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Unmasking Heteronormativity: Laura Mulvey's Impact on Spectator Identity in Cinema

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Abstract

In 1975, Laura Mulvey published a ground-breaking essay in which she coined the term “male gaze” and opened new perspectives about the male-centric film industry. However, as time marches forward, the brilliance of Mulvey’s work is found to be accompanied by limitations. This paper focuses on how Mulvey’s seminal “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” fell short of accounting for non-heteronormative spectators when analyzing women’s representation in Hollywood cinema, the dynamics of spectatorship, and erotic pleasure in film. Mulvey’s work encompassed inadvertent normative claims, including essentialist gender notions, a binary view of gender, the absence of female agency via the exclusion of the female gaze, a limited scope relying solely on Freudian psychoanalysis, and the pleasure aspect of film engagement. Is it the case that there exists only the male gaze and female gaze, or is there more to spectatorship in film? To address the pitfalls of Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” a more inclusive approach to film theory is needed. This paper examines and reevaluates the male gaze, as well as recognizes agency and complexity in female characters, accounting for non-heteronormative spectators and encouraging ongoing dialogue about feminism in film. By incorporating these solutions, scholars can build upon the foundation laid by Mulvey’s essay and foster a more inclusive and comprehensive analysis of gender representation in film.

Introduction: Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema

Laura Mulvey, a prominent figure in the realm of film studies and feminist theory, has ignited a spark that continues to illuminate the intricacies of cinema and gender representation. Her essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” has set the stage for a profound reevaluation of how we perceive and engage with films. In her work, Mulvey passionately advocates for a revolution in the world of cinema, imploring audiences to question and challenge the time-worn gender roles depicted on the screen. Her vision? To usher in a new era of empowering female portrayals and a more inclusive, equitable cinematic experience, shattering the chains of visual and narrative stereotypes.

Overall, Mulvey bases her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” on two key concepts: “Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look” and “Pleasure in Looking/Fascination with the Human Form.” She applies psychoanalysis to aspects of filmmaking in these parts to show how it may be used in cinema theory, especially by feminists who fight “under the heteronormative order.” Mulvey explores the pleasures of cinema, particularly scopophilia, which involves viewing other people’s bodies as sensual objects while remaining invisible to the audience. She argues that in a patriarchal world, scopophilia is split between active/male and passive/female viewing pleasure.¹ The male gaze is the dominant perspective, allowing male viewers to identify with male characters on film, fostering the illusion of dominance and control. This identification is not only about understanding the character’s perspective but also involves a level of narcissism, where the viewer aligns themselves with the empowered male figure. The audience, regardless of their gender, is encouraged to view the events of the film through the eyes of the male character.

In contrast, female characters are often seen as passive objects of the male gaze, sexualized and objectified, and portrayed as objects of desire. They are frequently positioned in ways that accentuate their physical attributes, such as through close-ups, low camera angles, or lingering shots. These techniques emphasize the sexual allure of the female characters and reinforce traditional gender roles, where women exist to be admired and desired by men. Mulvey highlights the tension between active/male and passive/female watching pleasure in films, with the viewer’s interest in the image leading to control and possession of the female form inside the diegesis, while the viewer’s gaze involves direct scopophilic contact with the female form.² In general, Mulvey

¹ L. Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ *Screen*, 1975, p. 835.

² L. Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ p. 837.

suggests deconstructing the scopophilic by examining the three distinct looks of cinema: the camera, the audience, and the characters appearing on film. She concludes that women, whose images have been used for profit, would embrace such a transformation and view conventional film form with nothing more than acknowledged sentimentality.

Analysis and Limitations of Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema

First, although Mulvey's argument about *Vertigo* supports the male gaze theory, it also lacks female agency and clarification about Judy's sexual orientation. *Vertigo* supports Mulvey's theory of the male gaze by depicting female characters as objects of desire and emphasizing their aesthetic attraction from the standpoint of the male protagonist and audience. Mulvey suggested that Hitchcock's heroes, in this case, Scottie in *Vertigo*, are dominant men possessing money and power, backed by "a certainty of legal right and the established guilt of a woman."³ The audience watches the film through the view of the male protagonist, Scottie, and his voyeuristic obsession with the female character, Madeleine. Scottie acts as a sadist, forcing Judy to reconstruct herself as Madeleine for his pleasure, shaping Judy into the perfect masochist. In the end, Judy dies after being stuck in a vicious cycle of repetition, all geared to keep Scottie's erotic interest. On the one hand, the film could potentially help female spectators to get out of the same cycle as Judy, prompting them to remove the mask of their fake identity and return to living as their original selves. On the other hand, Scottie's voyeuristic behaviors are "normalized" by his valorization in the role of the sympathetic protagonist, and Hitchcock constructed the women in this film to appear always to be focused on themselves, trying to be another person so that men could fall in love with this idealized and false image. This portrayal serves to reinforce the male gaze and the objectification of women in the narrative, as men are encouraged to fall in love with this manufactured and unrealistic image.⁴ Additionally, the narrative framework of the movie reinforces the male gaze from the primary purpose of Madeleine's persona: to serve as a mysterious and watchful presence for Scottie. Her inner lives and intentions are frequently hidden, highlighting her function as Scottie's object of attention rather than a fully realized person.⁵ This supports Mulvey's claim that female actors frequently lack subjectivity and are instead reduced to becoming simple visual spectacles. The narrative framework of the movie and

³ L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' p. 841.

⁴ A. Klevan, 'Vertigo and the spectator of film analysis,' *New York: Routledge*, 2014, pp. 194-224.

⁵ For further treatment of self-actualization's historical importance for feminism, see Chapter 5 in MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*.

Scottie's influence over Judy's appearance serve to highlight further the power relationships and objectification at the center of the thesis.

However, the viewers remain uninformed regarding Judy's sexual inclinations and orientation. Even though the time when "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" was written was still heteronormative, Mulvey's analysis does not account for the potential queer subtext in Judy's character and her relationship with Scottie. The essay primarily focuses on the binary and heteronormative aspects of the male gaze, overlooking the possibility of LGBTQ+ themes and interpretations. This omission limits the essay's applicability to discussions of sexual orientation in cinema, as it fails to engage with the nuanced dynamics that may exist beyond the traditional male-female dichotomy. Consequently, Judy has been portrayed as a passive figure despite her actual agency in the narrative. Galvin Ester initially hires Judy to impersonate Madeleine, his wife, as part of a sinister plot to murder her and inherit her wealth. While her involvement in this scheme may appear passive, Judy actively takes on the role of Madeleine. She undergoes a physical and emotional transformation to mimic the appearance and behavior of the deceased woman. This requires agency on her part as she actively participates in this deception. In the film's climactic scene, Judy decides to reveal the truth about her impersonation to Scottie. This act is a conscious choice on her part to come clean and assert her own identity, despite the potential consequences. Judy's transformation, emotions, and decisions all highlight her active agency within the movie.

Second, Mulvey also fails to consider female agency in another movie that appeared in Mulvey's analysis: *Rear Window*. Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 suspense masterpiece presents L.B. Jeffries, a wheelchair-bound photographer (played by James Stewart), who finds himself absorbed with watching his neighbors from his flat window as he recovers from an injury. Jeffries, who believes he has seen a murder in a nearby building, asks his nurse Stella (played by Thelma Ritter) and lover Lisa (played by Grace Kelly) for assistance in looking into the shady goings-on. Tension increases as they piece together the jigsaw and gather more information as they approach closer to learning the truth about the purported crime. With Hitchcock's trademark blend of suspense, intrigue, and psychological tension, the movie deftly examines voyeurism, morality, and the meaning of reality. In particular, the viewers are presented with the cinematic experience through the lens of Jeff, a Caucasian male, who engages in inappropriate observation of his female neighbors daily. Although the audience follows the plot through Jeff, Doyle, a policeman, is the stereotypical male gaze that Mulvey previously addressed in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Doyle is the

rational and reasoning male. He is uncomfortable talking with Lisa, a female, about the murder. He even belittles Lisa's theories, stating that he does not believe in "female intuition." In contrast, Jeff is bound to the wheelchair, making him have no other choice than to be confined to no other action but the male gaze. But as the movie progresses, Jeff falls in love with Lisa, an independent and successful woman. Jeff, instead of dismissing Lisa like Doyle, is impressed with Lisa's abilities and fearlessness. When Jeff is in danger and stuck in the wheelchair, he yells for Lisa to save him, which confines him into one place, unable to move or make decisions for himself, making Lisa a more active character than Jeff. At the end of the movie, Lisa peers out the window as she looks at the male gaze that seems to be watching her, then proceeds to drop the book that Jeff likes her to read. She then picks up Harper's Bazaar, retaining her identity without conforming to the male gaze.⁶ Ultimately, *Rear Window* introduces strong female characters as well as the obnoxious stereotypical male gaze that can be used to criticize Mulvey's previous argument regarding the film.⁷

Third, while Mulvey did reflect on her limitations in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," she did not directly retract or disavow her original theory. In *Afterimages: On Cinema, Women and Changing Times*, Mulvey responds to the criticism and debates raised about her earlier work, such as "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." She discusses the conflict between employing feminist theory, which aims to challenge patriarchal standards, and psychoanalysis, a theory that has been criticized for its patriarchal foundations. Mulvey notes that while psychoanalysis contributed much to our understanding of the mechanisms of audience engagement and the building of cinematic narratives, it also had inherent limits because of its long-standing affiliation with patriarchal ideology. She concedes that the complexity of female subjectivity and agency might be partially captured by the Freudian paradigm she used. As well as that, the tendency of psychoanalysis to essentialize gender roles and desires is one of the accusations leveled at it. Mulvey considers how some essentialist ideas might have been unintentionally maintained in her earlier work, notably in connection to the male gaze hypothesis. She is aware that the binary structure of a male viewer and a female object tends to oversimplify how moviegoers interact with films.⁸ Mulvey contends that the narrative itself has become more of the focus in her latter work, away from the

⁶ A. Hitchcock, 'Rear Window,' 1954, 1:52:03

⁷ L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' p. 842.

⁸ L. Mulvey, *Afterimages: On Cinema, Women and Changing Times*, Reaktion Books, 2019, p. 242.

psychoanalytic lens.⁹ She emphasizes how crucial it is to consider how stories being told on television interact with larger societal narratives and cultural contexts. Her latter work shows a shift away from focusing solely on visual dynamics and towards a more thorough examination of narrative structures. Mulvey also acknowledges that viewers, particularly women, have a variety of responses and experiences that cannot be easily contained under a single theoretical framework. She understands the necessity of going beyond a strict theoretical framework to account for the richness and individuality of women's cinematic participation. Although her response reflects a willingness to adapt her theoretical framework in light of ongoing discussions and critiques within the field of feminist theory and cinema studies, it provides little to no solutions to the criticism.

The discussion thus far applies to all the answers to the questions that Mulvey addresses in *Afterimages: On Cinema, Women, and Changing Times*. Mulvey came to see that the male gaze hypothesis was founded on a binary conception of spectatorship and gender. She started to realize that films have the power to arouse new kinds of identification and pleasure beyond those often experienced by male viewers and passive female objects.¹⁰ This acknowledgment signaled a change from the strict structure she had first put forth. Mulvey also acknowledged that her initial theory might have overlooked alternative forms of gender identification and sexual orientation because it focused exclusively on heterosexual relationships.¹¹ She recognized that there is a wider range of cinematic experiences and reactions and that the male gaze theory needed to be enlarged and reframed to take this variety into account. Mulvey also investigated the gaze as a notion that transcends gender differences. She emphasized that the gaze can involve a wider range of relationships between viewers and the screen and is not just about power and objectification. Her changing grasp of the subtleties of visual pleasure and identification in film is reflected in this shift in viewpoint. Later works by Mulvey recognized the significance of intersectionality in comprehending spectatorship. She noticed that racial, socioeconomic, and cultural differences have a big impact on how people interact with films. This realization inspired her to think about analyzing the movie experience from a broader and more complex perspective. However, even though Mulvey did “realize” her limitations, the above “solutions” that she provided did not give new insights into spectatorship.¹² For example, she doubled down on her spectatorship theory by just

⁹ L. Mulvey, *Afterimages*, p. 241.

¹⁰ L. Mulvey, *Afterimages*, p. 243.

¹¹ L. Mulvey, *Afterimages*, p. 244.

¹² L. Mulvey, *Afterimages*, p. 245.

assuming females are endowed with the same type of gaze directed towards males. Moreover, throughout the book, Mulvey only acknowledges her fault but does not solve the criticism.

Responses to Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema

Many authors have commented on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” after it was published in 1975. One of them was Tania Modleski, whose response to Mulvey contributed to the ongoing conversation about gender, spectatorship, and film theory. Mulvey’s ideas can be critiqued and partially reinterpreted in Modleski’s reaction. While Modleski draws attention to the idea that women may find enjoyment and affiliation in films that uphold the male gaze, Mulvey’s essay primarily focuses on the male gaze and its consequences for female viewers. According to Modleski’s argument in her essay “The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory,” published in 1984, women may not just be passive recipients of the male gaze but may also be empowered and contented by engaging with media that focuses on male protagonists and narratives. While acknowledging the significance of the male gaze and its impact on the representation of women, Modleski introduces the idea that female spectators might derive pleasure, identification, and even empowerment from films that adhere to the male gaze. This viewpoint differs from Mulvey’s claim that men automatically objectify women and reinforce patriarchal power dynamics.

Furthermore, Modleski’s argument can be understood in the light of feminist film theory as a whole. She argues that, contrary to Mulvey’s binary framework, women’s reactions to cinema are more varied and nuanced. While it is vital to recognize how objectification and the reaffirmation of gender stereotypes in media can be harmful, Modleski stresses that women’s viewing behavior is not only influenced by these factors. Modleski introduces several essential ideas, including the notion of “identificatory pleasure.” The term “identificatory pleasure” describes the excitement and emotional involvement that female viewers may feel when they can relate to the acts, feelings, and problems of masculine characters on television. According to Modleski, women can actively participate in the story by projecting their desires, fantasies, and experiences onto male characters instead of being restricted to a passive and voyeuristic interaction with cinema, as suggested by the male gaze theory. In her essay “The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory,” Modleski examines horror films, a genre that frequently includes strong, tenacious female characters dealing with numerous threats and difficulties, to analyze this idea. According to Modleski, female viewers could find enjoyment in these narratives not

just because they are masochistically identifying with the victimized individuals, but also because they can experience courage, resistance, and empowerment firsthand through the actions of these characters. For example, a female viewer may empathize with a female protagonist who fights back against a threatening antagonist in a horror movie. The audience member can feel empowerment, agency, and control by placing herself in the character's role. The viewer can escape the confines of their own life and situations thanks to this identification and fully immerse themselves in a story in which they actively participate in overcoming challenges in life. It is important to note that Modleski's solution does not dismiss the importance of the masculine gaze or the feminist critique of objectification in film. She instead expands the discussion by addressing the variety of ways that women interact with film narratives. Modleski's reevaluation encourages a more nuanced view of female spectatorship that considers personal agency, a variety of responses, and the possibility of subversion within the cinematic experience.

Furthermore, another author who touches upon the rigid concept of male viewer and female object is Teresa de Lauretis, who talks about it in her essay: "Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema." De Lauretis discusses Mulvey's idea of the male gaze and its consequences for creating cinematic narratives in this essay. Mulvey's dependence on Freudian psychoanalysis is one of the main areas where De Lauretis differs from Mulvey. De Lauretis contests the Freudian framework's application to feminist cinema theory, contending that it restricts our comprehension of female spectatorship and identity. She makes the argument that Freudian psychoanalysis is based on a patriarchal ideology and might not adequately capture the nuanced nature of women's experiences.¹³ Freudian psychoanalysis has a propensity to universalize and reduce experiences to their core components, ignoring the wide variety of personal experiences and identities. She contends that this inclination towards universalization ignores the subtleties of how many people perceive their identities and pleasures, particularly in the context of cinema.

In contrast to De Lauretis, Freudian psychoanalysis assumes that males are active subjects and women are passive objects, leading to a simple binary conception of gender relations. She contends that more than this framework is needed to explain the nuanced ways in which women interact with film or the potential for other modes of identification aside from the gaze of men. De Lauretis contends that

¹³ T. De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 23.

Freudian psychoanalysis frequently downplays or pathologizes feminine desire, which limits its applicability to studying how women react to films.¹⁴ She emphasizes that a wide range of desires, fantasies, and identifications that are not sufficiently addressed within the Freudian framework can be incorporated into women's experiences, which are not only determined by the male gaze. De Lauretis emphasizes the importance of recognizing women's subjectivities, which means considering how individual women bring their unique perspectives, experiences, and desires to the cinematic experience. She challenges the notion of a universal female spectator and argues that women's responses to films are diverse and shaped by their own lived experiences. Overall, she explores the subtleties of how women interact with film narratives, highlighting the variety of subjectivities and modalities of identification by fusing semiotics with feminist theory. De Lauretis underscores the limitations of Mulvey's male gaze theory in this way, opening up fresh perspectives on how women, film, and identity are related.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler challenges the essentialist and binary notions of gender that Mulvey's essay relies on. Mulvey's essay focuses on the male gaze and its role in the objectification of women within cinema. She argues that cinema reinforces patriarchal power dynamics by positioning women as objects of desire for the male viewer. While Mulvey's analysis critically examines the power structures at play in cinematic representation, it operates within a binary framework that positions the male gaze against the female object. According to Butler's theory of performativity, gender is a socially produced identity that is continuously enacted and performed rather than an inherent feature.¹⁵ This viewpoint aligns with Mulvey's idea of the male gaze since it casts doubt on the constancy and veracity of gender identities and makes suggestions about how gendered performances are socially legitimized. Butler's theory suggests that the gaze itself, whether male or female, is performative and constructed. The act of looking, as presented in Mulvey's essay, can be seen as a performance of power and identity rather than a fixed biological or psychological response. This idea resonates with Butler's larger argument that gender is a continuous process of enactment and repetition.

In addition, Butler's concept of "performativity" challenges the idea of set gender identities and behaviors. Butler's focus on the flexibility and diversity of identity challenges the binary framework of Mulvey's essay, where the male gaze is set against the feminine object. If

¹⁴ T. De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, p. 67.

¹⁵ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 1990, p. 17.

gender is performative, then looking becomes a created gesture rather than a reflexive or preset action, regardless of the viewer's gender. This is similar to Mulvey's goal of exposing patriarchal structures in cinema as it calls into question the male gaze's hierarchical power relations and complicates the notion that one's position as a viewer is directly influenced by one's gender. Performativity also confronts the idea that women's roles in films are only limited to being passive objects of the male gaze. This challenges the notion that female viewers must inevitably empathize with female characters and submit to the male gaze. Instead, performativity makes a variety of gendered performances and identifications possible. Butler's response does not negate or dismiss Mulvey's ideas but rather offers an alternative theoretical lens through which to view them. Butler contributes to the conversation on spectatorship, gender, and power dynamics in the film by addressing the performativity of gender and gaze. Their work supports a more nuanced investigation of how identities and wants are produced, enacted, and negotiated through cinematic experiences, expanding the debate beyond the constraints of a fixed masculine gaze.

Similarly, Mary Ann Doane also argues that the complexities of spectatorship extend beyond a simple division between male viewers and female objects. While Mulvey centers her argument on the traditional binary of male viewers and female objects, Doane's concept of masquerade builds upon this framework by suggesting that spectatorship is not limited to a straightforward binary dynamic. Masquerade theory holds that spectators, regardless of gender, project themselves onto the characters they are seeing.¹⁶ This concept is based on psychoanalytic theory. Viewers "masquerade" as the characters during this process, temporarily taking on their identities and going through their experiences. This implies that the interaction between the viewer and the movie is more complex than just identifying with a fixed viewer or object role.

Doane's critique emerges from her observation that the male gaze theory does not fully account for the complexity of female spectatorship experiences.¹⁷ While Doane argues that women can experience pleasure and identification in a variety of ways, Mulvey assumes that female viewers can only identify with male actors through a male gaze perspective. Mulvey argued that female viewers only engage with the male character because they imagine themselves as the recipients of the male gaze. However, female viewers have the option to actively project

¹⁶ M. Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator,' *Screen*, 1982, p. 81.

¹⁷ M. Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade,' p. 82.

themselves into a variety of characters, even male ones, without being restricted to a single gaze, thanks to the concept of masquerade. Furthermore, the concept of masquerade opens the possibility that viewers have diverse desires, fantasies, and identifications that extend beyond the narrow scope of traditional gender binaries. This challenges the assumption that female viewers can only find pleasure in identification with female characters. It allows for the exploration of a range of emotional and psychological responses that do not adhere to predetermined gender roles. Doane's commentary on Mulvey's male gaze theory reaches beyond gender binaries, not restricting the "gaze" to only one male.

Lastly, Linda Williams is known for her essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," where she examines the relationship between pleasure, the body, and cinematic representation. In this essay, Williams analyzes cinematic excess and physical feelings, challenging some facets of Mulvey's theory while also constructing upon it. Williams' theories provide an alternative viewpoint on the importance of pleasure and sexuality in cinematic experiences, even though they are not a direct critique of Mulvey's work. Contrary to Mulvey's method, Williams' emphasis on enjoyment and sensation in the film indicates a shift from the examination of cinematic engagement that is essentially theoretical and visual. Williams' work contests the notion that cinematic enjoyment is derived only from the objectification of characters and the aesthetic pleasure brought on by the male gaze. Instead, she focuses on how various physical experiences, feelings, and affective reactions impact the entire cinematic experience.

Williams focuses on the physical and emotional experiences that films cause in viewers, in contrast to Mulvey's emphasis on the male gaze and the power dynamics of voyeurism. This shift contradicts the idea that enjoyment is derived exclusively from the act of looking at characters and emphasizes a more comprehensive understanding of how viewers interact with films. According to Williams, watching a movie involves not only sight but also other senses, including hearing and touch.¹⁸ She makes the observation that viewers physically reacted to the stimuli shown on television; shivering, tears, and other physical reactions are proof of this sensory engagement.¹⁹ By interfering with the sole concentration on the visual, this physiological participation gives a more embodied perspective of cinematic enjoyment. Moreover, Williams believes films evoke a variety of emotions. While she does not equate

¹⁸ L. Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,' *University of California Press*, 1991, p. 3.

¹⁹ L. Williams, 'Film Bodies,' p. 5.

sexuality as an emotion, she does emphasize the emotional and affective aspects of sexual representation in cinema. She sees sexiness as a nuanced and multifaceted part of the film experience rather than being restricted to objectification.²⁰ This viewpoint acknowledges that viewers can experience pleasure and excitement in a variety of ways that go beyond scopophilia.

Conclusion: The Enduring Impact of Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema

Although “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” received much criticism, it is still highly praised since the male gaze theory shed light on the broader issues of gender representation and power dynamics in media, sparking conversations about feminism, representation, and the influence of media on societal norms. The article initiated extensive scholarly debate concerning gender representation in cinematography and other visual media. It moved generations of academics, feminists, and cultural theorists to examine media through the prism of power dynamics, gender, and sexual orientation. Mulvey’s work also aided in the feminist movement’s critique of how women are portrayed in the media. It emphasized the significance of developing and disseminating alternative narratives that oppose heteronormativity and established gender norms. Mulvey also inspired filmmakers and creators to become more conscious of the male gaze and its impact on storytelling. As a result, some filmmakers began to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles and narratives in their work, leading to more diverse and complex representations on screen.²¹ The idea of the male gaze stimulated a more thorough investigation of representation, which provoked debate on intersectionality and the representation of LGBTQ+ people and experiences in popular culture. As a result, diverse identities and viewpoints are now more visible and well-represented. Overall, Mulvey’s theory of spectatorship initiated a significant discourse that contributed to broader cultural shifts toward recognizing and challenging heteronormativity and gender stereotypes in various forms of media. In a world undergoing constant transformation, what new dimensions and possibilities might emerge within the realms of spectatorship and the cinematic arts?

²⁰ L. Williams, ‘Film Bodies,’ p. 6.

²¹ For further reference, here are some filmmakers who associated with the wave of feminist film theory after the publication of “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”: Chantal Akerman, Sally Potter, Agnes Varda, Lucrecia Martel, and Nina Menkes.

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