolved, matured, and become more accessible, so has the ability to post these selfies to the internet and to see them. According to a study by

Rawhide in 2015, there are approximately 93 million selfies taken every day and “1,000 selfies are posted to Instagram every 10 seconds”.<sup>60</sup> Although self-portraiture is not a new thing, this devotion to displaying images of ourselves is. It is also fair to assume that when people take a selfie, they want to look their best. This paper does not look into the why’s and what’s of people’s posting habits, but it does look at the gaze. This millennial accessibility to millions of images of people who are preening for the camera, ready to be selected, liked and added, furthers our ability to develop and curate the gaze.

Things become a little less clear regarding advertising and the use of imaging on the Instagram platform. As stated in the Instagram help resources, “We want to show you ads from businesses that are interesting and relevant to you, and to do that, we use information about what you do on Instagram and Facebook (our parent company) and on third-party sites and apps you use.”<sup>61</sup> It’s reasonable to assume that as Instagram is an image driven platform that the adverts that are shown also would contain a high amount of visual imagery. How does the traditional viewpoint of the gaze begin to interact with such targeted forms of online advertising? This piece is not about the practice of online advertising per se, but as the user somewhat owns the control of their image feed on the

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<sup>60</sup> David Cohen, *Selfies, Narcissism and Social Media*, January 06, 2016, <http://www.adweek.com/digital/rawhide-selfies-infographic/> (accessed 02 21, 2018).

<sup>61</sup> Instagram, *Help Center*, 2018, <https://help.instagram.com/1415228085373580> (accessed 02 21, 2018).



platform, should the platform also account for such subtle shifts in gaze-based viewing in the display of imagery used in targeted advertising? As someone who has been involved in creating adverts on social media platforms for large corporations, there is not, to my knowledge (as of the time of writing), an ability to display different gender or different gazed based adverts that become selected based on your carefully curated feed or proclivities. To that end, the control of the gaze on a platform such as Instagram is still owned by the gender expectations, peccadillos, and predilections of those that ultimately control the content.

While examining social media-based gaze issues, it is impossible to ignore the meteoric rise of dating apps. This becomes particularly relevant with the rise of the selfie as discussed earlier in this section. The modern equivalent of small ads in swingers magazines or the personals ads in the local free newspapers and magazines, and with the selfie being the equivalent of the polaroid shots frequently used to avoid sending photographic film out to public developing services, these apps have become the de-facto first way for many people to seek out new friends, relationships, or simply a quick fuck. From "Tinder" to "OKCupid", "Grindr" to "Growlr", and "Her" to "Brenda", there are seemingly apps for every sexuality and gender identity.

But why are these apps important in a piece about visual culture and the gaze? Because, along with the rise of the selfie, the dating app shows us the importance of the visual image in our personal world, and, more specifically, how the image of the self has evolved to be used as almost a picture menu in dating circles as well as an effective way of curating your own visual calling card. For those who just wish to be voyeurs in the game of online people viewing, it also allows you to further control and customize your gaze in the way that traditional dating or sexual hookup avenues did or do not. Before, people of different sexuality and gender identities had to scan general ads of all persuasions looking for clue words such as bi, curious, ac/dc, etc. to find potentially interested matches or to visually gloss-over the pictures that they were not interested in by sex or gender. Now, users can directly pick the app of their choice and then curate their selections accordingly. No longer is a swinger's magazine or newspaper a platform with a directional gaze controlled by the publishing arm and skewed by the users; it is now a platform that is created with the intended opportunity to cater for multiple gazes and to allow further customization with multiple visual indulgences.

These same visual principles or *piques* also apply to a greater or lesser extent to the other platforms mentioned at the beginning of this section: YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. While YouTube is a video-driven platform and Facebook

and Twitter blend visual elements and text together, all these platforms allow an element of curation and selection in their operation and then use algorithms to further direct their ongoing automatic gaze development. All platforms now also support advertising in various forms and while they may not allow gaze specific modification of individual companies adverts according to either viewing habits, membership or profile indicators, or other activity-based flags, they can show selected individual adverts based on these flags and indicators. Thus, the control and development of the gaze is still owned, at least partially if not totally, by the user.

So, what is the outcome of this development of the selfie, social media, the surge of awareness and use of the human body in dating and hookup apps? Is this love of the body and ourselves porn, voyeurism, narcissism, or a blend of all of these things? How does the gaze function for the creators and the users of the apps? Is the gaze even relevant in this discussion anymore as we, and indeed the platform owners are now able to customize the gaze almost infinitely in these virtual worlds? These are some of the questions that still need to be explored and answered as these digital domains continue to develop with regard to the evolution of the gaze.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION: NEW FRONTIERS - TRANS IS THE NEW GAZE

The final segment of this exploration of visual culture and the evolution of the male gaze, looks at one of the most recent developments, the depiction of transgender people in our visual world. I have already discussed the many changes, twists, and turns that the gaze has taken since Mulvey published her first article and no discussion of this topic would be complete without exploring how transgender people are being portrayed. However, this discussion takes a different path from the previous ones in that it does not attempt to necessarily answer all the questions that it raises. Instead, I will raise some points for thought and discussion in this new(ish) area of visual culture. For some it may seem that transgender awareness is a new phenomenon, but, just as with all other sexual and gender variances we have touched on, being transgender is not new; it has just received a lot more visual publicity in recent years. Just like in the 1980s, when conservative media made it seem like you could pick up homosexuality as easily as a box of laundry detergent at the grocery store, the same things seems to be happening in the trans world.

Of course, representations of trans people in the media have existed for many years. One can point to the experiences and advocacy of Christine Jorgensen in the 1950s for some of the earliest media coverage of transgender

issues. Jorgensen, a former GI, underwent surgery and began advocating for trans people in North America and around the world through media pieces, interviews, books, and other opportunities. While she may not have been the first person to have undergone surgery, she was possibly the first to be so visible in visual culture after surgery, opening discourse through photography in magazines and newspapers, at the coffee table, the working man's club, and on the university lecture circuit. But even with people like Jorgensen openly talking about their experience and being photographed, the public has always had a much more difficult time with transgender issues than with other sexual and gender variances (with perhaps the exception of intersex). The conclusion of this thesis is not the place to explore the whys and wherefores of why that is, but it is appropriate to note that the representations of transgender people in visual culture have not always been helpful or friendly.

With a public that has had limited access to information about trans issues and even less opportunity to interact with trans people, it is not surprising that visual misinformation is so common. From the confusion in people's minds between transvestitism, drag kings and queens, transgender, and intersex, plus the often-unhelpful representation of trans people by the media, trans people have had a rough time of it. It is not necessarily completely unfair to blame the public for their lack of knowledge of transgender issues when little knowledge

has been available or has been actively prohibited from being given in our education systems over the years. But, by the same token, the public do not get a free pass in owning the responsibility to educate themselves either.

Thankfully, visibility of trans people in our world is changing. With that, comes an increasing shift in their overall representation in photography and visual culture too. After Christine Jorgensen's first brush with the media in the 1950s, trans people were subsequently "represented" by the glamorous and sexy Dr. Frankenfurter as the confusingly titled, "Sweet transvestite from transsexual Transylvania," adding further confusion to the public's ability to understand trans people.<sup>62</sup> Things got a little more edgy in the 1980s and 1990s with a wave of gender bending pop stars such as Marilyn, Marc Almond, Annie Lennox, and Boy George, but as cis gender singers carrying the gender bending tagline, while they may have done lots for sexual expression and the ability to feel more at home in one's own sexual and visual identity, they did far less to bring trans issues directly to the public.

The last decade, however, has witnessed an emergence of a different approach. We have photographers such as Jess T Dugan in the fine art world documenting the lives of trans people, TV shows such as "Orange is the New Black" (OITNB) featuring trans actors like Laverne Cox, and personalities such as

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<sup>62</sup> *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, directed by Jim Sharman, 1975.

Chaz Bono appearing on TV reality shows like "Dancing with the Stars." TV shows that are bundled with Amazon Prime shopping subscriptions are now featuring transgender story lines, such as "Transparent," the Golden Globe and Emmy award winning show, that discusses transgender issues within a family unit. At the same time models, such as Andreja Pejic, are beginning to have a significant impact on the photographic world and fashion industry by spearheading a more trans-inclusive environment. Caitlyn Jenner is now a household name and she has been the cause of much discussion around trans issues, on all sides of the arguments, and from all points of view.

So how does this evolving representation of trans people impact the male gaze? Through all the sections in this thesis I have talked about how the initial Mulvian theory of the gaze was about how everything oriented from the perspective of a heterosexual male. If the subject is now a trans person, either male or female, who is looking this time? When the TV shows that we have mentioned are being constructed, from whose perspective is the gaze that will watch them being built? These are more difficult questions than some of the others that I have looked at as we now begin to add issues of gender identity to the mix. These, by nature, are different issues to those of sexuality. Who is looking at Laverne Cox in OITNB (and why)? Indeed, are viewers looking at her or do we/should we deconstruct this gaze further to understand whether this is

more complex? It is tempting to think, and it would certainly be nice if it were true, that in the time since Mulvey first put forward her ideas that both viewers of visual culture and the visual arts, together with the makers, have evolved to a point where the gaze is less about objectification or a point of perspective. I have certainly posited that in other sections with the suggestion that there are now multiple gazes in play. If we should decide to deconstruct who is looking in the case of a trans gaze, then what would be the outcome? While both sexuality and gender conformity can be said to exist on a continuum, the application of this continuum to a trans gaze may certainly complicate the ownership of the view. It also raises the question of gender fluidity. Does the gaze or construction even have to be owned by one set of viewers?

This idea becomes even more abstracted and interesting when the subject becomes much more visual, as could be the case of fashion photography featuring the model Andreja Pejic. Fashion photography has always been highly gendered. Clothes themselves are nearly always gendered, with the exception of a few fashion trends, and with the exception of targeted campaigns such as the one by the fashion company "Tootal" with their "It looks better on a man" campaign, (which is, in itself, highly gendered and problematic), and the markets that fashion photography is aimed at is also highly segmented and defined. What does the introduction of trans models such as Andreja mean for the viewer,



the art director, fashion stylist, and the clothes designer? It is an enormous step for transgender visibility issues, inclusiveness in photography and media, and, it could be argued, also goes a long way toward continuing to disassemble centuries of gender stereotyping and conformity. For Andreja herself, it allows her to wear the clothes that she wishes, to freely express her gender identity in her career, and to exhibit her creative partnership with photographers and designers. For the designers and photographers, it gives them new avenues to explore and new directions to push their art. It also means that if they wish to, they can be free to explore any gaze that they wish.

As mentioned at the beginning of this conclusion, the discussion of transgender visibility here is intended as a starter for discussion, to stimulate thought, and to continue to move the ball forward. Clearly the world of photography and visual culture has seen large changes in this area in a short space of time. As media and public opinion continue to react, evolve, and accept transgender people into visual culture, this discussion can and should continue to develop. Of course, it should also be noted that not all transgender people are looking to or wishing to “pass” as their desired or displayed gender. Many of the examples given here are of people who are do “pass” as their preferred

gender; greater strides still need to be made in allowing people who do not wish to “pass” but still wish to freely express their preferred gender<sup>63</sup>.

## 6.1 Summary of main points

In summary, Mulvey’s original notion of the male gaze focused on the objectification of women through works that had been created to satisfy viewers who identified as male and heterosexual. Her theory of this traditional male gaze placed the heterosexual male in a position of power and the gaze was always placed upon the woman. This creates a relationship where there is always a power structure of sorts, and one that is inherently unequal. One is always in control and one is always submissive. However, it is important to note that in creating a visual work, there is always the person who is looking and the person or object who is looked upon.

Although Mulvey’s original concept was oriented toward cinema, this notion of the gaze applies equally to other media as well. All media has a creator, whether it be a singular force, a partnership, or a corporate entity. The principles identified by Mulvey in her original theory may well have been originally geared to one discipline, but it is clear that as all media has creators and consumers that

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<sup>63</sup> “Passing” is the process where a person succeeds in visually and culturally belonging to a gender grouping by means of visual cues, most often by means of dress and appearance.

those principles apply just as effectively to other media, whether they are new, old, or emerging. It is also clear that the gaze can be manipulated, either overtly, or more subtly and less obviously.

Because of all of these factors, I claim that the gaze has shifted from Mulvey's original primarily heterosexual perspective to a more fluid and less securely anchored perspective. This gaze is more of a dominant gaze instead of a specifically male gaze and the person who is looking, or, indeed, who constructed the gaze, may not be biologically male, but instead occupies a position of power or control. This ownership and positioning of the gaze is now much more fluid and has allowed a web of gazing to evolve that allows others to gain control. As a result, those that were once looked upon, can now control their own 'looked-at-ness' and gaze.

It is, however, critical to note that the landscape of sex and gender is very different now when compared to the time that Mulvey devised her theory. As I have pointed out, many women now occupy spaces that were traditionally occupied by men, both in art and other fields. The same is also true the other way, with examples such as ballet and fashion modelling becoming supportive environments for those wishing to explore styles that were traditionally secured to a specific gender. Although this crossing of roles is welcomed by many, when gender and sex cross into roles that are not historically defined as theirs, there

can be problems. Dominant groups always attempt to control non-dominant groups, and this shows that the gaze is inherently rooted in power. We can also see that even if gazes and roles evolve, the viewers may not necessarily do so. This becomes evident when there is a backlash from people watching or participating in activities that are either not intended for them or that they find offensive.

Gazes can also now be dual or multiple in the same event. As discussed, the movie *Brokeback Mountain* is one such example where there are gazes for straight women and gay men. Similarly, we have also seen how the gaze can be owned, subverted, and taken control of, as was the case of Robert Mapplethorpe with his photographs of male nudes and men in extreme positions. It is clear that where the gaze in Mulvey's eyes was generally singular and well defined, now there are many more facets and aspects to it as the same image can be used or made to be appealing to many genders or sexualities at once. In line with this, we see that the gaze can also be controlled for many different reasons; art, power, politics, advertising, sex, to name just a few. Not all uses of the gaze are good. Some, such as the use of the gaze in *Lesbian Chic* are very dubious.

For good or bad, there are societal frameworks that are very difficult for us to escape from in how we feel that we or "things" are supposed to look. We know that people evaluate themselves through the process of evaluating images of

others. This becomes a key figure in the rising importance of the personal picture, portrait, or selfie. Social media can allow a user to directly take control of the gaze, even if that control is not absolute. Indeed, it needs to be asked whether the concept of the gaze is even really relevant in a social media driven world.

## 6.2 Implications

What does this all of this mean for the gaze and what are the implications? As the gaze is intrinsically about power and we can see that the ownership of the gaze is shifting, that implies that power and ownership around the use of images and imaging is also shifting. We can also see that as social, political, and gender constructs continue to break down, develop, and change, new gazes will evolve, the traditional gaze may erode further, and the power dynamics that are inherent in visual imaging will continue to develop and change.

It is tempting to think that these developments will always be forward in motion or velocity. However, as these gazes continue to shift and develop there will be backlashes as we have already seen occur. The implication of these backlashes in visual culture is the same as in daily life. It causes instability, anger, discussion, and then eventually (or hopefully) further development. That development may not always be forward; sometimes a sideways step may be

necessary before the journey can continue forward once more. But censorship, backlash, and re-assessment are not new things in the development of art. This constant circle of evaluation and assessment is necessary for forward motion in all things.

Clearly, the existence of power into art via the gaze is not a new thing. But the use or availability of multiple power points or control centers in an images via the gaze can introduce or provide additional tension with an image or work. This tension may provide an additional latent power that is waiting to be unlocked by viewers depending on their position on the power/gaze spectrum. The development of new gazes is undeniably linked to the ongoing development and maturation of society, particularly with relation to social and gender related issues.

### 6.3 Next steps

What, then, is next for the evolution of the gaze? Now, over forty years from the original work that defined it, we can see that much has changed. We have seen the original concept of the gaze that Mulvey defined change and develop. No longer is it linked to just one group. While the idea of the gaze is still sound, how the gaze manifests is fluid and continues to develop. What will happen to the gaze next as society continues to develop, evolve, and move forward? We

have seen many more groups take or claim ownership of the gaze and it must be asked whether the ownership of the gaze will become so complex that the concept of ownership fragments and splinters too much?

What happens when too many groups claim power or ownership of the gaze of an image or a piece of visual culture? Can there be a situation where the gaze can be more or less important to some of these groups at the same time? Or will we get to a position where the gaze is irrelevant once true equality becomes the norm? This last question is perhaps more doubtful as history shows us that there is always inequality and that even if equality exists on the surface, then inequality lies just beneath or in the shadows. What we can see is that imaging and visuality is continuing to dominate our world and culture and shows no sign of slowing down or becoming less important. Because of that, we can be sure that these open questions will remain relevant for many years to come.

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