The Drifting Gaze:
Sexuality and Spectatorship in
the Internet Age

Yushi Li

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Printed Name: Yushi Li
Signature:
Date: 05/09/2022

Abstract

'The Drifting Gaze' investigates the fluidity of the power inherent in the gaze in the scopic field of digital social networks, seeking a new discourse around the question of the gendered gaze outside of the existing dichotomy of active men and passive women. Using psychoanalysis as my main theoretical framework, this power relationship is scrutinised and elaborated through an exploration of the concept of desire in relation to gender and sexuality. The photographic medium is both an observing tool for the investigation of the representations of men as an erotic subject and also a screen for projections of my fantasies, in which the power structure inherent in the gaze is questioned, deconstructed and examined. By putting myself inside these fantasies/photographs via different digital methods, I become a combination of director, observer, protagonist – and sometimes even prop – in the image. The fluidity of my position is facilitated by the Internet and digital technologies, questioning how the accessibility and ubiquity of images today blurs the boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity in the Internet age and how the constant connection provided by the Internet fundamentally changes the perception of the gaze. In this essay, I explore these themes through research involving psychoanalytical and philosophical theories, analyses of my own and other visual artists' work and accounts of my own dreams. Across writing, dreams and photography, we drift between the conscious and the unconscious, the virtual and the corporeal, approaching an altered form: a theatre of sexuality and spectatorship.

Contents

List of Illustrations

Fig. 2.1 Giorgione/Titian, *Sleeping Venus*, c. 1508-10

Fig. 2.2 Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1534

Fig. 2.3 Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863

Fig. 2.4 Diego Velázquez, *The Toilet of Venus (the Rokeby Venus)*, c. 1647-51

Fig. 2.5 The *Rokeby Venus* by Velázquez slashed by Mary Richardson, 1914.

Fig. 2.6 Sylvia Sleigh, *Philip Golub Reclining*, 1971

Fig. 2.7 Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1781

Fig. 2.8 *The Nightmare*, 2019

Fig. 2.9 Titian, *The Death of Actaeon*, c. 1559–1575

Fig. 2.10 *The Death of Actaeon*, 2020

Fig. 2.11 *Purple Sky*, 1969

Fig. 2.12 Film still from *Blue Bananas and Other Meats*, 1973

Fig. 2.13 *The Veil*, 2020

Fig. 2.14 *The Feast, Inside*, 2020

Fig. 3.1 Lili Dujourie, *Zonder Titel [Untitled]*, 1977, Photo by Kristien Daem

Fig. 3.2 Aneta Bartos, *Spread (from 4 Sale)*, 2011

Fig. 3.3 Juno Calypso, *The Honeymoon Suite*, 2015

Fig. 3.4 'The Female Gaze' collection, Zara. Annemarieke van Drimmelen, 2020

Fig. 3.5 Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, 1533

Fig. 4.1 Amalia Ulman, *Excellences & Perfections*, 2014

Fig. 4.2 Screenshot from JenniCam

Fig. 5.1 *A mother taking a bath in a British house, photograph*

Fig. 5.2 *A mother cooking in the kitchen in a British house, back view, photograph*

Acknowledgements

Introduction

This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze. In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear.[1]

Jacques Lacan

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI, Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 89.

In a contemporary age of visuality, almost everything has become an image soaked with desire, a trap for the gaze. 'The Drifting Gaze' is an exploration of the question of the gaze in relation to desire, gender and sexuality within a range of artistic and social contexts.

Starting with what first came to mind, that is the desire of the (m)Other, several fundamental psychoanalytic concepts, including desire, Lacan's *objet petit a*, the phallus and fantasy are explained and discussed in the first chapter to establish a theoretical framework for this thesis. The longing for the love from the absent mother produces a repeated and inexhaustible attempt to mediate between lack and excess, in which satisfaction is fulfilled not through obtaining the actual object, but through desiring itself. Through the desiring process of the mother, we come to Lacan's question of what the (m)Other desires – *'Che Vuoi?'*, 'What do you want?' By questioning what the mother wants, the subject starts to desire what the Other desires, and then to develop his or her own desire and subjectivity. Several accounts of my own dreams are inserted into this chapter to open up some gaps, which can lead us to another space that is outside of our conscious thinking and writing.

The second chapter looks at a selection of paintings from art history, from different depictions of Venus to paintings of certain erotic fantasies, in which different kinds of looking are constructed and represented through various painterly details. By analysing the representations of the body and the staging of desire in these paintings, I offer a brief review of the female nude in art history and draw and discuss a comparison between these classical paintings and my photographic work, which brings us to the question of the dyadic active-passive relationship between the 'looking' subject and the 'looked-at' object.

The third chapter examines the complexity of the gaze and reviews different theories of the gaze. The gaze is neither the look nor the eye, but a third locus in the dynamic of the scopic drive. Looking at the idea of the gendered gaze – the male gaze and the female gaze – originating in film theory, I investigate and clarify certain misunderstandings and limitations of the use of Lacan's concept of the gaze. At the end of this chapter, the idea of the psychoanalytic gaze is introduced and discussed based on Freudian and Lacanian theories, positing a subject who never achieves a stable position and never coincides with the gender position assigned

by the Symbolic order.

In the fourth chapter, the idea of the gaze is questioned and examined further within the context of the contemporary Internet age. With the development of computer technologies and the Internet, everyone can easily make images, or become images that can be looked at by others and themselves. Following the discussion of this all-pervasive gaze in the age of the image, an in-depth analysis of the Internet artwork *JenniCam* and a documentation of one of my moving image works, Breathe in, Breathe out, aim to suggest the operation of the gaze via the digital eye, which is outside of the existing binary framework of the gendered gaze. The chapter ends with a discussion of different kinds of visual relationships through the idea of the screen and the frame. With immediate and convenient access to endless images/examples, the Internet facilitates the process of the displacement of desire, positing a multiple rather than a singular gaze: the gaze onto the looked-at, the gaze from the looked-at that does not directly look back at the looker and the gaze from the screen that reflects the looker's own face and desire.

The Desire of the (m)Other

As a child, I didn't forget: interminable days, abandoned days, when the Mother was working far away; I would go, evening, to wait for her at the U bus stop, Sèvres-Babylone; the buses would pass one after the other, she wasn't on any of them.[2]

Roland Barthes

2. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* (London: Vintage Books, 2002), p. 14.

I cannot remember where my mother was when I was a child; I only knew that she was always away. I do not know whether I have lost all my memories of her, or I have blocked them in order to deny her absence in my childhood. But I remember that I was always a well-behaved child, a good girl, who did not cry or complain, because I did not miss her. As Roland Barthes says in *A Lover's Discourse*,

> I behave as a well-weaned subject; I can feed myself, meanwhile, on other things besides the maternal breast. This endured absence is nothing more or less than forgetfulness [...] This is the condition of my survival; for if I did not forget, I should die [...] I waken out of this forgetfulness very quickly. In great haste, I reconstitute a memory, a confusion.[3]

In this confusion, I forgot where she was, I forgot to miss her, I forgot whether I actually forgot her or not. However, I did not forget her absence and my desire for her – the absent one.

18 February, 2019
I was chasing a strange man under the sea. I did not see what this suspicious man looked like or what he did. All I knew was that he was dangerous, and I needed to catch him.

We were running frantically in the water, the way we run on the ground, moving and breathing effortlessly. Suddenly, the man ran into a small white tower. I opened the door and entered the space after him. It was an extremely small room, which was almost the same size as me and was full of shelves and drawers. On the shelves were various kinds of colourful food.

I could not find the man anywhere in this tiny, crowded room, but I knew that he was there, somewhere in the tower and I knew that he was masturbating. The whole room was shaking, and some of the shelves and drawers were thrust forward as if he was penetrating the tower from the outside.

This invisible man was like a lascivious monster, and I was inside his masturbating

---

3. Ibid, p. 15.

tower. I was scared, because I could not see him and did not know what he was going to do. The tower was still shaking, and the drawers and shelves kept moving in and out, in and out. This tiny room had just enough space for me to not get hurt by these thrusting movements, but I was still terrified and worried that the whole tower might collapse.

> Absence persists – I must endure it. Hence I will manipulate it: transform the distortion of time into oscillation, produce rhythm, make an entrance onto the stage of language. Absence becomes an active practice, a business; there is a creation of a fiction which has many roles (doubts, reproaches, desires, melancholies).[4]

To manipulate the absence, the child repeatedly throws the cotton reel over the side of the cot, out of sight, and pulls it back again, thus miming the mother's departure and return.[5] A rhythm has been created not only to fill the absence, but also to extend the interval to postpone the possibility of no return, to symbolise the never-ending possibility of her return – gone/there.[6]

The longing for the absent one and the fear of loss produces a kind of throb, by which I mean a repeated and inexhaustible attempt to mediate between lack and excess. Gone/there, gone/there, gone/there… The desire to make good the lack can lead to excess through the accumulation of things – one thing failing to satisfy is substituted by another in what Jacques Lacan calls 'the endless metonymy of desire'.[7]

---

4. Ibid.

5. In Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, the rhythm borne of absence refers to the game Freud called Fort/Da, which Freud suggests, is the child's vocalisation for the German words 'Gone/There'. Freud interprets the game as the 'renunciation of instinctual satisfaction, which the child had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting.' He further suggests that the child has changed his position from passive to active by using the retrievable reel to mimic the absence of the mother. Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 1-64.

6. Barthes claims that the interval formed by this game delays the other's death, which 'separates the time during which the child still believes his mother to be absent and the time during which he believes her to be already dead.' Barthes, p. 15.

7. Lacan, *Écrits,* p. 489.

Desire cannot be satisfied and exhaust itself in pleasure, which is 'a principle of homeostasis'.[8] Neither is desire need, which can be satisfied and articulated in demand through the mediation of signifiers.[9] Desire is the residue of the subtraction of the need from the demand , which remains unfulfilled and is realised through the reproduction of itself as desire.[10]

Desire in this context is the desire for the absent mother's love, to whom the child addresses their demands, something indescribable and unlocalisable, in which satisfaction is obtained not through obtaining the actual object, but through seeking itself. In other words, the lack and pain stemming from the unattainability of the desired object are precisely what keeps us wanting. Wanting to gain, wanting to lose, wanting to be wanted. The child wants to be what the mother desires, insofar as the mother is an idealisation, an imago, and not the "real" mother.

> Desire full stop is always the desire of the Other. Which basically means that we are always asking the Other what he desires.[11]

According to Lacan, desire is the desire for the Other and for the object that the Other desires or lacks. The Other with a big O does not mean any specific other, someone like me, but an otherness that 'transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification.'[12] While the little other reflects the Imaginary ego, the big Other exists beyond the realm of imaginary identifications and refers to two types of otherness in the order of both the Symbolic and the Real, respectively.[13] Firstly, the big Other is the symbolic or-

---

8. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 31.
9. Lacan, *Écrits,* p. 580.
10. Ibid.
11. Lacan, *My Teaching* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 38.
12. Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 136.
13. The registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real are three fundamental concepts of Lacan's work. The Imaginary is the field of the ego, in which we identify with an imagined image of the counterpart. The Symbolic is the language and signifiers that structure our world. By contrast, the Real is something that is outside of the language, which is indescribable and unlocalizable. In other words, the real is a loss or a gap in the Symbolic order. 'Jacques Lacan (Stanford Encyclopaedia Of Philosophy)', *Plato.Stanford.Edu*, 2013 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/> [Accessed 12 October 2021].

der, which can be equated with language and the law.[14] Secondly, the big Other also has a Real dimension, which is 'an unknowable "x", an unfathomable abyss of withdrawn-yet-proximate alterity.'[15] The Other here I refer to is the Real Other, the enigmatic Other that 'punches a hole' in the Symbolic. For Lacan, the maternal figure is the initial incarnation of a Real Other for the infant.

What the Other desires is not always clear, because it is ultimately unconscious. To desire is to constantly question what the Other wants, which in the first instance is to identify the mother's desire. Following the graph of desire, Lacan raises the question of what the (m)Other desires – *'Che Vuoi?'*, 'What do you want?'[16] The (m)Other here stands for both the mother and the Other, who is the first big Other the child encounters. By asking what the mother wants, the infant tries to find out what the mother lacks, in order to know how to become the desired object of the mother. This process of questioning leads the infant to develop their own desire and subjectivity.

However, it is difficult for the infant to understand the mother, as they cannot speak or understand what the mother says or does. During that period, the only way for the infant to communicate with the mother is by crying and looking at the mother's eyes as she gazes at her child and observes her gestures, listens to the sounds she makes, trying to work out what she does and wants. More importantly, what the mother desires is beyond language and outside of the dimension of consciousness. Even after the child enters into language, the desire of the mother still remains an enigma.

2 April, 2019
A middle-aged woman came to talk to me after the show finished at the theatre. She wore a black dress and a camel cape, with her hair loosely tied up in a low ponytail. She invited me to go back home with her, and I said yes without much hesitation.

---

14. Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, p. 136.
15. 'Jacques Lacan (Stanford Encyclopaedia Of Philosophy)', *Plato.Stanford.Edu*, 2013 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/> [Accessed 12 October 2021].
16. The graph of desire is a topological schema developed by Lacan, which shows the structure of desire and subjectivity. Lacan, *Écrits,* pp. 689-690.

It was a strange apartment, which had unpainted walls, bare concrete floors and glamorous vintage furniture. The few things I could remember were a green velvet couch and two maroon pianos.

More strangely, there was a girl playing one of the pianos. However, I could not hear any sound or music. She did not talk to us or look at us, just continued playing silently like a well-behaved doll. I could not see her face, only her back. I remember that she had long black hair and wore a long-sleeved 'baby doll'' dress. I was slightly surprised by her presence and even felt a bit jealous. Before I could talk with the girl, the woman asked me to play the other piano for her.

For this enigma of the (m)Other, Lacan designates the phallus, which she fundamentally lacks, as a signifier of her desire. The phallus is neither the penis, nor the object of desire, but an indicator of what the (m)Other does not have. Lacan stresses that the phallus has to remain veiled, the lack it signifies 'only ever represented as a reflection on a veil.'[17] The veil suggests that there is something hidden behind it without ever exposing what it may be. Therefore, the phallus remains invisible, unlocalisable and unattainable, like the desire it signifies.

2019
I did not know where I was or what I was doing. It seems like I was in a room by myself. I looked down my crotch and saw an erect penis, which was almost as big as a water bottle. This big penis was not someone else's penis, but my own. Suddenly, I realised that I was in my own dream. The first idea that came to my mind was: I have to make use of this opportunity; I can finally feel how it feels like to have a penis!

Then I touched my giant penis, it looked slightly red and felt very hard. After touching it for a while, I moved my hand up and down more and more quickly, like what I have seen before – how a man masturbates. I felt good, but I was not sure if that was how it would feel like to have something concave, rather than convex.

In order to be what the mother desires, the child wants to be the phallus of and for

---

17. Lacan, *The Ego in Freud' s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 2010), p. 11.

the mother. However, the female child does not have a penis, nor does the male child have permission to use his penis to fulfil the mother's desire and his own desire. According to Sigmund Freud, sexual difference is first encountered during the phallic phase, in which both male and female children discover that the mother does not have a penis.[18] The female child is fundamentally castrated in identification with the mother, while the male child is under the constant threat of castration made by father who intervenes to maintain the interdiction on incest.[19] Castration anxiety is generated in response to this phantasy of the castration of the imaginary penis, which recalls a series of traumatic experiences, characterised by loss or separation, from birth to the loss of the breast in feeding and weaning to the realisation of the anatomical difference between the sexes. The child has to align themselves with one of the sexes, therefore foregoing something of their infantile sexuality.

For Lacan, the phallus is not the actual penis, and the castration complex is more than the fear of losing a bodily organ, but also 'the symbolic lack of an imaginary object.'[20] The imaginary object is the phallus that the mother essentially lacks; and the castration anxiety is a metonymic displacement of the child's anxiety at trying to be the mother's desired object. Although Lacan has stripped the phallus of its anatomical origin and theorised it as a signifier, a function that is not one relating to any bodily organs, Lacan's theories around the phallus have been repeatedly critiqued as phallocentric. Judith Butler argues that the Lacanian phallus still shows a precedence over other corporeal signifiers, and that Lacan fails to differentiate the phallus entirely from male genitals.[21] However, what the phallus signifies is not the desire for a penis, but the sexual difference on the level of lack, which is first 'picked up and made significant by the undeniable visibility of the penis as the only mark of significant difference between the little girl and the little boy.'[22] It is through this

---

18. Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1965), pp. 139-167.

19. Jean Laplanche and J, B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 57.

20. Lacan, *Seminar IV: La relation d'objet*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1999), p. 219, cited in 'Castration - Cahiers Pour L'Analyse (An Electronic Edition)', Cahiers.Kingston.Ac.Uk <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/concepts/castration.html#_note3_return> [Accessed 30 August 2021].

21. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of "Sex."*, 2nd edn (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2011), pp. 28-57.

22. Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Gender* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996).

recognition of the sexual difference that both male and female children realise that they lack the phallus that the mother desires.

The fact that desire is something beyond what we have brings us to the Lacanian *objet petit a*, which refers to what is unreachable in the object of desire and 'what sets our desire in motion'.[23] Therefore, the *objet petit a* functions as an indirect and figurative symbol of the lack and an imaginary compensation for the symbolic castration. In other words, the *objet petit a* is a symbol of the phallus, which is the object of the drive, and 'desire moves around it, in so far as it is agitated in the drive.'[24]

In Freud's fort/da game played by the child, the *objet petit a* is the cotton reel. Unlike Freud, however, Lacan thinks that the cotton reel does not simply represent the mother, but also 'a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his': in other words, a residue of the process of separation from the mother.[25] The cotton reel, which belongs neither to the child nor the mother, creates a rift in the mother-child wholeness.[26] This rift allows the child to develop his own desire and establish the presence of his subjectivity in the absence of the mother.

> The mother is a big crocodile and you find yourself in her mouth. You never know what may set her off suddenly, making those jaws clamp down. That is the mother's desire […] There is a roller [rolling-pin], made of stone, of course, which is potentially there at the level of the trap, and that holds and jams it open. That is what we call the phallus. It is a roller which protects you, should the jaws suddenly close.[27]

For some commentators the rolling-pin represents the 'paternal function' that protects the child from the desire for and of the mother. The paternal function is what

---

23. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 53.
24. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 243.
25. Ibid, p. 62.
26. Bruce Fink, 'The Subject and the Other's Desire', in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 251.
27. Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis,* trans. by Russell Grigg (New York, NY: Norton, 2007), p. 129.

intervenes from without in the mother-child dyad. The child realises at some point that they are not everything to the mother, that the mother's desire is directed towards a place outside of the mother/child dyad, a place conventionally occupied by the father (but it could be another woman). It is from that place that the paternal function operates to open a gap between the mother and the child.

Therefore it is not only the absence, but also the presence of the mother that the child finds unbearable. On the one hand, the child wants to be everything to the mother, the desired object of the mother's desire to stay inside the warm and safe mouth of the mother crocodile. On the other hand, the child can only breathe and constitute their own space, their sense of self, if there is a rolling-pin that keeps the mother's jaws open. This rolling-pin opens up a gap between the mother and the child, the possibility of absence, which allows the child to indulge itself in the presence of the mother without being eaten. In this paradox of absence and presence, the child clings to the *objet petit a*, which is the remainder of the broken mother-child unity, to maintain the illusion of wholeness.[28]

This complicated relationship between the subject and the *objet petit a* is what Lacan calls a phantasy.[29] Based on Freud's work, Laplanche and Pontalis define phantasies as imaginary scenes in which the subject is both an observer and a participant.[30] For Lacan, phantasy is a *mise-en-scène* of desire, which shows how the subject 'would like to be positioned with respect to the Other's desire.'[31] As Žižek says, phantasy provides a scene for the object that drives desire, which is the *objet petit a*.[32] Even though phantasy cannot offer us the object we desire, it can present a scene in which we can experience a sense of possibility.

28. Fink, p. 253.

29. There is a distinction between the two alternative spellings phantasy and fantasy. Phantasies are largely unconscious and are involved in all mental processes and activities, including libidinal and aggressive impulses and defence mechanisms. By contrast, fantasies are conscious daydreams and imagined scenarios. Susan Isaacs, 'The Nature and Function of Phantasy', in Developments in Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 2018).

30. Laplanche and J, B. Pontalis, p. 314.

31. Fink, p. 253.

32. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 53.

2019

I was sitting on the grassland in a sombre park. Before I even realised, there were a man and a woman pointing their guns at me. I could not see them very clearly, but I remembered that they were wearing some kind of black leather outfits. Suddenly, I recognised that I was in a kind of hunger game, in which all the players hunt for each other and kill their prey. They were talking about something which I could not understand, while I was stiff with the cold and the metallic feeling of the gun that was pressed against my forehead. I felt extremely scared, worrying about what they were going to do to me.

After a while, instead of killing me, they took me in a car and drove to a place. When I entered the room, I saw a big pyramid that consisted of six layers of people who were having oral sex with each other. I could not see their faces, as they seemed to be in a constant transition between their heads and bottoms. The only exception was the man on the top, a middle-aged bald man, whose face I could see all the time.

In the field of the visible, the gaze is the *objet petit a*,[33] which is not the look, but something that is outside of the Symbolic and functions in the dimension of the Real. The gaze is a lost object that cannot be apprehended and localised directly. However, fantasy provides a relation to this lost object, in which the subject can imagine the possibility of obtaining the impossible object. The photographic sketch is the fantasy I construct in my mind, by selecting certain objects, elements, through the lens of my eyes both consciously and unconsciously to create a *mise-en-scène* of desire. The desire of photography is the desire to construct a scene, a fantasy, in which I can experience myself as a desiring subject.[34]

> A fantasy is simultaneously pacifying, disarming (providing an imaginary scenario which enables us to endure the abyss of the Other's desire) and shattering, disturbing, unassimilable into our reality.[35]

In his book *The Real Gaze*, Todd McGowan discusses how fantasy can offer both a justification or rationale for the impossibility of the fulfilment of desire, and expose

---

33. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* p.75.

34. Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp.24-25.

35. Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of The Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 18.

the repressed excess that stains the seemingly neutral social reality. McGowan stresses that through creating different fantasies, cinema can not only fill in the gaps in the ruling ideology by replacing the subject's dissatisfaction with an imaginary enjoyment, but also interrupt the functioning of ideology by revealing the hidden obscenity and excessive enjoyment embodied in the gaze.[36]

Unlike films, photographs are still and soundless. However, the stillness, the silence and the absence of an explicit narrative in photographs leave more space for the viewer to imagine what might have happened outside the frame. According to Christian Metz,

> The photographic take is immediate and definitive, like death and like the constitution of the fetish in the unconscious, fixed by a glance in childhood, unchanged and always active later. Photography is a cut inside the referent, it cuts off a piece of it, a fragment, a part object, for a long immobile travel of no return. Dubois remarks that with each photograph, a tiny piece of time brutally and forever escapes its ordinary fate, and thus is protected against its own loss. [...] The fetish, too, means both loss (symbolic castration) and protection against loss.[37]

Because of its relation to the reality of which it is an image, a photograph, unlike a painting, offers the fantasy of an unmediated access to the reality that has been photographed. This specificity of the photographic image makes it particularly susceptible to disavowal: 'I know very well that what I see in the photograph actually happened, but nevertheless it is only an image.' This separation of knowledge from belief is characteristic of fetishism.[38]

In psychoanalysis, fetishism is a form of sexual perversion, according to which the normal sexual object, such as sexual organs, is replaced by an intrinsically non-sexual object. It is a defense against the fear of castration that arises when the male child sees for the first time that his mother does not have a penis, and makes sense

36. McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, pp.39-42.
37. Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, 34 (1985), 81–90 (84).
38. Thinking Photography, ed. by Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 190.

of the difference in terms of loss: the mother has lost her penis, which makes it possible for him to imagine that he too may one day lose his penis.[39] The child looks away and the fetish is created in this instant when his gaze falls upon an object which will become a substitute for the maternal penis, allowing him to keep his belief in the maternal penis intact and his fear of castration at bay.

As Metz writes, 'the fetish is related to death through the terms of castration and fear, to the off-frame [of the photograph] in terms of the look, glance, or gaze.'[40] The fetish is the result of the displacement of the look, from absence to presence. The off-frame of the photograph invites such a displacement. Unlike films, everything that is outside of the frame of a photograph will never come back to the frame and can never be seen or heard, living in a space that can only be imagined and fantasied by the viewer. When we look at a photograph, we see what is inside the frame, and imagine what is outside of the frame - a reminiscence of the absence, a feeling of lack.

When the shutter closes, the camera takes everything inside of the frame in and cuts off everything that is outside the frame. Regardless of the fullness of the 'in-frame', the 'off-frame' makes a photograph always a part object that is haunted by the irrevocable absence, 'which are the past, the left, the lost.'[41] Therefore, photography can work as a fetish not only because of its materiality as an object that can be held and kept close to the body, but also because it functions as both a substitute for that which is absent, and a reminder of the lack.

A photograph is more than an image; it is a mental object that figures castration, the 'off-frame' gaze, as a fetish. On the other hand, photography also offers a glimpse at the photographer's desire, which has the potential to stage fantasies that allow the subject to imagine obtaining the desired object as a possibility.

---

39. Alain de Mijolla, International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), p. 582. According to Freud, fetishism derives from the child's confrontation with the mother's lack of a penis. The fetishist both affirms and disavows this lack by using an object to substitute the missing phallus. As discussed previously, the phallus here is not the actual penis, but a signifier for what the (m)Other essentially lacks. Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', pp. 147-157.
40. Mets, 86.
41. Ibid, 87.

When I take a photograph, it is more than an act of capturing a view or possessing a past, it is a construction of my fantasies and a process of reaching the 'ideal' image. Firstly, I have an image in my mind, sometimes inspired by a painting, a book, an experience in my life, or an idea the origin of which I do not know. Then I find a place, a subject, a composition, and render this imaginary scene into a photograph through the lens of my camera.

In a sense, my photographs are fantasies created by me, in which I can imagine the possibility of obtaining the desired object – the phallus, the desire of the (m) Other. The fantasies I refer to here are not unconscious phantasies, but conscious daydreams and imagined scenarios which may involve unconscious motivations.[42] Through constructing the ideal settings for my photographs, which normally consist of a naked man within a domestic space, my desire for the phallus is represented in both a literal and a metaphorical way – the penis of the man and a fantasy of having power over the man in the picture. By power here I mean the dominant and active position in the fantasy I create, which is achieved by occupying the position of both the photographer and the one who looks at the man.

The nakedness of the man is more than an erotic representation; it is also an indicator of my attempt to have control over their visibility. In his work *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre stresses that when someone knows that they are being looked at, what they realise instantly is not 'there is someone there', but the fact that 'I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I cannot in any case escape from the space in which I am without any defence.'[43]

Being visible is being vulnerable: being exposed to a potentially dangerous situation over which one does not have full control. The vulnerability inherent in the act of being looked at is in the exposure not only to potential physical danger, but also

---

42. Susan Isaacs proposes a distinction between these two alternative spellings, stating that fantasy is 'conscious daydreams, fictions and so on' and phantasy is 'the primary content of unconscious mental processes'. Susan Isaacs, 'The Nature and Function of Phantasy, in *Developments in Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2018).

43. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness - An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 282.

to a gaze from which one cannot hide in a psychological sense. For example, the expression 'I see right through you' suggests a radical exposure of the subject's most intimate thoughts. Through 'stripping naked' the men I photograph, I try to put them in a similarly vulnerable situation, in which they are completely visible to me and subject to my gaze – the idea that I might see right through them.

Additionally when I ask these men to take off their clothes, I aim to strip them of their particular identity in order to forget the teacher, the businessman or the artist, and be left with a naked man, a body without disguise or character. In other words, these naked men are undifferentiated and replaceable. In 'stripping' these men naked, I, also, and more importantly, try to remove the veil of my own desire, behind which there is nothing that is the phallus.

3 February, 2022
I was searching for some pornography to watch on my laptop, with a particular image in my mind – a man and a woman who both wear business suits having sex in a typical office space. I tried to type in "sex in a workplace" in the search box, but for some reason, it was fairly difficult for me to type in the right letters. I kept typing the wrong words and kept getting the wrong types popping onto my desktop. None of them was sex in a workplace, or in any ordinary space, but in a lot of unusual or fantastic scenarios.

Suddenly, another porn just popped up, in which a number of monsters, looking like half animal half-human creatures, were having an orgy. I felt so scared and tried to close the window. But the 'close' button that was right in front of me seemed so far and so difficult to reach, I kept failing to close the window just as I kept typing the wrong letters in the search box.

In the fort/da game, the child symbolises the comings and goings of the mother by repeatedly throwing away and pulling back the cotton reel, therefore enacting a control it does not actually have. The game is also an instance when the child asks itself the questions: 'Do you still love me when you are not here?' Or in other words, 'Do I still exist in your absence?'

Another example is the peek-a-boo game, in which the mother first hides her face from the infant, and then uncovers it and says 'Peekaboo!'. The infant finds it immensely pleasurable when the mother takes her hands off her face and looks at

them. What appeals to the child here is not only the presence of the mother, but its visibility to the mother, or in other words, the look of the mother through which it confirms its existence. The mother is the Other who ratifies the image of the child for the child.[44] This image of itself is one the child imagines from the place of the (m)Other. Therefore, what the child is trying to control is not only the absence of the mother, but the image of itself, which is constituted through the presence of the (m)Other.

In my work, instead of intending to provide an assortment of naked male bodies for consumption, the male body is always represented in its relation to other elements in the frame, never on its own. Apart from eroticism, there is also a kind of care and tenderness in my work, in which the domestic space and mundane activities ask us to see beyond the naked body. By making them completely visible, I try to return them to the moment when they were born. In a sense, I become the (m)Other who is looking at them and ratifying their image.

On the other hand, beyond the image of these men, there is the imago of the mother, which is a fantasy of the absent mother. The man in my images does not represent a specific man, or a particular type of man, but a thing that has been situated within the domestic interiors amongst objects in the scene I created, functioning as signifier of desire – the desire of the (m)Other. Through photographing these men within these domestic settings, I try to create a space that is very familiar to all of us, a maternal space in which castration could occur. My desire for control takes the form of a demand that is not addressed to these men themselves, but to the imago of the mother, in a displacement of the demand that can never be met, that the mother be ever present. My original satisfaction at being in control of the absence of the mother is reproduced in a fantasised form, in which I fantasise about not only having the phallus but also being the (m)Other.

I have been repeatedly asked to justify my choice of male models who are not from the same ethnic background as me. What came to mind in response was that these men remind me neither more nor less of my own father, whose naked body I have never seen and therefore remains an enigma. There is a disturbing closeness and

---

44. Lacan, *The Seminar, Book X, Anxiety* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 45.

intimacy about the Asian male body, which suggests the desire to both see and not to see and makes it difficult for me to work with. In my practice, photographing itself creates a distance, like the rolling-pin in the mother crocodile's mouth, leaving a gap for me to develop my own desire. The fantasy of control is indissociable from the desire for the mother, set in motion by her absence, and also from the question of her desire, directed away from the child, towards another, the father. In a sense, my portrayal of the desired body is a condensation of the imaginary of the unknown body of the father and the maternal body, but at a distance.

In some of my works, I also show myself in the scene, playing make-believe with these men in my own fantasy. The *mise-en-scène* that I create in these photographs usually contains some childish elements, such as archery training toy for children used in the work *The Death of Actaeon (2020)*, suggesting the dreamland of a child, in which s/he fantasises about controlling everything. In this case, I am both the (m)Other who gazes at the child – the photographer, and also the child who indulges herself under the maternal gaze – the subject in the photograph. In addition, by putting myself in the photograph, I am both a spectator and a spectacle, as I am looked at by the man in the scene and the viewer of the image. However, these photographs are not self-portraits, as I am only a signifier, a prop, no different from the man, the table, or any other object in the scene. Instead of a dichotomy between the looking subject and the looked-at object, I compose my photographs to explore more complex looking relations, in which the look is not fixed, but fluid and exchangeable.

Therefore, to photograph is to create a scene for the object cause of desire, or in other words, to try to capture the gaze by rendering the desired object through the photographic scene. However, as the gaze is a lost object, which cannot be described and localised, this attempt to make the 'ideal' image, or in other words capture the gaze, is doomed to fail. The gaze here is not the look from the photographer but the photograph itself, which gazes back at both the photographer and the viewer. From one photograph to another, the scene changes, but the desire remains the same and unfulfilled.

2. Looking Back – Reconstructing the Fantasies in 'Old Master' Paintings

The eye sees the world, and what it would need to be a painting, sees what keeps a painting from being itself, sees – on the palette – the colours awaited by the painting, and sees, once it is done, the painting that answers to all these inadequacies just as it sees the paintings of others as other answer to other inadequacies.[45]

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

45. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy And Painting* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwest University Press, 1993), p. 127.

In 1972, John Berger published his well-known book *Ways of Seeing*, an adaptation of his four-part BBC television series, in which he discusses how women have been depicted and represented in European oil painting by exploring a key subject in fine art: the nude.[46] In the paintings Berger discusses in his book, the subject, the naked woman is always aware of being looked at by the viewer.[47] She looks at the viewer, she looks away from the viewer, she shares the spectatorship of herself with the viewer by looking at the mirror. However, she is perpetually the self-aware spectacle in all these situations.

In contrast, the male nude is often perceived as an autonomous subject, athletic, upright and confident, while female figures are often presented in reclining poses associated with passivity. As Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat says,

> The nakedness of the male nude signals his autonomy; it tells us that he is in control of his own actions and that his is master of his own fate; the nakedness of the female nude has nothing to do with autonomy but is associated rather with passivity. The male nude can have erotic implications, but these do not interfere with its status as a subject; the female nude, by contrast, is all beauty and eroticism.[48]

Let us look at the painting *Sleeping Venus* (1510), by Giorgione (completed by Titian), which is one of the first reclining nudes in Western painting.[49] Venus is lying naked, with her right arm raised around her head and left hand covering her genitals. Sydney Freedberg describes this painting as 'the perfect embodiment of Giorgione's dream, she dreams his dream herself.'[50]

What Freedberg describes here is a loop of fantasy, in which Giorgione fantasises

---

46. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972).

47. Ibid, pp. 45-64.

48. Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, 'On the Semantics of Male Nudity and Sexuality. A Retrospective', in *Nude Male: From 1800 to the Present Day* (Munich: Hirmer, 2012), p. 17.

49. Sarah Dotson, 'Why Titian's "Venus of Urbino" Is One of Art History's Most Iconic Nudes', *Artsy,* 27 August 2020 <https://www.artsy.net/series/stories-10-art-historys-iconic-works/artsy-editorial-titians-venus-urbino-one-art-historys-iconic-nudes> [Accessed 18 August 2021].

50. Sydney Joseph Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p.134.

Fig. 2.1
Giorgione/Titian, *Sleeping Venus*, c. 1508-10

about the Venus dreaming about being dreamed by him. Her closed eyes suggest that she is dreaming on the tranquil hills, while her left hand on her private parts both hides herself and attracts attention to her sex. The closed eyes, the hand cupping her sex may readily suggest the self-absorption of masturbation.

Frances Borzello thinks that Venus's closed eyes symbolizes passivity, which turns her whole body into a spectacle that can be viewed by the onlookers as much as they want.[51] However, I would argue that Venus is not completely passive, as she is also depicted as a desiring subject, who is looking at the viewer without actually looking. Her closed eyes stop us from seeing what she is looking at, or rather what she is dreaming about, which opens a breach in the gaze of both the painter Giorgione and the viewer. She sees what remains invisible to the viewer.

The closed eyes and resting pose of Venus in Giorgione's painting suggest a more ambiguous and complex scenario than other depictions of Venus in art history. For instance, in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1534), Venus is looking at the painter/viewer with an intense and seductive look. Her head is slightly tilted and leaning towards her right shoulder and her right hand holds a small bunch of flowers gently as if what she holds is her pubic hair that her other hand is covering. These gestures are more suggestive of a pin-up photo, in which the naked woman knows that she is being looked at and offers her body for the visual pleasure of the viewer. By looking at the viewer seductively, she is indicating that, 'I am here for you.' Alternatively, her pose could be interpreted as a provocative display of her solitary and autonomous enjoyment, a sensual pleasure from which the viewer is excluded, and furthermore defined in contradistinction to the realm of work occupied by her two maids, who are equally excluded from the realm of sensual pleasure. The little dog curled up in sleep, eyes shut, offers another image of indifferent, and autonomous, pleasure.

In Edouard Manet's painting *Olympia* (1863), Venus is replaced by a nude woman, Olympia, who is a *demi-mondaine*, or prostitute. Even though Olympia is also a depicted reclining on a couch, her pose is more natural, and less seductive. A significant difference is in the depiction of her left hand, which rests on her right thigh

51. Frances Borzello, *The Naked Nude* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012). <http://jssgallery.org/Other_Artists/Velazquez/Velazquez_Venus_at_her_Mirror.htm> [Accessed 22 August 2021].

Fig. 2.2
Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1534

concealing the pubis. But the hand is spider like, the fingers like walking legs facing forward, and as such it attracts attention to her sex only to repel it. Olympia is also looking at the painter/viewer, but her look is not as seductive as the gaze of Venus in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1534): it is more assertive and almost confrontational. Instead of saying, 'I am here for you', the naked woman depicted in Manet's painting knows that she is being looked at and is looking back at the viewer looking at her with an even gaze. Her pose is natural and seems at ease, showing her body and her sexuality not in a passive and submissive manner, but with confidence.

Furthermore, there is an insistence on the act of looking in Manet's painting that is absent from Titian's depiction of Venus. Whereas in the latter the two maids are looking away and the little dog's eyes are closed in sleep, Manet paints the servant looking at the naked woman and the black cat's eyes wide open, looking directly at the viewer of the work. In Titian's painting, a space of intimacy is created between the viewer and Venus by means of the dark green drape that partly conceals her body while defining a space separate from the one occupied by the maids, and by a singular exchange of looks between Venus and the viewer.

In contrast, in Manet's *Olympia (1863)*, the naked woman, the servant and the black cat all appear in the same space, signifying their awareness of the presence of the viewer/painter. Unlike Titian's seemingly docile and passive dog, the small black cat in Manet's painting stands upright and tensed on the right-hand side of the bed, its body almost blending with the dark green curtain behind while its shining eyes are wide open against the intrusion of the viewer/painter. Interestingly, in French, the slang word for female genitalia is *chatte*, which also means a female cat. In a sense, what Olympia is covering with her left hand is displaced and displayed in the figure of the black cat, gazing back at the viewer. As Jennifer DeVere Brody says,

> On closer examination, we are confronted only with the figure of the
> cat which functions as an index of what we must/must not see.[52]

Another female nude I would like to discuss is Diego Velázquez's work *The Toilet of Venus (the Rokeby Venus)* (1647-51). Venus, the goddess of beauty, love and

---

52. Jennifer DeVere Brody, "Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's Olympia", *Theatre Journal,* 53.1 (2001), 95-118

Fig. 2.3
Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863

fertility, is lying languidly on her bed, with her back facing the viewer. The folds of the bed sheets resonate with her curvaceous body. On the left side of the bed, Venus's son, Cupid, is holding a mirror next to her, in which we can see a vague reflection of her face. The indistinct image in the mirror makes it difficult for us to know whether Venus is looking at the reflection of herself or that of the viewer of the painting. Some would argue that she is looking at herself in the mirror, which symbolises vanity and narcissism. For Natasha Wallace, the indistinct face in the mirror shows that the depiction 'is not intended as a specific female nude, nor even as a portrayal of Venus, but as an image of self-absorbed beauty.'[53] For Berger, the true role of the mirror in paintings is to 'make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight.'[54]

Conversely, Edward Snow argues that the *Rokeby Venus* (1647-51) breaks the dichotomy of the gendered gaze and the fantasy of the power of the male gaze.

> The face in the painting's mirror has a disconcerting tendency to gaze, without the knowledge of the woman from whom it apparently derives – directly into the eyes of the viewer, with knowing intimacy.[55]

For Snow, the image in the mirror is as if detached from the Venus's body, which allows her to gaze at her own body and, more importantly, to gaze at the viewer. Snow stresses that the mirror mediates between us and Venus, reflecting an otherness that is either her or us. Like the closed eyes of Titian's Venus, the mirror in the *Rokeby Venus* stops us from knowing what Venus is looking at. Therefore, what the mirror displays is the gaze of the viewer, gazing at us by showing an indistinct, disembodied reflection of the reclining woman's face. This vague image seduces us, but at the same time also stops us at the same time, from seeing what we want, or in other words, from obtaining what we desire.

---

53. Natasha Wallace, 'Velazquez's: Venus at Her Mirror', *Jssgallery*, 2021 <http://jssgallery.org/Other_Artists/Velazquez/Velazquez_Venus_at_her_Mirror.htm> [Accessed 22 August 2021].
54. Berger, p. 51.
55. Edward Snow, "Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems", *Representations*, 25 (1989), 30-41 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928465>.

Having remarked that the reflection in the mirror appears detached from the body of Venus, Snow draws a formal connection between the Cupid, whose gaze is directed at the face in the mirror, locked in a pre-oedipal bond, a doubled gaze, which is 'male and female, young and old, infant and maternal', 'gazing out together on the single self-sufficient female body.'[56] Rather than being sadistic or aggressively possessive, there is considerable tenderness, wistfulness and pleasure in their looks. Snow stresses that what the *Rokeby Venus* opens onto is a maternal field of vision, rather than a phallic or patriarchal capture, which is 'a space neither of possession and display nor of mythic plenitude but of splitting, separation, spacing, and the weaving and traversing of gazes.'[57]

By comparing these different paintings of Venus, we can see that there can be various nuances within the same subject. The key difference is the look of Venus, which is directed at the viewer in different ways. Therefore, I would argue that it is rather reductive to claim that all female nudes are passive spectacles for the male spectator. On the other hand, I think that the prevalence of female nudes in art history itself raises many questions about the framing of the representation of women. Lynda Nead argues that 'the transformation of the female body into the female nude is thus an act of regulation.'[58] Additionally, the male artist is usually considered productive and controlling, and his sexual desire is expressed through his brush. In her work *The Female Nude*, Nead uses Jacques Derrida's discussion of the concept of style[59] to describe the relationship between the artist and the canvas, in which the artist, the brush and the style is masculine or even phallic while the canvas or surface is both receptive and terrifying. As Nead says,

> The female nude marks a double inscription – it is a kind of surface
> within a surface [...] Within critical language woman is figured as the

---

56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.
59. In his book *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, Derrida discusses an opposition between the pointed and sharp style, which can be a quill or a stylus, and the hostile material that it resists. Nead argues that Derrida's analysis of this opposition can be applied to the investigation of the construction of the female nude, in which style can be realised through different kinds of drawing or painting instruments, such as brushes and pencils and brushes, and the awaiting medium is the canvas, or in other words, the woman in the work. Nead, pp. 56-57.

Fig. 2.4

Diego Velázquez, *The Toilet of Venus (the Rokeby Venus)*, c. 1647-51

resistant, unnameable 'otherness' of paper/canvas, the sign of absolute non-signification. The female nude within patriarchy thus signifies that the woman/surface has come under the government of male style.[60]

In 1914, Canadian suffragette activist Mary Richardson slashed the *Rokeby Venus* (1647-51) in the National Gallery in London to protest against the arrest of the British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. In her statement, Richardson says,

> I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government for destroying Mrs Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history.[61]

Nead argues that Richardson's attack has itself become a 'literal realisation of the phallic figuration of style', which inadvertently reveals the unconscious hostility embodied in the looking relationship between the looker and the looked-at.[62] By slashing the canvas, or in other words, the body of the most beautiful woman, with a butcher's knife, Richardson broke the ideal image of the female nude and made her own marks of agency on the painting.

In her painting *Philip Golub Reclining* (1971), Sylvia Sleigh tries to challenge the masculine way of portraying the nude in a portrait of herself painting a reclining male nude. The man has long, dark-brown hair and a slim body with lightly toned muscles. He is shown lying on a couch and looking at himself in a mirror, a pose that evokes the *Rokeby Venus* (1647-51). On the left-hand side of the painting, a woman, Sleigh, is painting the man and looking at the viewer. For Sleigh, the male nude is depicted as 'a vehicle to express erotic feelings, just as male artists have always used the female nude'.[63] Unlike the indistinct image in the mirror in the *Rokeby Venus* (1647-51), the man's face is painted with great detail in Sleigh's work. This

---

60. Ibid pp. 57-58.
61. Mary Richardson, 'Miss Richardson's Statement', *The Times*, 11 March 1914, pp. 9-10.
62. Nead, pp. 57-58.
63. Joan Semmel and April Kingsley, 'Sexual Imagery in Women's Art', *Woman's Art Journal*, 1.1 (1980), 4 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358010>.
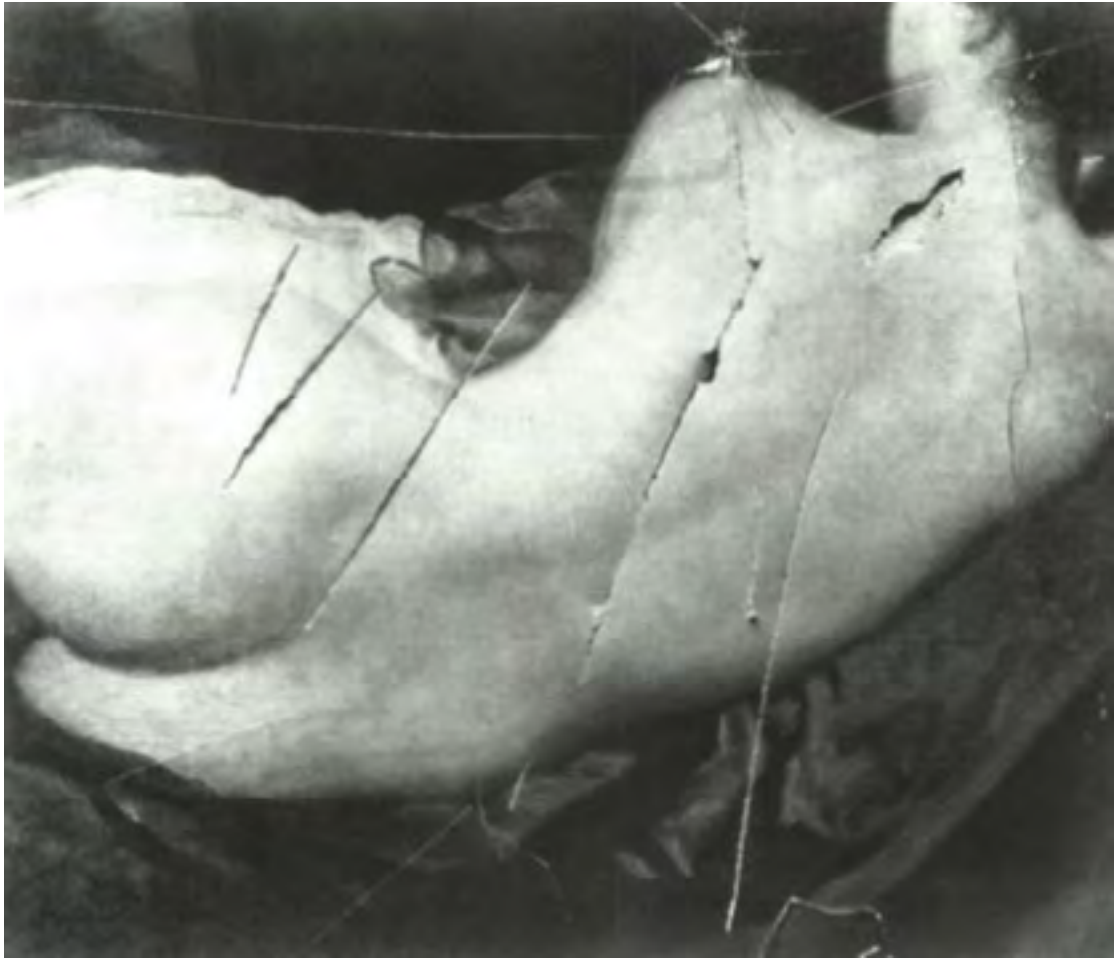
Fig. 2.5

The *Rokeby Venus* by Velázquez slashed by Mary Richardson, 1914.

makes the painting more like a reversal of the gender roles, in its presentation of a man in the stereotypical poses of a female nude.

However, when we take a closer look at the painting, we can see that the painter is seated behind the model, who is looking at himself in a mirror that spans the width of the canvas. What we are seeing is Sleigh's reflection in the mirror seen from her point of view. She is also looking at herself in the mirror, a gaze that coincides with our own gaze as we are looking from the painter's perspective. The narcissistic gaze of the model is echoed in the narcissistic gaze of the painter. Therefore, this painting is a conflation of two genres: the nude and the self-portrait. More importantly, the gazes depicted in the painting do not meet, as both the model and the painter are absorbed in their own image.

In *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker argue that regardless of his reclining pose, the male subject, Golub, is not simply a body, but a finely painted and recognisable portrait who is looking back at the viewer through his self-possession.[64] As Pollock and Parker say, 'masculine dominance cannot be displaced merely by reversing traditional motifs and thinking that this automatically produces an alternative imagery.'[65]

Firstly, we only know it is a 'recognisable portrait' because the name of the sitter appears in the title of the painting. There is nothing in the painting itself that allows one to know this is Philip Golub, the son of American painter Leon Golub. Furthermore, if we look at the painting closely, we can see that the man's look is vague and indirect as he gazes at his own image as if in a daydream, whereas the painter's look is sharp as she looks directly at her own reflection in the mirror which coincides with the position of the viewer. According to the codes of representation, she is the one who appears self-possessed as she looks directly and unwaveringly at the viewer. Additionally she sees what he does not see; his back is turned to the viewer as he remains absorbed in his own reflection, a position of vulnerability

In my practice, I reflect on the staging of desire and eroticism in certain paintings

---

64. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, 2013), p. 124.
65. Ibid, p. 126.

Fig. 2.6
Sylvia Sleigh, *Philip Golub Reclining*, 1971

in art history to try to reconstruct these erotic fantasies and make my own portrayal of the desired body. More importantly, instead of simply reversing male and female roles, I try to use my photographs to question and challenge the dichotomy between the masculine style and the feminine surface in art history, and to explore more complex looking relations of looking beyond the existing model of a looking subject and a looked-at object.

For instance, my work *The Nightmare* (2019) is inspired by Henry Fuseli's painting *The Nightmare* (1781). Fuseli's painting portrays an erotic, dreamlike image, in which an incubus is sitting on a sleeping woman's belly. The woman is lying on her back on a bed: her upper torso has slid over the edge of the mattress and her head and arms are hanging down. She is not naked, but we can see her curvaceous body clearly through her gauzy dress. The incubus, who is a male demon who tries to seduce women into having sexual intercourse with him, is crouching on the woman's belly, looking out at the viewer. On the left-hand side of the room, the head of a horse with bulging white eyes is emerging from the parted curtains. What is striking about the horse's head is that it is not looking at anything: its eyes are two bulging white globes, as if it is blind. The blind eyes of the horse echo the closed eyes of the sleeping woman. However, they suggest very different meanings: one is the blindness to the outside world in dreaming; the other one is the blindness of not seeing.

In 1779, Fuseli wrote to a friend about his fantasies of a woman he had fallen in love with, named Anna Landholdt, before she was to marry another man:

> Last night I had her in bed with me – tossed my bedclothes hugger-mugger – wound my hot and tight-clasped hands about her – fused her body and soul together with my own—poured into her my spirit, breath and strength. Anyone who touches her now commits adultery and incest! She is mine, and I am hers. And have her I will [...][66]

---

66. Maryanne C. Ward, 'A Painting of The Unspeakable: Henry Fuseli's "The Nightmare" and the Creation of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"', *The Journal of The Midwest Modern Language Association*, 33.1 (2000), 20 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1315115>.

Fig. 2.7
Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1781

Fig. 2.8
The Nightmare, 2019

The Nightmare (1781), then, can be seen as Fuseli's portrayal of his unrequited love for Landholdt, in which the woman is Landholdt and the incubus represents Fuseli himself. However, the pose of the sleeping woman ambiguously suggests both passive receptivity[67] and seductive voluptuousness.[68] The painting makes us aware of the incubus's weight upon the sleeping woman's belly, a weight that is oppressive as well as sexual in that it implies two bodies touching, figuring the dreamer's sexual arousal.

In my photograph, I am the demon who is sitting on this man's lower torso, hiding his penis and distorting the shape of his body. I am neither an incubus nor a succubus (a demon in a female form), but something in between, or a combination of both. The nudity of the subject suggests an erotic scene, while my turtleneck top and tights refuse to show any sexual seductiveness towards him. My attitude and my clothes, furthermore, suggest the *maîtresse* of a sado-masochistic scene.

Another example is my photograph *The Death of Actaeon (2020)*, which is inspired by Titian's painting of the same title. The original painting depicts the moment when the goddess Diana is hunting Actaeon after she found out that Actaeon had been looking at her bathing naked in the woods. Unlike the female nude described by Hammer-Tugendhat, Diana is shown as an active, upright and even aggressive hunter, rather than a passive embodiment of beauty and eroticism.

In my photograph, I am shown about to shoot an arrow at the naked man beyond the window. The man is the one who is being looked at, while I am both the looker and the hunter. It is evident that I do not always take the male role in the scene, but the more dominant and powerful one, regardless of sex. This is because instead of simply reversing the gender roles, I am more interested in questioning and challenging the dyadic looking relationship between the active looking subject and the passive looked-at object.

Painting always involves the gaze of others – with icons, the gaze of

67. Charles Stewart, 'Erotic Dreams and Nightmares from Antiquity to The Present', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* 8.2 (2002), 279-309 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.00109>.
68. Richard Peter Treadwell Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil, And Ruin* (New York: North Point Press, 1999), p. 23.

Fig. 2.9
Titian, *The Death of Actaeon*, c. 1559–1575

Fig. 2.10
The Death of Actaeon, 2020

Gods; with civic art, the gaze of public authorities; with easel paint-
ing, the gaze of artist and patron – but it is not the gaze as the Oth-
er's gaze that serves paintings' function in desire.[69]

The complex relationship between the painter, the painted scene and the viewer
of the painting plays a significant part in Lacan's discussion of the gaze. For Lacan,
painting is 'a play of *trompe-l'œil*,'[70] which involves looking, desire and the gaze. As
a feast for the eye, painting lures the viewer into a trap for the gaze, in which what
is shown to us is not what we wish to see.

On the other hand, Eunice Golden depicts male nudes as abstracted landscapes to
express her sexual desire and challenge the discrepancies between the representa-
tions of female nudes and male nudes in art history. For instance, in her painting
Purple Sky (1969), Golden paints the naked form of a man reclining across the can-
vas, headless, his fingers around the base of his erect penis, that juts out against a
purple nocturnal sky. The form of the male body and the abstract topography of the
landscape interpenetrate, reterritorialising the sexed male body as geographical,
cultural and sexual terrain for the female viewer.[71]

As I worked on this image I felt myself penetrating the painting's sur-
face and cloaking myself in the skins of the male body landscape, but
as a woman, in corporating my body with this, thereby transcending
his power and reclaiming my own. In this androgenous state I could
even emphathise with his eroticism as he caressed his genitals.[72]

In her film *Blue Bananas and Other Meats* (1973), Golden makes a feast of the penis,
which she decorates with an assortment of vegetables, cheese, fruits and yogurt
covered with chocolate syrup, in the order in which they would have been served

---

69. Catherine Marie Jennings, 'Paintings and The Nuanced Gaze: Studies in The Application, Com-
plication, And Limitations of Psychoanalytic Gaze Theory' (unpublished PhD thesis, Texas Tech Uni-
versity, 2001).
70. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p.103.
71. Aliza Edelman, 'Eunice Golden's Male Body Landscapes and Feminist Sexuality', *Woman's Art
Journal*, 41 (2020), 16–28 (21).
72. Eunice Golden, 'The Male Nude in Women's Art: Dialectics of a Feminist Iconography', *Heresies:
A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, 3 (1981), 40–42 (40).

Fig. 2.11
Eunice Golden, *Purple Sky*, 1969

Fig. 2.12
Eunice Golden, film still from *Blue Bananas and Other Meats*, 1973

were it a meal. Aliza Edelman argues that Golden's film intentionally references Meret Oppenheim's performance *Spring Feast* (1959), in which a naked woman becomes the table upon which a banquet is served.[73] What comes to my mind is Gustave Courbet's painting *L'Origine du Monde* (1866), in which a naked woman is lying on a bed with her legs wide open. However, whereas the female genitalia in Courbet's painting is offered to the gaze, the penis as cornucopia, a symbol of plenty in Golden's film, invites a cannibalistic fantasy of ingestion and incorporation. The food also works to both magnify and occult the penis; at once transfigured penis, and the veil that is the very condion of the phallus.

As discussed in the first chapter, the phallus is a signifier of desire, which has to remain veiled. In my photographic diptych *The Veil (2020)*, a naked man, seen from the front and the back, stands behind a ribbed glass door. It is as if the glass slices the body into multiple vertical sections. The ribbed glass is the veil that blurs and distorts the view of this man into a genderless form. The blurred body behind the door reminds me of Pierre Bonnard's paintings, in which the female body is rendered in soft brush strokes. In my photographs, the glass door is the brush that turns an explicit image of a male nude into an indistinct image, an image that invites us to wonder what is behind the door.

Other female artists have been exploring the male body in their practice, such as May Stevens' phallic-like portraits of the patriarchal power in her *Big Daddy* series, Sarah Lucas' humorous sculptures of the male anatomy that consist of ordinary objects like vegetables, fruits and mattresses, and Martha Edelheit's erotic paintings of the reclining male nude. However, Golden argues that it is difficult for female artists to claim a female erotica, as 'there is no voyeuristic tradition for women.'[74] This reminds me of comments about my earlier work *My Tinder Boys (2017)*, in which I photographed different men I met through Tinder, naked in their kitchens: those photographs, I was told, appear to have been taken by a male homosexual photographer. The assumption here reveals certain preconceptions about the male nude and homoeroticism, implying that the voyeuristic gaze onto the male body can only be masculine. I would argue that the voyeuristic gaze is not gendered, never-

---

73. Edelman, 24.
74. Golden, 42.

Fig. 2.13
The Veil, 2020

theless, the sexual imagery within female artists' works seem to be less accepted and understood.

> Censorship functions on many levels, preventing women from developing a female erotica [...] they may find that the sexual imagery within their work is denied, or even disclaim it themselves [...] There should be a place in women's art where intimacy can be defined in terms that are very broadly sexual: a prophetic art whose richness of fantasy may unleash a healthy appetite for a greater sense awareness as well as unmask the falacies of male power.[75]

In another work, *The Feast, Inside (2020),* I work with another female photographer, Steph Wilson, to explore more complex looking relationships to expand my investigation of the question of the gaze. Looking at classical oil paintings of female nudes in art history, — such as William-Adolphe Bouguereau's *The Nymphaeum* (1878) and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *The Turkish Bath* (1862), we try to construct our own fantasies of erotic desire by creating a 'cornucopia of naked men'. In a sense, this 'feast of men' is inspired by, and also my response to, the general fantasy of the powerful man in his harem.

In *The Feast, Inside (2020),* a large painting on the back wall, which depicts revellers and maenads – the female followers of Dionysus, the god of wine in Greek mythology – enjoying the festivities. In the painting, men, women and children in various states of undress are dancing around in flirtatious indulgence. In contrast, the figures are static and no one seems to be looking at anyone in the photograph. People are staring in emptiness, creating a sense of extreme detachment between the figures. In this scene, where bodies are not touching and eyes do not meet, the gaze, which is different from the look, is detached from the eyes and constantly drifting among the photographers, the naked men, the painting and the photographic scene itself.

---

75. Golden, 42.

Fig. 2.14
The Feast, Inside, 2020

3. The Complexity of the Gaze

It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me – You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you! […] if what Petit-Jean said to me, namely, that the can did not see me, had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically.[76]

Jacques Lacan

76. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 96.

3.1 The Gaze, the Look and the Eye

What is the gaze? The problem with the question of the gaze is that the definition of this term – the gaze – is usually unclear. In Sartre's work *Being and Nothingness,* the gaze is conflated with the act of looking, which can be given by not only the literal eye, but also an implication of the Other's presence. For Sartre, the Other, with the capital O, is the 'indispensable mediator between myself and me', which brings me the full recognition of 'all the structures of my being'.[77] Based on the Hegelian dialectic of master and servant, Sartre designates a dyadic active-passive relationship between the looking subject and the looked-at object.[78]

> I am fixing the people whom I see into objects; I am in relation to them as the Other is in relation to me. In looking at them I measure my power.[79]

The Other is objectified through my look upon him or her and could be apprehended as a subject only when he or she sees me. The act of seeing creates a distance between me and the things I look at, which dissociates me from the Other's world of being and makes these things become a part of my perception. The Other no longer exists as a subject in the same temporal space with me, but as an object in my observation and conjectural comprehension.

> By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgement on myself as an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other.[80]

Sartre further states that the Other's look causes in us a feeling of vulnerability and shame. Being looked at is being in a potentially dangerous situation in which one does not have full control. When someone is looked at, their vulnerable body is exposed to the potential precariousness, as the looker can see where one is and

---

77. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 284.

78. Richard Boothby, 'Figurations of the Objet a', in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 168.

79. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* p. 266.

80. Ibid, p. 302.

what one is doing without one knowing their intentions. On the other hand, the look from the Other challenges one's subjective freedom and invokes one's fear of being judged by the Other, which is a source of shame.

In contrast, Lacan separates the gaze from the look, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty's idea of the pre-existing gaze that constantly looks at us from all sides.[81] Unlike Sartre's either/or dichotomy of the looking subject and the looked-at object, Lacan suggests a multi-layered triangular relationship between the spectator, the spectacle and the gaze, in which the positions of both the subject and the object can be interchanged and occupied simultaneously. The gaze does not simply objectify the subject, but actually sustain and constitute the subject in a function of desire.[82] For Lacan, the gaze is a third locus in the dynamic of the scopic drive, which indicates not only the desire to look, but also to be looked at as the desired object of the Other's gaze. Thus, the gaze is 'the *object petit a* in the field of the visible.'[83]

> In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze.[84]

As discussed in the last chapter, the *objet petit a* is the phallus – the signifier of desire, which is essentially lacking and has to remain veiled. In the scopic field, the gaze is the *objet petit a*, which is veiled by the eye. For Sartre, the gaze is not necessarily equivalent to the eye, whereas the gaze and the eye are never the same for Lacan. As Lacan says, 'the eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field.'[85] The split between the gaze and the eye is the split between the unconscious and the conscious. In the dynamic of the scopic drive, the gaze slips away from the actual image, from the conscious eye, gazing at the phallus in the realm of the unconscious.

---

81. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1968).
82. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 84-85.
83. Ibid, p. 75.
84. Ibid, p. 73.
85. Ibid.

Under the constant gaze of the Other in this spectacle of the world, the subject not only sees but also gives itself to be seen. But for whom? For the Other. As Lacan says, 'what determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside.'[86] The gaze is a stimulating vortex, around which the drives to see and to be seen circulate. In other words, the gaze is the signifier of our desire of what the Other desires in the field of the visible.

86. Ibid, p.106.

3.2 The Gendered Gaze

3.2.1 The Male Gaze

As mentioned above, in his *Ways of Seeing*, Berger discusses how women have been the looked-at objects for the male viewers throughout the history of art.[87] Berger states that while men survey women, a woman is both the surveyor and the surveyed, as she is constantly surveying how she herself is being surveyed by men.

> Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at [...] Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.[88]

For Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, Berger extends Marx's theory about commodity fetishism to describe the unequal gender relations of looking, in which everything has become an exchangeable commodity.[89] The inequalities of power derived from social values are implanted in the process of image making, creating a dichotomy between the active male surveyor and the passive surveyed female inherent in the look.

Similarly, in Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', she discusses this unequal looking relationship between men and women and proposes her conception of the male gaze.[90]

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance cod-

---

87. Berger, pp. 45-64.
88. Berger, p. 47.
89. Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, 'The Gaze Revisited, Or Reviewing Queer Viewing', in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 18.
90. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

ed for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.[91]

Mulvey points out that in classic narrative cinema, the spectacle is always female, while the spectator is always male, or masculinised. The female characters are normally displayed as the erotic object, either for the male characters within the narrative of the film or for the audiences.[92] Mulvey's discussion of the gaze is clearly based on an active men/passive women dichotomy between the looking subject and the looked-at object, which owes more to Sartre's notion of the look than Lacan's theory of the gaze. In this case, the gaze is limited to the act of looking and understood as a form of mastery, which is fundamentally masculine as a product of our patriarchal society.

In his essay 'The Difficulty of Difference', David Rodowick stresses that this rigid binary logic leaves no place for the female subject, except as 'an absence, a negativity defining castration and the not-masculine, or as a yet unrealised possibility.'[93] Rodowick argues that what is missing in Mulvey's essay is an acknowledgement of the logic of the unconscious, which does not obey the logic of consciousness. Consequently, she could only imagine a viewing position for women that equates with their actual sex and the sex of the women on the screen. In her later essay, she recognises this and proposes another 'viewing position' for women in identification with the masculine position – to be understood as 'active'.[94] In the unconscious, the subject shifts positions in identification, regardless of its sex and gender. The later idea of fantasy as a staging of desire helps to further distance the individual from sex and gender determinism, as the subject in fantasy takes up a position or multiple positions in relation to its desire and not in accordance with its sexual identity.

Furthermore, Joan Copjec argues that film theory's interpretation of the Lacanian gaze is in fact a 'Foucauldization' of Lacan.[95] In Michel Foucault's book *Discipline*

91. Ibid, p.19.
92. Kenneth Mackinnon, *Uneasy Pleasures: The Male as Erotic Object* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1997).
93. David Norman Rodowick, *The Difficulty of Difference* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 16.
94. Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Inspired by King Vidor's Duel in the Sun', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).
95. Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire* (Cambridge; London: The MIT Press, 1994).

and Punish, he develops the idea of the panoptic gaze, which refers to the architectural plan for a prison by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, which was termed Panopticon. The architectural panopticon has a circular structure that houses the cells around a watchtower at its centre. The prison guard is able to observe all the prisoners from the watchtower, without being seen by the them. Therefore, the prisoner is 'seen but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication.'[96] Unable to see inside the watchtower, the prisoners never know whether they are being watched and therefore behave at all times as if they were.

According to many film theorists, including Metz, Jean Louis Baudry, Jean Louis Comolli and Stephen Heath, the screen of the cinema is like a mirror, which positions the subject as master of the image.[97] For Paula Murphy, this is a misinterpretation of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, in which the subject is essentially split or divided, instead of the stable and complete subject described in film theory.[98] Departing from this, Copjec points out that Foucault thinks of desire 'not only as an effect, but also as a realisation of the law.'[99] In contrast, for Lacan desire is never realised, and is both stimulated and repressed by the law. Therefore, Copjec argues that there is no psychoanalytic subject in film theory, but in fact a Foucauldian reading of the Lacanian gaze. This misinterpretation of psychoanalytic theories will be discussed and elaborated further on in section 4, The psychoanalytic gaze, below.

3.2.2 The Female Gaze

Even though Berger does not argue for the existence of a singular gendered gaze and the subject of Mulvey's essay is classic Hollywood cinema, their work has been broadly cited in support of the idea of a gendered gaze endowed with the power

---

96. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1979), p. 200.
97. Copjec, p. 21.
98. Paula Murphy, 'Psychoanalysis and Film Theory Part 2: Reflections and Refutations', *Kritikos*, 2.1552-5112 (2005) <https://www.intertheory.org/psychoanalysis2.htm> [Accessed 3 January 2021].
99. Copjec, p. 24.

to subjugate. Mulvey's well-known concept of the 'male gaze' has almost become 'a metaphor for "patriarchy"', which oversimplifies the complexity of the gaze and perpetuates the binary view of gender.[100] In relation to the male gaze, there has also been significant discussion of the female gaze in the context of with other feminist issues in recent years, raising the question: what is the female gaze?

In Laura Hinton's essay '(G)Aping Women; Or, When A Man Plays the Fetish', she analyses the male protagonists in the TV show *I Love Lucy* (CBS, US, 1951–1957) and the film *Notorious* (US, 1946) to explore the possibility of a male fetishised body.[101] In both cases, Hinton notices that there are several moments when these men are looked at by the female characters. However, the male spectacles are always somehow feminine, while the portrayal of the women spectators is either unflattering or as emotionless, and even masculinised to some extent. Hinton argues that the woman's gaze upon the man feminises him and puts him in the position conventionally assigned to the woman in those classic films and TV series. Apart from this, Hinton stresses that the bisexuality inherent in all subjects is revealed when men become the object of desire under these women's gaze.

Why does being looked at make the male spectacle bisexual? This argument suggests that even when a man is being looked at by a woman, he is either being looked at and desired by another 'man' – the masculinised female spectator or has been feminised by the gaze of the female looker. In both scenarios, what Hinton implies here is that the looker is perpetually masculine while the looked-at is essentially feminine. Even though Hinton's essay discusses a range of fetishism, which could involve either a female or male form, the discourse around the gaze is still within the binarism of the active male looking subject and the passive female looked-at object.

In Sartre's book *Nausea*, the main character, Antoine Roquentin looks at himself in the mirror, finding his own body is 'nothing new' but 'familiar stuff', which is the same mass of flesh as others', an object that contains heterosexual desire. The mo-

---

100. Evans and Gamman, p. 12.

101. Laura. Hinton, '(G)Aping Women; Or, When A Man Plays the Fetish', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 48.2 (2007), 174-200 <https://doi.org/10.1353/frm.2007.0012>.

ment he realises this disturbing nature of his sexual body, he feels nauseous and disgusted by himself.[102] His confusion and anxiety about the sexuality of the male body is shown more explicitly in one of his dreams:

> I gave Maurice Barres a spanking. We were three soldiers and one of us had a hole in the middle of his face. Maurice Barres came up and said to us: 'That's fine!' And he gave each of us a bunch of violets. 'I don't know where to put it,' said the soldier with the hole in his head. Then Maurice Barres said: 'You must put it in the middle of the hole you've got in your head.' The soldier replied: 'I'm going to stick it up your arse.'[103]

In this dream, all men have holes (in both faces and arses). Instead of reading it as a homosexual fantasy, in her doctoral thesis 'The Gaze in Theory', Melinda Jill Storr states that this dream shows Roquentin's 'anxiety about the sexuality and facticity of the male body in general'.[104] In addition, it is noticeable that this dream happens straight after the dream about the municipal park, which ends with the statue of the Velleda of this public park pointing a finger at her 'hole'. The sexual desire that is aroused by the female 'hole' but projected onto the male 'hole' shows Roquentin's confusion and inability to distinguish between masculinity and femininity.

This inability to distinction between the male body and the female body is vividly presented in Lili Dujourie's work *Zonder Titel* (1977). In this group of six black-and-white photographs, it is hard for the viewers to discern the gender of the model with long hair, who is lying delicately on the floor with the long hair. He looks soft, beautiful and fragile, instead of autonomous, aggressive and masculine. According to Dujourie, even the model himself was surprised at how feminine a male body could look, and most male viewers felt uncomfortable when they were confronted with the male fragility suggested in this work.[105]

---

102. Melinda Jill Storr, 'The Gaze in Theory: The Cases of Sartre and Lacan' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 1994), pp. 86-86.
103. Sartre, *Nausea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 89.
104. Storr, p. 87.
105. Sophie Lauwers, 'Lili Dujourie – Poetic Strategies', in *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s : the Samlung Verbund Collection, Vienna* (Munich: Prestel, 2016), p. 213.

Fig. 3.1
Lili Dujourie, *Zonder Titel [Untitled],* 1977, © Photo: Kristien Daem

Apart from exploring the fluidity between masculinity and femininity mentioned above, numerous artworks about the female gaze tend to focus on femininity, female identity and representation. In Charlotte Jansen's book *Girl on Girl: Art and Photography in the Age of the Female Gaze*, she highlights a wide range of photographic works by different female photographers, amongst whom are Juno Calypso and Aneta Bartos.[106] As the title of the book indicates, the female gaze in question is the gaze of women on women. Similarly, in a 2020 exhibition at Marcelle Joseph Projects, London, *Monster/Beauty: An Exploration of the Female/Femme Gaze*, all the artworks exhibited were about the female body. There were no representations of the male body in the exhibition, except for a clay made 'boyfriend' lying in the bed with the artist in Mary Stephenson's work *Pillow*.

It seems that the discourse on the gaze has been restricted by attributing a biological sex to the act of looking. One of the main problems is that the sex and gender of the one who looks is unquestionably taken as determining how one looks, asuming that there is a gendered gaze inherent in the act of looking. However, following this logic, in which subjects are fully conscious and enjoy stable and unquestionable identity, I would argue that a woman can look at and portray another woman or herself as would a man look at and portray a woman; or, in other words, a woman can also apply the so called "male gaze" onto the female body. More importantly, as discussed in earlier chapters, the gaze does not identify with any gender in the dimension of unconscious fantasy.

The statement on the *Monster/Beauty* exhibition says that the artist's own nude or semi-clad body 'cripples the male gaze with its radical narcissism.'[107] Looking at Calypso's or Bartos's hyper-feminine depictions of female nudes, it is difficult to draw a clear line between the active feminine body that renders the female artist's narcissistic or erotic fantasy and the passive sexy female body that embodies the male viewer's visual pleasure. Even though the intention of these works is 'privileging feminine genius and womxn viewers',[108] one can argue that the feminine

106. Charlotte Jansen, *Girl on Girl: Art and Photography in The Age of The Female Gaze* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2017).
107. *Monster/Beauty: An Exploration of The Female/Femme Gaze*, 2020 <http://lycheeone.com/wp/female-gaze-press/> [Accessed 3 January 2021].
108. Ibid.

Fig. 3.2
Aneta Bartos, *Spread (from 4 Sale),* 2011

Fig. 3.3

Juno Calypso, *The Honeymoon Suite,* 2015

body created for women, which is still broadly sexualised in the current world, can always be interpreted as an embodiment of the male viewer's erotic desire, as the artist cannot determine how the work is viewed and by whom.

The female gaze is thus partly created as a refusal of the male gaze, in aiming to present women with agency through woman's rather than men's eyes, trying to create a world that is all by women and all about women. Nevertheless, British writer Anna Marie Smith argues that this ideal 'by women, for women and about women' world, in which there is nothing but 'the pure reflection of the "truth" about women's sexuality', is in fact self-contradictory and unattainable.[109] In such a women-only space, where we do not need to prove who we are as a woman to each other, why do we need to represent ourselves to ourselves?

Smith stresses that the phrase 'by women, for women and about women' has become not only a feminist seal of approval but also a marketing strategy. In October 2020, the Spanish clothing brand Zara launched their first lingerie collection with a campaign photographed by a female photographer, Annemarieke van Drimmelen. The campaign consists of a series of black-and-white photographs of young, slim models wearing Zara's lingerie products. In a sense, this is a perfect example of a project that is by women – a female photographer, for women – female customers and about women – female models in the pictures.

However, if we look at these photographs closely, we see that most of these models are depicted in a conventional way that mainly focuses on their slim and sexy bodies, their heads cropped by the frame. In an article for the *Elephant* magazine, Jansen described these images as 'disembodied objectification, in which the objectified model is simply shown as a product, is that it encourages us to see women as commodification.'[110] These photographs are neither for women, nor about women, but only represent the liberation of capitalism, in which the desire for emancipation is conflated with, and reduced to, buying more things. As Nina Power says,

109. Anna Marie Smith, '"By Women, For Women and About Women" Rules Ok? The Impossibility of Visual Soliloquy', in *A Queer Romance* (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), pp.215-220.92.
110. Charlotte Jansen, 'Zara's Female Gaze Collection Is Cynical Capitalism at Its Worst', *ELEPHANT*, 30 October 2022 <https://elephant.art/zaras-female-gaze-collection-is-cynical-capitalism-at-its-worst-30102020/> [Accessed 11 July 2022].93. Storr, p. 87.

Fig. 3.4

'The Female Gaze' collection, Zara. Annemarieke van Drimmelen, 2020

in her book *One-Dimensional Woman*,

> FeminismTM is the perfect accompaniment to femme-capitalTM
> [...] To Freud's infamous question, 'what do women want?' it seems,
> then, that we have all-too-ready an answer. Why! They want shoes
> and chocolate and handbags and babies and curling tongs washed
> down with a large glass of white wine and a complaint about their
> job/men/friends (delete as appropriate). This model of contempo-
> rary womanhood, as specific to advanced industrialized countries as
> it is, is everywhere.[111]

In this case, the 'seal of approval' has failed us: it cannot guarantee either the ef-
fects of the image, nor an ideal world that excludes any otherness and is purely
'by women, for women and about women.' This female-only space is eventually
constructed as a non-male space, within the existing binary dichotomy of men and
women.

3.2.3 The Queer Gaze

Last but not least, it is often argued that this essentialist model of the gendered
gaze does not take into account non-binary, queer relations of looking. In their es-
say 'The Transatlantic Gaze: Masculinities, Youth and the American Imaginary',
Hearn and Melechi points out two problems in the concept of the male gaze: the
heterocentrism of the discourse and the dichotomy between homosexuality and
heterosexuality.[112]

In the book *Switch Hitters*, Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel compiled eighteen
short stories[113], in which these queer boys and girls fantasise about each other's

---

111. Nina Power, *One-Dimensional Woman* (Winchester, UK: 0 [Zero] Books, 2009), pp. 29-30.

112. Jeff Hearn and Antonio Melechi, 'The Transatlantic Gaze: Masculinities, Youth and The Amer-
ican Imaginary', in *Men, Masculinities and The Media* (California; London; New Deli: Sage Publica-
tions, 1992), p. 215.

113. Switch Hitters: Lesbians Write Gay Male Erotica and Gay Men Write Lesbian Erotica, ed. by
Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel (Cleis Press, 1996).

sexual experiences. Through cross-gender writing, one can imagine not only switching to another gender, but also desiring another sexed body. This idea of switching, or the idea of genderfuck, allows the subject to drift across sex and gender, which 'destablises the boundaries of our recognition, of sex, gender, and sexual practice.'[114]

'What is the difference between a woman with a strap-on and a man?' June L. Reich asks this question in her work 'Genderfuck: The Law of the Dildo' to discuss the function of a dildo in a butch-femme sexual relationship. As the dildo has been often considered as a substitution of penis, lesbian penetration is conflated with heterosexual intercourse. However, Reich argues that the dildo could work as the phallus symbolically, which signifies difference without essentialising gender.[115]

> Genderfuck could be said to be the effect of unstable signifying practices in a libidinal economy of multiple sexualities [...] The ambiguity of the system is its interplay and constant negotiation between the meaningful productions of sex/gender, on the one hand, and gender/sexual performance, on the other. It is a discourse of pleasure, producing desire in a subject who is able to get over herself and have it make a difference. [116]

The dildo is not the penis, but frequently looks like a penis that has a glans and sometimes even two testicles, which perform no reproductive function rather than some decorative effect. When a woman wears a dildo, she adopts the masculine position in sexual intercourse while maintaining her feminine body. In a sense, the dildo is a mimicry, a masquerade of the lacking phallus, which is always erect and posits a gaze that does not subscribe to 'any heterosexist or anatomical truths about the relations of sex to gender'.[117]

Similarly, Evans and Gamman argue that through playing with binary opposition, genderfuck 'moves towards a model of gender as a simulacrum (without an original)', and critique the emphasis on 'essential' identities in gaze theory and stress

---

114. June L. Reich, 'Genderfuck: The Law of the Dildo', *Discourse*, 15 (1992), 112–27 (113).
115. Ibid, 120.
116. Ibid, 125.
117. Ibid, 113.

how queer identifications can help us understand the complexity and fluidity of the spectatorial subject position.[118] 'Because identity itself is not fixed, it is inappropriate to posit any single identification with images.'[119]

Evans and Gamman claim that the psychoanalytic framework adopted by Mulvey in gaze theory is not sufficient to explain our cross-gender experiences of viewing and ignores other important aspects of subjectivity, such as ethnicity and class. Queer theory would offer a space for spectatorial fluidity according to a model of identifications which can be multiple, shifting and changeable.

However, the problems with many existing conceptualisations of the gaze are not the psychoanalytic framework itself, but the misunderstandings of those psychoanalytic theories by many film theorists. In fact, this fluidity that queer theory argues for is actually fundamental to psychoanalytic thinking. In the dimension of the unconscious, the subject takes up a position, or multiple positions in relation to its desire and not in accordance to its sexual and/or gender identity. As Cavanagh writes:

> Sexuality is, in itself, queer by Freudian definition […] Nobody grows up straight, let alone normal, from the perspective of unconscious sexuality. Likewise, masculinity and femininity are, for Freud, about the outward or inward distribution of libido. There is something about the societal requirement to become "feminine" or "masculine" (not both) that causes enormous psychic suffering.[120]

Therefore, if we want to expand our understandings of the gaze, we have to go back to those psychoanalytic theories, instead of abandoning them.

---

118. Evans and Gamman, p. 51.
119. Ibid, p. 41.
120. Sheila L. Cavanagh, 'Queer Theory, Psychoanalysis, And the Symptom: A Lacanian Reading', Studies in *Gender and Sexuality*, 20.4 (2019), 226-230 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2019 .1673974>.

3.3 The Psychoanalytic Gaze

In his essay 'A Child Is Being Beaten', Freud discusses a common childhood fantasy of beating and how this fantasy is transformed differently between by girls and boys, to explore the origin and structure of fantasy and the interplay between masochistic and sadistic perversion. He remarks that this fantasy is differently articulated by girls and boys. For girls, there are three sequences of the beating fantasy: (1) the girl sees her father beating another child whom she hates; (2) she is being beaten by her father; (3) she sees a father substitute – a teacher beating children, usually boys. The second phase is unconscious and never remembered – or in Freud's words 'in a sense […] has never had a real existence.'[121] In contrast, this fantasy only appears as two stages in boys: (1) the boy is being beaten by his father; (2) he is being beaten by the mother or other women. The first stage is unconscious while the second one is conscious.

According to Freud, both the girl's and the boy's unconscious fantasies have their origin in oedipal attachment to the father, in which 'being beaten stands for being loved (in a genital sense)'.[122] It can be seen that the role of the adult beater or the beaten child changes during different stages of this beating fantasy, especially for girls, whose position changes from a sadistic witness to a masochistic victim and to a sadistic one again. However, it is worth noting that only the form of the third phase of the girl's fantasy is sadistic: the satisfaction of this phase is actually masochistic, as she enjoys a disguised and repressed incestuous pleasure through identifying with the victim – a boy.[123] This fantasy speaks of the movement of identifications in the unconscious, regardless of gender and sexual identities.

In this paper, Freud appears to equate femininity with passivity and the masochistic position, which is one of the foundations of Mulvey's gaze theory and also one of

---

121. Sigmund Freud, '"A Child Is Being Beaten" A Contribution to The Study of The Origin of Sexual Perversions', in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XVII (1917-1919), An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 185.

122. Ibid, p. 198.

123. Patrick Joseph Mahony, '"A Child Is Being Beaten" A Clinical, Historical, And Textual Study', in *On Freud' s* "*A Child Is Being Beaten*", 2nd edn (London: Karnac Books, 2013), pp. 79-80.

the main reasons for critiquing the psychoanalytic theories used in the conceptual-isation of the gendered gaze. However, Freud also stresses that 'we far too readily identify activity with maleness and passivity with femaleness'[124] in his later studies. There seems to be a confusion, or conflation, between the everyday common use of these terms and their psychoanalytic understanding. One might consider characterising femininity psychologically as giving preference to passive aims. This is not the same thing as passivity; to achieve a passive aim may call for a siginificant amount of activity. Furthermore, passivity has a negative connotation in a general sense, whereas both activity and passivity are used equally and neutrally in psychoanalytic theory. In a sense, passivity and activity are like the concave and the convex sides of the distribution of libido.

More importantly, if we look more closely at the meanings of these psychoanalytic terms, we understand that there is actually a more complex and interchangeable relationship between these oppositional pairs, such as activity/passivity and sadism/masochism. According to Freud, 'every instinct is a piece of activity; if we speak loosely of passive instincts, we can only mean instincts whose aim is passive.'[125] In other words, activity and passivity are different ways to achieve the aim of the instinct/drive. Similarly, in sadism/masochism, satisfaction is gained through either tormenting or being tormented. Masochism derives from sadism, but is turned around upon the subject's own self.[126] Additionally, masochists are in fact very active in pursuing pain and failure.[127] The transformation between these opposites indicates the possibility of their simultaneous presence in the same individual. As Freud says, 'a sadist is always at the same time a masochist'.[128]

Therefore, by approaching the notion of the gaze through psychoanalysis, the as-

124. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962), p. 53.

125. Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On The History of The Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers On Metapsychology And Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 122.

126. Ibid, pp. 109-140.

127. Jack Novick and Kerry Kelly Novick, *Fearful Symmetry: The Development and Treatment of Sadomasochism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), p. 31.

128. Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 123-246.

sumption of the gendered gaze put forward by Mulvey is thrown into crisis, as the unconscious does not recognise gender difference. In fact, psychoanalysis has been criticised for using an essentialist model – male and female – as nowadays there are other gender positions beside the masculine and feminine gender positions. Psychoanalytic theory, far more radically, posits a subject who never achieves a stable position, who never coincides with the gender position assigned by the Symbolic order.

So, what is the psychoanalytic gaze? As discussed in the first Section: 'The gaze, the look and the eye', according to Lacan, the gaze is the *objet petit a* in the field of the visible. In his book *The Real Gaze*, McGowan says:

> It is not the look of the subject at the object, but the gap within the subject's seemingly omnipotent look. This gap within our look marks the point at which our desire manifests in what we see. What is irreducible to our visual field is the way that our desire distorts that field, and this distortion makes itself felt through the gaze as object.[129]

In other words, the gaze is a manifestation of the real, which is an experience that is outside the Symbolic order – 'the structure supporting and regulating the visible world'.[130] One of the problems with the early Lacanian film theory is that it misinterpreted the gaze on the level of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, but not on the level of the Real.[131] The gaze is not an indication of what we see, but what we cannot see, which is the *objet petit a* of the scopic drive. For instance, we only desire to see something that is precisely not visible. The gaze is a lost object in the field of vision, which triggers the movement of desire and also marks the unattainability of the Other.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan uses Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) as an example to illustrate the site of the gaze. When the viewer looks frontally at the painting, they see two wealthy ambassadors and an anamorphic figure floating at the bottom centre of the painting. It is only

---

129. McGowan, p. 6.
130. Ibid, p. 3.
131. Ibid, p. 7.

Fig. 3.5

Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, 1533

when the viewer is about to move away from the painting and starts to see it from the right side that the shape resolves into a human skull. According to Lacan, this picture is 'a trap for the gaze',[132] which can look back at us and 'reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head.'[133] In a sense, the gaze is a disruption, or a stain, in the picture, which reminds us that there is nothing behind our desire but our own lack.

McGowan thinks that the gaze is not an actual object of desire that can be pinned down and shown directly, like the naked bodies in pornography, but a distortion in the seemingly neutral field of the visible. In films, the gaze can be depicted as 'a disturbance in our looking',[134] through either creating filmic fantasies or displaying the gaze as an absence. In my practice, I try to create different fantasies in either photographic or moving-image form, which are *mises-en-scène* of exhibitionism and voyeurism, as well as sadomasochism. These fantasies allow me to imagine obtaining the desired object – the power/control over those men, in other words, the desire for the phallus. The gaze is not simply my looking upon the man, but the fantasmastic distortion created in these scenes, which reflects my own lack – the phallus – and also provides an opening to an otherwise unreachable enjoyment that frees us from the constraints of ideology.

The male gaze as conceptualised by Mulvey is actually the look of the Other, through which the subject seeks recognition from the Other. However, the Other will never see us in the way that we want to be seen. As Lacan says, 'When [...] I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that – You never look at me from the place from which I see you.'[135] The gaze is the gap between the way we are being looked at and the way we want to be seen by the Other, which keeps us desiring. Therefore, to be free is not to obtain the gaze to have the power of vision, but to realise the impossibility of the gaze and the seduction of power.

It is not a purported male gaze that needs to be challenged, countered by a so-called 'female' gaze – it is the assumption that the Other seems to hold the gaze

---

132. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 89.
133. Ibid, p. 92.
134. McGowan, p. 28.
135. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 103.

and can see our true being that should be questioned. However, even though Mulvey's theory of the gendered gaze is a misinterpretation of the Lacanian gaze, and being the looker does not necessarily mean having power over the looked-at, one can argue that her revelation of the gender inequality in the relations of looking is still valid, considering that women have been the looked-at in most visual arts, films, advertisements, etc, for a fairly long time. In my opinion, the problem is not who is looking and who is being looked at, as the subject's position is never fixed. The problem is the presupposition that women need to seek recognition from the Other more than men do. The gender disparity is not between the male looker and the female looked-at, but between the dominance of male fantasies in the public realm – a fantasy that is created for men and by men – and other fantasies, if we understand the images as fantasies created for the subject to imagine the possibility of the impossible desire, not the desire itself.

In our contemporary image-driven age, in most 'developed' contries, both men and women have easily accessible resources to create fantasies for themselves. Everyone can look and be looked at. The gaze remains unattainable, but more ubiquitous, due to the constant connection with the Other via the Internet. In the following chapters, I will explore and discuss whether the convenience and accessibility of images and the constant connection of the Internet has changed the presupposition and the disparity discussed above.

4. Looking Forward – The Drifting Gaze in the Internet Age

Everyone is at once a mouth that sucks on the images and an anus that gives the undigested, sucked thing back to the images.[136]

Vilém Flusser

136. Vilém Flusser, Into the Universe of Technical Images (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 66.

4.1 Living in the Age of the Image

With the development of technology and the Internet, everyone can easily make images or become images that can be looked at by the others and themselves. For instance, everyone can post carefully edited and selected images of themselves to create an online persona who broadcasts their lives and has real-time interactions with other online personas all day, every day. It is increasingly difficult to distinguish the boundaries between digital life and physical life, since almost every part of our life, from where we go to what we eat, or who we date, can be shared and documented on the Internet. The digital-born image, which can capture and translate the physical, algorithmic, aesthetic and political aspects of this multi-layered reality, has become a connection between physical and digital modes of existence in the age of the image.[137]

In *Excellences & Perfections*, Amalia Ulman pretended to be a girl who lives a consumerist fantasy life, posting photographs of specialist food, luxurious products and sexy selfies on her Instagram page. 'First, cute Tumblr-loving ingénue; next, a basic sugar baby who's into streetwear; and finally, a post-rehab wellness freak'[138] are the three personas Ulman adopted during this project. After three months of playing these scripted personas on Instagram, Ulman achieved around 90,000 followers and received hundreds of comments. This work then brought Ulman exhibitions and media exposure all over the world. The success of this fake Internet identity and of Ulman herself as an artist is characteristic of this age of information capitalism, in which the look from the others has become a form of capital.

In her interview with the *Financial Times*, Ulman talks about her project and says,

> I was born a woman: that's the life I've experienced so far, and I try
> to talk about what I know. But I feel that femininity has never come

137. Daniel Rubenstein, Johnny Golding and Andy Fisher, *On the Verge of Photography* (Birmingham: ARTicle Press, 2013), p. 8.
138. Amalia Ulman, 'Amalia Ulman: Why I Staged My Own Instagram Meltdown', *Financial Times*, 3 January 2020 <https://www.ft.com/content/d2cb7650-279b-11ea-9a4f-963f0ec7e134> [Accessed 12 March 2021].

Fig. 4.1
Amalia Ulman, *Excellences & Perfections,* 2014

"bae yr perfect"

"Skin goddess"

"Okayyy nice body"

"Nice belly button"

"You do blond well, but I like it dark...

WOW lotsa great Pics I never saw

on FB, so I went & liked them all :)"

"That's right, cry. I'm getting hott

watching this"[139]

---

139. Comments from Amalia Ulman's Instagram account <https://www.instagram.com/amaliaul-man/?hl=en> [accessed 20 June 2017].

naturally to me. For years I've felt that I had to "perform" a role in my everyday life just to fit in. So this project was an extension of that in a way […] I think Instagram popularity, when it comes to images of women, depends on where you are in the world. It seemed that in the US the formula, for a while, was to have a huge ass with surreal Brazilian butt-lift proportions.[140]

According to recent research about online self-representation, young women are frequently associated with selfie-taking.[141] Their self-representations on online social media platforms are considered either as empowering acts of self-assertion[142] or as narcissistic and deceptive popularity-seeking antics,[143] boring and repetitive in form.[144] In Ulman's work, she performs as one of these wannabe it-girls on Instagram to investigate the objectification of women on the Internet. Looking at Ulman's work and endless similar types of selfies on social media, the question raised here is: has the rapid expansion of social media reinforced sexism and gender stereotypes, or has it created new ways of looking and showing to emancipate us from the existing dichotomy between the male looker and the female looked-at?

In her article 'Feminism 2.0 – The Women Who Rule the Web', Tish Weinstock discusses how the Internet has affected female representation. While some people argue that the Internet has accelerated the objectification of women, she considers the Internet to be an empowering tool, with which women can represent and control our own images.

---

140. Ulman, 2020.

141. Anne Burns, 'Selfie Control: Online Discussion of Women's Photographic Practices as A Gendered Form of Social Discipline' (unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Loughborough University, 2015).

142. Amy McCarthy, '#Feministselfie Reinforces Why Selfies Are Empowering', *Bustle*, 2013 <https://www.bustle.com/articles/9421-feministselfie-reinforces-why-selfies-are-empowering> [Accessed 12 March 2021].

143. Tara M. Dumas and others, 'Lying or Longing for Likes? Narcissism, Peer Belonging, Loneliness and Normative Versus Deceptive Like-Seeking on Instagram in Emerging Adulthood', *Computers In Human Behaviour*, 71 (2017), 1-10 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.037>.

144. Lauren Oyler, 'How Instagram Makes You Basic, Boring, And Completely Deranged', *Vice*, 2017 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/vbbjbx/how-instagram-makes-you-basic-boring-and-completely-deranged> [Accessed 12 March 2021].

> We can now make the choice to post a sexy photo, and try and mimic the way Beyoncé or Miley or Kim Kardashian represent themselves. Or we can make the choice to post a photo where we are smiling with spinach in our teeth and a stain on our shirt.[145]

However, I would argue that this control over our images is actually a fantasy, and does not involve real power that would guarantee how the images would be perceived or distributed. Also, this so-called freedom to represent oneself as one wishes is always already subjected to the law of visibility. It is significant that the examples Weinstock gives of the personas one can 'choose' to adopt as a young woman, are all mainstream media celebrities. Furthermore, whether a sexy photo or an image of someone with spinach in her teeth, in the current age of the image, where everything has been shown and can be seen, these images are nothing new or radical, but are reiterations and re-articulations of dominant codes of representation disseminated through mass media. It is important to remember that the idealised, 'sexy' image takes its meaning and effect from its (implicit) comparison with a commonplace image, and vice versa.

More importantly, I think that the discourse around the gendered gaze itself needs to be questioned. The editors of the book *Re vision* use the notion of the panoptic gaze developed by Foucault to describe women's total visibility under the patriarchal eye:

> She carries her own Panopticon with her wherever she goes, her self image a function of being for another... The subjectivity assigned to femininity within patriarchal systems is inevitably bound up with the structure of the look and the localisation of the eye as authority.[146]

However, in the current Internet age, it is no longer only women who carry their own panopticon, but men as well, subject to the unverifiable gaze of our networked

---

145. Tish Weinstock, 'Feminism 2.0 - The Women Who Rule the Web', *i-D*, 21 July 2014 <https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/d3vz5x/feminism-20> [Accessed 22 March 2021].
146. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (eds.), Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism (American Film Institute Monograph series) (Los Angeles: University Publications of America, 1984), p. 14.

devices. People no longer make images, but instead live inside the images. The image exists before it is made, since we are continually posing for the anonymous other on the Internet. Under this ubiquitous and pervasive gaze, is it still plausible to discuss the power relationship inherent in the gaze based on the existing binary dichotomy of men and women? How does this kind of constant presence of the Other change our relation to images and others?

Instead of trying to escape from the gaze, it is precisely the look behind the screens that most people seem to seek nowadays. There are more and more people showing and sharing their lives on Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms, from which they can not only get attention, but also money. Everybody wants to be looked at, everybody wants to be a 'Hot Babe', everybody wants to be loved. As Hannah Black says,

> The Hot Babe is no one in particular, and neither are you. She "maintains her image," but not any particular image. The condition of the Hot Babe is invisibility or (the same thing) pure contentless visibility. Her image is the appearance of what cannot appear. Image, which is impossible, is itself a taboo on the impossible. All impossibilities (image, love, desire, sex) must be played out as possibilities: The Hot Babe volunteers to perform this necessary self-abasement. The Hot Babe is the embodiment of the flatness and emptiness of the image, but the very flatness and emptiness of the image, any image, is its uncanny fullness[147]

While Black thinks that the Hot Babe is a gendered concept, a she, a product generated through the commodification of women, I would argue that it is not only women, but men as well, who are objectified and drink desire 'like a matte surface repudiates light'[149] in the current age of the image. Neither a she nor he, the Hot Babe is like the phallus, a screen behind which there is nothing, just pure emptiness. The flawless face and the 'perfect' body, be it slim, curvaceous or muscular,

147. Hannah Black, 'Further Materials Toward A Theory of the Hot Babe', *The New Inquiry*, 2013 <https://thenewinquiry.com/further-materials-toward-a-theory-of-the-hot-babe/> [Accessed 18 April 2021].
148. Ibid.

all of which reminds the people in front of the screen of something they do not necessarily possess, create various ideals for different people to aspire to. The Hot Babe is an image of unattainability – a 'better than real life' fantasy, which is universally available but fundamentally unattainable. The difference between the fantasies created by films or books and the ones created online is that the accessibility of the Internet gives people a stronger illusion of possibility – the possibility of obtaining the unattainable. The 'ideal' image is no longer a hero or a princess played by impossibly attractive actors or actresses in films or TV shows, but someone on the screen of my phone, whose life seems to be almost as ordinary as mine.

> Every portrait is a record which says, "I once existed, and looked like this." These portraits say, in addition, "I was an object of respect and envy".[149]

The desire to present an idealised image of ourselves prevailed long before the Internet age, as can be seen in the portrait tradition in art history.[150] Berger describes these portrait paintings as more a documentation of a legacy rather than art, in which certain objects are selectively painted or omitted in order to depict the wealth and social status of the patron who commissioned the painting. Nowadays, the manipulation and distortion of portraits is commonplace. With the help of smartphones and photo editing applications, any flaw can be edited, and anyone can turn themselves into an 'ideal' image. Instead of saying, 'I once looked like this', these edited selfies say, 'I want to look like this, and I am an object of the look.'

Now, we are living not just under a pre-existing gaze, but living through the lens of this pervasive gaze in the current Internet age. Our lives have been captured and divided into fragments of a constructed online profile, which consists of 'ideal' images of ourselves from different perspectives. We look at things with this preconditioned gaze, constantly looking for someone, something or moments that are worth taking photographs of. For instance, before eating and enjoying the food at the restaurant, the first thing some of us do is to take a photograph of the dish and

---

149. John Berger, *John Berger / Ways Of Seeing, Episode 3 (1972)* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7wi8jd7aC4> [Accessed 2 September 2021], 15:11.
150. Kate Frew, 'The Age of the Instagram Portrait' (unpublished Postgraduate, Royal College of Art, 2020).

post it on social media. The Internet provides us with a constant connection to the world, or in other words, a persistent presence of the Other.

Therefore, the digital-born image has become less like a documentation of our lives, and more of a performance for the audience in front of the other side of the screen.[151] In her book, Danah Boyd points out that this audience is an imaginary audience, who is invisible, targeted and ideal.[152] The performer performs based on the presumed reactions of the imagined audience, who, in a sense, outlines the social context.[153] The desire to exist in the Other's gaze is structural to our being, since we define ourselves in relation to others. Even though there is no physical presentation or interaction online, the Internet offers us the constant connection of this all-seeing gaze and a fantasy of this seemingly more figurative audience through the immediate and measurable comments, 'likes' and 'followers'.

In her book *Showing Off!*, Jorella Andrews stresses that seeing is conflated with judging in the current image-world, creating circles of evaluation that are normally preconditioned and focus on the 'best of' an existing category.[154] It is true that the Internet allows almost everyone to post and share their various content equally, but the potential audience is mediated through platforms whose algorithms decide on the level of visibility to afford certain content. In other words, a seemingly democratic and inclusive space – the Internet also tends to celebrate what is popular and marginalise what is not. Even though what is popular on the Internet is less homogenous than what is popular in other forms of media, it is important to realise that all the various trends created online are still marketable trends like any other trend, which are simply classified and presented in an increasing number of subdivided categories. More importantly, the judges are also the creators of images, in other words, the looker is also the looked-at, locked in an all-pervasive logic of constant reciprocal evaluation.

---

151. Ibid.
152. Danah Boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 30-31.
153. Ibid.
154. Jorella Andrews, *Showing Off!: A Philosophy of Image* (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

Instead of being just an archive of past events, the digital-born image, which can instantly and simultaneously appear on any networked device across the world, evolves into an event itself through endless repetition and dissemination on the Internet. There is neither a linear chronology nor the signifying of truth in images on the Internet, but only scattered narratives and dispersed desire floating around them. In other words, these networked digital images can be seen not only for what they represent, but also for what they are.

> The digital image is actually a very accurate image, not of an external reality, but of the ways in which we as humans embody the network and how the network is intertwined with our embodiment.[155]

According to Lacan, 'man's desire is the desire of the Other.'[156] As discussed in the first chapter, the Other with a capital O does not mean any specific other or other people, but a radical otherness that 'transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary,'[157] and refers to two types of otherness in the order of both the Symbolic and the Real. The Other here I refer to is the Symbolic Other, which is equivalent to the language and the structure that construct our visible world. On these online social network platforms, we try to become the desired object of the Other by taking up various ready-made symbolic identities. The Internet facilitates this process of wondering about and becoming what others desire by providing us with immediate and convenient access to endless images/examples. We want to be seen, to be liked and followed, to become a shiny product, as described in David Bowie's song *Heroes*.

> No longer a subject, but an object: a thing, an image, a splendid fetish – a commodity soaked with desire, resurrected from beyond the squalor of its own demise.[158]

Even though many social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, usually promote themselves as places for sharing great moments of our lives with oth-

---

155. Rubenstein, Golding and Fisher, p. 13.
156. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 235.
157. Evans, p. 136.
158. Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of The Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), p. 49.

ers, I would argue that most social media platforms are in fact mainly for showing, rather than sharing. While sharing means conveying and expressing certain information and ideas to other people, showing emphasises presenting, performing and even promoting for a potential audience.

By endlessly posting every possible aspect of our lives on the Internet, we create an image-based virtual world where we are subject to the gaze of the Other more than ever before. How we look, what we eat, where we have been, what we have done, none of which seem to really exist or have ever happened unless we post it on the Internet. Even though we might not be ceaselessly posting every single thing or moment of our lives on social media platforms, the Internet provides us with the possibility of constant connection with the Other, which leaves us no break from the Internet gaze – an instant, omnipresent and digital gaze that can be easily translated between different devices, platforms and layers of data. In a sense, we only realise our existence through turning ourselves into images under the Internet gaze, which is constantly looking at us from all sides. We are like children under the constant gaze of the mother, relentlessly trying to show her, 'Look at me, look at what I have done!'

On the other hand, we are also trapped by this Internet gaze, through which the everlasting metonymy of desire is accelerated and intensified. As mentioned above, the Other functions in the order of both the Symbolic and the Real. In this image-based virtual world, the Symbolic Other is the structure that guides and regulates our existence on the Internet. It constructs our use of words, appearance and experience, creating unwritten rules and trends for us to follow. The difference between these structures on the Internet and the ones in real life is that the Internet rules or trends are created by both the users and the algorithm.

While humans' desire has a dimension of the unconscious, the algorithm only works in the conscious world. Using the binary digits 0 and 1 to store and process data, computers are significantly more methodical and deterministic than humans. With this binary and deterministic system, the algorithm tries to calculate and resolve our desire, as it would a mathematical question. Every individual is seen and stored as different data points, which can be collected, categorised, transferred and calculated for the purpose of encouraging more and more consumption.

The algorithm might be able to calculate what we like and lead us to want a lot of things, such as trendy clothes, the latest digital devices, or unlimited image content, but it cannot predict or resolve our desire, which is something fundamentally indescribable and unlocalisable. This brings us to the other dimension of the big Other – the Real, which is 'an unknowable "x", an unfathomable abyss of withdrawn-yet-proximate alterity'.[159] Nowadays, the Real Other is rendered and complicated through countless images posted online. We try to become what the Other desires by looking at and posting the "best" images on the Internet, in the same way that a child tries to compete with his or her siblings for the gaze of the mother. The attention span of this "mother" seems so short that we have to continuously provide increasingly more novel and provocative images to compete with thousands of other "siblings". However, trying to use the methodical algorithmic system to decode the fundamentally disordered unconscious world is doomed to fail. The instantaneousness and accessibility of the Internet confuses us with an illusion of reaching the Real Other, which in fact remains enigmatic and lacking.

In psychoanalytic theory, Freud uses the term scopophilia to describe the pleasure in looking, which consists of a pair of opposite drives: voyeurism and exhibitionism. The voyeur tries to glimpse at concealed parts of the other's body while hiding his or her own, in order to 'destroy the physical integrity of the person by substituting a dismembered body for the unified image.'[160] However, in the current age of the image, where there seems almost nothing hidden on the Internet, and everything can be viewed, transmitted and stored as fragments of data, what is left for the voyeur to see and dismember?

Voyeurism and exhibitionism have their origin in the child's uncomprehending confrontation with sexual difference. According to Lacan, the voyeur not only wants to be seen looking, but also

> does not allow himself to be blinded by sexual difference but cannot
> support the truth. He knows exactly what his mother is like, but tries

---

159. 'Jacques Lacan', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
160. Alain de Mijolla, *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), p. 1843.

to save his phallic image through some visual sleight-of-hand. More than anyone, he denies what he sees: the rift between the sexes, the fracture of bodies.[161]

With the increasing access to various images of supposedly private parts on the Internet, I would argue that the question of difference remains, and, more importantly, the refusal of sexual difference has actually been magnified, rather than reduced.

In this age of information capitalism, what we desire is conflated with what we consume, which is not only material objects but also immaterial images: millions of multivarious images on the Internet that form a kind of screen we look at. But this is not what we desire. What we desire is the phallus – the Hot Babe, by both looking at and trying to be one. What we desire is the gaze from the Other, like the way the child seeks for recognition and approval from the gaze of the mother. What we desire is a fantasy of connection and wholeness out of the virtual connection on the Internet, by using a computer or smartphone to replicate the voyeuristic situation, with its screen both a peephole and screen in front of which we feel we are hiding. The one who exhibits him/herself can fantasise about who is behind that screen, as well as the voyeur. However, there may in fact be nobody showing or looking, but only the algorithm doing its work and data created for the markets and economic imperatives. The gaze, more than ever, is thus detached from the eye.

---

161. Ibid.

4.2 Looking through the Digital Eye

From 1996 to 2003, Jennifer Ringley used a webcam to capture and upload pictures of her dormitory room (student bedroom) to her website *JenniCam*, continuously and without any kind of filter or editing.

> I use Timed Video Grabber to catch a picture from my Connectix QuickCam every minute. Every three minutes QuickKeys executes an AppleScript which tells Fetch to upload the picture … And the server sends it to you![162]

Anyone could look into Ringley's room, at the most mundane and intimate aspects of her everyday life, through a small window they would open on their desktop. Although there were programmes that allowed people to see each other via the Internet, Ringley chose neither to see nor interact with those who were looking at her. The webcam in Ringley's room provided a one-way window through which strangers could look at her without being seen by her.

Commentators on the *Jennicam* declared Ringley to be an exhibitionist. However, the power dynamic between Ringley and the viewer was not a one-directional active/passive relationship. According to Freud, voyeurism and exhibitionism are a pair of opposite drives that are closely bound up with each other and appear in an ambivalent manner.[163] As the original object of the scopophilic drive is part of the subject's own body,[164] a voyeur is also an exhibitionist, whose 'narcissistic subject is, through identification, replaced by another, extraneous ego.'[165] In other words, the exhibitionist is a voyeur in his or her unconscious through identification with the gaze upon him; the voyeur thus looks at his or her own body through imagin-

---

162. JenniCam homepage: www.boudoir.org, (now defunct), cited in Burgin, 'Jenni's Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude', *Critical Inquiry*, 27.1 (2000), 77-89 <https://doi.org/10.1086/448999>.
163. Freud stresses that during the early stage of the development of the ego, the subject's 'sexual instincts find auto-erotic satisfaction, "narcissism"'. Therefore, the scopophilic instinct, which is auto-erotic at all stages, involves 'a narcissistic formation'. From the active scopophilic instinct to the passive scopophilic instinct – exhibitionism, the subject 'returns to the narcissistic object' through identifying with an extraneous person. Freud, 'Instincts and their vicissitudes', pp. 113-138.
164. Ibid, p. 127.
165. Ibid, p. 129.

ing what others see of him. Therefore, in the play of identification Ringley would be both an exhibitionist and a voyeur, fantasised object and subject of the other's gaze, showing herself in order to imagine herself as others see her. Therefore, the positions of the exhibitionist and the voyeur are never fixed, but are fluid and interchangeable.

In his essay 'Jenni's Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude', Victor Burgin rejects the dominant appraisal of Ringley's behaviour solely in terms of 'exhibitionism' in the common and negative understanding of the term. While he retains the exhibitionist dimension that is structural to all subjectivity, he listens to what she actually says, and suggests that, for Ringley, who had recently left her parental home to go to university, the gaze of the webcam was a substitute for the maternal gaze.[166]

Burgin cites the book *Playing and Reality,* in which the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott discusses how the child can play alone and sometimes even take hazardous risks under the mother's gaze.[167] In Ringley's case, the webcam had provided her with this protective maternal gaze, under which she could show herself without inhibitions and also experiment with her occasional performances as a child would in front of her parents, testing the limits. Without either seeing the viewer, or even knowing that there was someone watching, simply showing photos of herself in her room on the Internet would give Ringley a sense of connection with others, fundamentally a confirmation of her existence for others, in the safety of the omnipresent maternal gaze.

While the media depicted her as an exhibitionist, she stated in an interview: 'I felt lonely without the camera.'[168] It seems that Ringley not only used her website to show herself, but also to be looked at, in other words, to be *looked after.* The look from the viewers here would not be perceived as a voyeuristic intrusion, but instead provided a kind of complimentary attention, which gratified her narcissism.[169] More

166. Burgin.

167. D. W Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London; New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986), p. 50.

168. WBEZ Chicago, 'Tales from the Net', on *This American Life*, June 7, 1997, interview by Ira Glass, cited in Burgin.

169. Narcissism is used here in a psychoanalytic sense, which is different from the meaning in everyday usage. Narcissism is structural to human subjectivity. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, narcissism is: 'By reference to the myth of Narcissus, love directed towards the image of oneself.' Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 255.
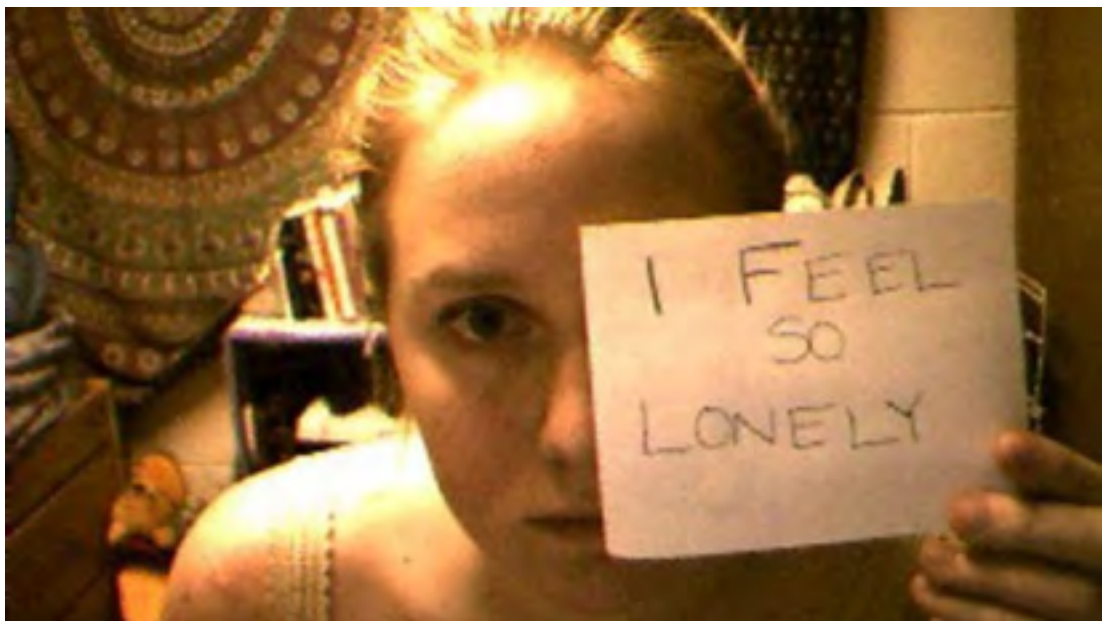
Fig. 4.2
Screenshot from JenniCam

importantly, this look does not demand a look in return. Like the child self-absorbed in her play, safely under the gaze of the mother who is out of her sight, Jenni plays under the gaze of the camera, only infrequently interacting with it,[170] always as a demand for attention free from the demands of others who are out of sight.

As mentioned above, Ringley had set up her webcam to continuously capture and upload pictures of her dorm room and herself within it, every three minutes. Ringley never switched the webcam off. In her answer to the question if she had ever censored the *JenniCam*, Ringley says 'I never know when the camera is going to take the picture, so I have no time to prepare, and I never feel a need to hide anything going on anyway.'[171] As she did not know when the pictures were taken, she could not prepare herself and perform for that instant. The eye of the webcam was always upon her, in a structural analogy of Foucault's panoptic gaze. In Bentham's panopticon prison, or in this case, the Jenni's room, Ringley did not know when the picture was taken, just as the prisoner does not know when the guard is watching at him or her: she felt herself being watched all the time.

On the other hand, these three-minute pauses may have created a gap in the watchful webcam gaze, which allowed Ringley to imagine the possibility of not being seen, even under the constant gaze, testing her own ability to live away from home, separate from the mother. As discussed in the first chapter, it is not only the absence, but also the constant presence of the mother which the child may come to find unbearable. Therefore, even though Ringley enjoys being looked at as a child who indulges herself in the presence of the mother, the child – in this case, Ringley – might imagine, in these moments when no photograph is taken, the possibility of separation in absence to develop her own desire. Thus the *JenniCam*, as apparatus, functions both to expose her to the outside world and to protect her under the imaginary maternal gaze in an everlasting process of learning to separate from the mother.

These intermittent still images are more than a mere documentation of Ringley's life; they form an active flow of desire that carries endless reflections of herself and

---

170. As when she did a 'sexy dance' with the result that she received salacious messages – the fantasy of the maternal gaze was temporarily shattered.
171. JenniCam, homepage.

every viewer of the website. Every image automatically captured and uploaded to her website shows an instant of Ringley's life. By continuously showing these unfiltered and discontinuous fragments of her everyday life, random blind spots are created for the viewer, which keeps them wondering and desiring: what have I missed seeing? Where is Jenny?

More importantly, although the webcam was on all the time, Ringley was not in her dorm room all the time. This means that the viewer was often looking into her empty room, waiting perhaps for her to return home, like a child who waits for the mother to come home. Every three minutes, the viewer could see a new picture that told them whether Ringley had come back or gone out again. During the three-minute interval between uploads, the viewer had the time to look around Jenni's room and at Jenni within the room till a new image replaces the previous one. Due to the slowness of the Internet connection at that time, when they looked at the image, Jenni was already doing something else. Therefore, what the viewer saw was always one single still image of an instant that had already passed, which functioned as a screen beyond which Jenni's life unfolded in real time.

For Ringley, the gaze of the webcam functioned as a substitute for the maternal gaze, while Ringley herself became the 'mother' to the viewer who was waiting in front of the computer screen for her return. The *JenniCam* functioned as a kind of fort/da game played by the viewer, who could open and close the window onto Jenni's room, invoking and revoking her presence, like the child who throws the cotton reel out of sight and pulls it back into sight, to symbolise its mother's departure and return. In a sense, through the *JenniCam*, Ringley and the viewer constructed a fantasy of a 'mother-child' connection with each other, in which the positions of the 'mother' and the 'child' were never fixed and always interchangeable.

In her book *The Body and the Screen*,[172] Michele White discusses how the relations of looking and spectatorial positions are reconstructed by women's webcams. Throughout her discussion, White rejects of the word 'user' in favour of the term 'spectator', thus foregrounding the scopic dimension of all relation to the screen, while the term 'operator' is used to insist on the active dimension of a form of exhi-

---

172. Michele White, *The Body and The Screen* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

bitionism conventionally conceived as passive. She references classic film theory to demonstrate that the spectator does not only 'use', but is also constructed by, the apparatus s/he is using. The virtual connection provided by the Internet makes webcams different from other cameras, in allowing both the operator and the spectator to show and see with no geographical boundaries. In addition, the 'real-time' aspect of webcams is supposed to deliver the spectator 'an unmediated reality' of the depicted scene, creating a fantasy of entering another space via the digital eye.

While some theorists think that the webcam reinforces the assumed traditional gendered looking relations, which they conceive of in terms of a passive female exhibitionist and an active male voyeur,[173] White argues that women webcam operators 'exert their authority and achieve agency' and break the active-passive power dynamic between the looker and the looked-at through their controlled visibility.[174] Women webcam operators nowadays can not only decide when, what and how they show themselves on the Internet, they can also regulate the spectator behaviour by setting up their own viewing rules and banning disruptive or unwanted spectators. For instance, one of the webcam operators, Aimee, describes her experiences as 'almost like being on your own TV show except that you own the network and make all the decisions.'[175]

Compared with edited images posted on social media platforms, images accessed through webcams are considered truer to life because they are perceived to be unmediated. The sense of physical closeness to a real person afforded by webcams, results in a different kind of looking when the digital and the human eye are conflated. Through the digital eye of the webcam, the viewer feels that he or she can not only see, but also enter another person's space. For instance, Steven Shaviro describes how he feels that Ringley has allowed him to enter her bedroom by letting him watch her sleep.[176]

---

173. Kristine Blair and Pamela Takayoshi, 'Introduction', in *Mapping Gendered Academic Spaces* (Stamford, CT: Ablex, 1999) <https://kairos.technorhetoric.net/2.2/coverweb/invited/kb3.html> [Accessed 4 July 2021].
174. White, p.12.
175. Aimee Live Profile – Internet Conferencing (now defunct), cited in White, p.68.
176. Steven Shaviro, 'Stranded in the Jungle--29', *Shaviro* <http://www.shaviro.com/Stranded/29.html> [Accessed 4 July 2021].

> She just lies there, passive and vulnerable. This body, this image,
> could be anyone's for the taking.[177]

Shaviro's uses the term 'body' and 'image' in a way as if they were interchangeable. However, it is only an image of Ringley's body, not the actual body, that he can see. This idea of a dominating gaze that enters and takes possession is only an illusion, a fantasy. As Katharine Mieszkowski says, 'webcams offer a strange mixture of distance and intimacy'.[178] This intimacy allows the looker and the looked-at to build a connection, in which both sides can gain some kind of virtual companionship. On the other hand, the distance allows them to enjoy looking and being looked at with no concerns about physical safety.

White argues that the closeness to the screen hinders the operation of voyeurism.[179] According to Metz, the distance between the looking subject and the looked-at object is an essential aspect of voyeurism.

> The voyeur represents in space the fracture which forever separates
> him from the object; he represents his very dissatisfaction (which is
> precisely what he needs as a voyeur), and thus also his "satisfaction"
> insofar as it is of a specifically voyeuristic type.[180]

In contrast, the Internet spectator is so close to the screen that they cannot see what they really desire to see. The distance here does not refer to the physical distance between two people on different sides of the screen, but the distance between the spectator and the screen, or in other words, the image shown on the screen. Whether it is small, big or even touchable, the screen allows the spectator to see any image he or she wants to, in almost any form, by simply clicking or touching the screen.

In psychoanalysis, the voyeur looks at what is forbidden and seeks pleasure by

---

177. Ibid.
178. Katharine Mieszkowski, 'Candy from Strangers', *Salon*, 2001 <https://www.salon.com/2001/08/13/cam_girls/> [Accessed 4 July 2021]
179. White, p. 77.
180. Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982), p. 59.

'seizing the other's image against its will.'[181] On the one hand, the digital eye seems to promise the spectator constant voyeurism, through which anyone can see almost anything they want to see, including images of supposedly private parts of other people's bodies, instantly and unlimitedly. On the other, this unhindered viewing is exactly what prevents the voyeuristic drive from working, as there is almost nothing forbidden or hidden anymore.

However, I would argue that voyeurism still operates in the context of the Internet. The distance that is conditional for voyeurism is sustained through the screen, which creates both a physical and a psychological distance between the looker and the looked-at. What one can see on the screen is never the "real" thing, no matter how detailed it appears, but a rendering of a series of data shown on a digital surface. As the German art critic Boris Groys says,

> The digital image is an effect of the visualisation of the invisible image file, of the invisible digital data […] a digitalised image or text appears always in a new form, according to the formats and software that a particular user applies when he or she causes the digital data to appear on a screen.[182]

In other words, what we see through the digital eye is essentially a copy, a proxy, an interpretation of the original data. There is always a distance between what we see and the actual thing, which allows voyeurism to operate in the virtual space without a physical peep hole. More importantly, although the accessibility and the immediacy of the Internet makes everything more available, there is still something hidden, some space for desire. It is the logic of desire that impels one from one body to another, which is so well served by the unprecedented access to images the Internet gives us.

This abundant production of images of bodies on the Internet demonstrates that the enigma of sexuality, of sexual difference, of the pleasure of the other, endures. Browsing is a potentially endless process of displacement, from one image to the

---

181. de Mijolla, p. 1843.
182. Boris Groys, 'Modernity and Contemporaneity: Mechanical Vs. Digital Reproduction', in *The Lives of Images, 1st edn* (New York: Aperture, 2021), pp. 75-76.

next, from one body to the next. Desire is sustained in this process of displacement without end. The Internet facilitates this process of displacement and makes it increasingly difficult to find the next desired image/body. For instance, the more pornography someone has watched on the Internet, the more difficult it would be for him or her to find the next porn that is as stimulating, or even more so, than the one he or she had watched before.

In my work *Breathe In, Breathe Out*, I turned my fantasy into a Skype meeting, in which I was instructing a man to breathe in and out via typed messages. Unlike Ringley exhibiting herself through the *Jennicam*, or like Ulman performing on Instagram, I choose to hide myself from the gaze as I looked at another who exhibited himself for me, thus constructing a conventional voyeur/exhibitionist scenario.

The room I saw on my computer screen was a fairly small room, with white walls and a wooden bed in the middle. There was not much decoration, except for a photograph hanging on the wall behind the bed. It was a photograph of a window through which a blue lake and some trees could be seen. I was not sure if there was a real window on the opposite wall, or whether this was the only "window" in this room.

The subject is lying on the bed, breathing in and out according to the typed instructions I send him through Skype. 'Breathe in', 'breathe out', 'breathe in', 'breathe out' … I could hear him inhaling, exhaling, in and out, in and out. His chest rose and fell as my typed messages appeared on his screen, up and down, up and down. These repetitive movements reminded me of penetrative sexual intercourse, which has a similar in/out or up/down rhythm.

After a while, he started touching his penis. I was not sure whether he was masturbating with the intention of pleasing himself, or performing to please me. He did not look aroused or excited, but bored, as if he was just playing with a piece of his flesh to keep his hands busy. This hand gesture could also be a self-anointment, as described in Darian Leader's book *Hands: What We Do With Them – and Why*, which happens when the subject feels they are looked at.

> As the gaze of the other is imagined to turn to them, they touch their
> own body, as if to affirm that they are there, and to disarm the poten-

103

tially negative gaze. It is perhaps no accident that in many cultures, a representation of the hand is used to ward off the evil eye.[183]

According to Lacan, the evil eye is 'the eye filled with voracity', whose fundamental power is to separate.[184] On the other hand, Sartre says that being seen inevitably makes us conscious of our own being that can be hurt by others. Therefore, being looked at creates uncertainty as the other's look upon me disrupts my sense of self-possession. The man in the video touches his sex as if to ward off the evil eye – my unseen gaze upon him – that threatens his sexual integrity with castration.

As far as I was aware, over the course of my Skype meeting, the man could see nothing, only my typed instructions – 'Breathe in', 'breathe out', 'breathe in', 'breathe out', as I had blocked my laptop camera from the start. Where an image of me should have been there was only a small black rectangle at the top right side of the screen. While I was looking at him, he was looking at his phone. I could not see what he was looking at but guessed that he was reading my instructions, which intrigued me but also irritated me slightly. By looking at something that I could not see, he created a blind spot, a zone from which I was excluded.

In this scenario, I was the voyeur who was looking at this naked man, and he was the exhibitionist who displayed his own body to me. However, by looking at something I could not see, perhaps in retaliation for my refusal to show myself to him, he came to occupy both the positions of both the voyeur and the exhibitionist. By not showing myself, I wanted to be the ultimate voyeur, who can see without being seen. I wanted to be in full control of this man, not only by directing his breathing, but also by executing the power inherent in his total visibility and my invisibility. For me, watching a naked man breathing in his room is more than a voyeuristic behaviour, it is also a play of power. It is not the body that attracts me, but the desire to be in control.

As Sartre puts it, 'with the Other's look the situation escapes me. I am no longer master of the situation'.[185] When I am being looked at by the Other, what I am do-

183. Darian Leader, *Hands: What We Do with Them – and Why* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2016).
184. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 115.
185. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 284.

ing is more than the activity itself, and also a performance for the possible image of myself in the Other's eyes. Being seen challenges my subjective freedom and reduces me to a feeling of shame. The shame is the shame of myself, the shame of an unknown being of myself that is seen and judged by the Other.[186] In shame, I am scared of being considered wrong, unworthy or unwanted and mortified by the facticity of me being a passive object.

However, my attempt to have full power over my 'ideal' image failed. This man slipped away from my control, as he seemed to enjoy being looked at, rather than being a passive object who does nothing but what I tell him to do. His desultory masturbation seemed to be aimed at pleasing me and perhaps also at intimidating me, asserting that he could gaze back at me without seeing me. In the absence of his actual look upon me, his penis had become the thing that gazed at me. As Sartre says, the look can be given by 'a rustling of the branches […] or a light movement of the curtain,'[187] which is an imagined gaze in the presence of the Other. For Lacan, a detail in a painting, or a sardine can could gaze back at us in the all-seeing world.

More importantly, he escaped from my gaze through his phone, a screen to another visual world that I could not see. By creating this blind spot, he carved out a small locus of control for himself, which redressed the power imbalance between he and I. At that moment, I no longer knew if he was aroused by his fantasy of me watching him or by something else on the screen of his phone. Nor did I not know what he saw in the black window, in which my image should have appeared. Although he could not see me, as I had blocked my camera, this black window offered itself as a screen for his phantasmatic projections. The screen is an instrument of both showing and concealment, which not only reveals and presents, but also deceives and creates distance.

Then I looked at that 'window' again: the lake, the trees, the sky, wondering where this scene ends. Although it is a still image, the window implies a fantasy that could lead me out of this small room into an imaginary scene. Where it ends depends on what I have in mind.

---

186. Ibid, p. 285.
187. Ibid, p. 281.

4.3 Forming New Looking Relations through the Screen

In the last chapter, I discussed the complexity of the gaze, wondering if the existing dominant binary discourse on 'the male gaze' can give an adequate account of the complexity of the gaze and the positions of the looking subject and the looked-at object. The interchangeable 'voyeur-exhibitionist' and 'mother-child' positions discussed above suggest that the assumption of a binary active-passive power relationship inherent in the gaze, furthermore conceived as a power relation, is not adequate to explain the fundamentally unstable subject positions in the field of the visible.

In the current Internet age, we are living under the lens of the pervasive digital gaze, in which we desire not only to look, but also to be looked at, to be the object of desire. We are like children under the constant gaze of the mother, through which we realise and confirm the image of ourselves. Unlike the newborn, who cannot understand what the mother says and does, through the Internet we can receive instant feedback and sometimes even requests from the imaginary mother – the viewer. For instance, people can make comments on things posted on social media platforms or even talk to webcam operators in real time. However, these comments are never what the (m)Other desires, which is fundamentally beyond language and outside of the dimension of consciousness. Instead, the instantaneous feedback from the imaginary mother provides us with nothing but more confusion and illusion, which lures us into 'the endless metonymy of desire'[188] – one thing failing to satisfy is substituted by another.

For example, one person might change their outward appearance, such as their outfit, make-up or even their facial or body features, in response to the comments they receive on the Internet. 'You should wear more/less clothes!', 'I don't like your black hair!', 'You are too fat/skinny!' However, no matter how much this person changes himself or herself accordingly, he or she would never be what the (m)Other desires. Furthermore, although we act like the child under the constant maternal gaze, trying to become the desired object of the imaginary mother, the Internet gaze is not always a maternal gaze. In contrast, the Internet gaze can be alienating,

---

188. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 439.

when its purely algorithmic dimension is foregrounded, malicious when it becomes a channel for the criticisms from others, oppressive and dangerous when it functions as a tool for surveillance.

Even though what the (m)Other desires still remains enigmatic, the relationship between the looker and the looked-at on the Internet sometimes appears more reciprocal than other looking relations. When we look at another person on our screen via webcams, or some images posted on social media platforms, the looked-at is no longer simply a two-dimensional image, but a subject that can look back at the looker through the screen and talk to us in real time or reply to our comments. It is conceivable for the looked-at, who is also the one who looks during a two-way exchange, to be perceived as both the one who looks and the one who talks, and an image by virtue of being 'framed' behind the screen.

Following the video *Breathe in, Breathe out*, I started a project called *I Hope You Like What You Have Seen* to continue this kind of 'game' of power via online services. In this project, I am trying to create different erotic encounters and direct a series of videos of different male strangers performing mundane activities, such as cutting fish and folding clothes, dusting a carpet, for me via Skype. These men are those who contacted me by email or online messaging, saying that they want to appear in my work. Their desire to be looked at opens up a complicated relationship between the voyeur and the exhibitionist.

In these videos, there are no narratives nor plots, just simple, repetitive gestures and movements. For instance, in the video *Salmon*, we see a bare-chested man who methodically slices pieces of fresh salmon. His nakedness, and more importantly, the pink flesh of the salmon which the knife penetrates as it slices, the in and out cutting gestures, suggest an unusual erotic scene. In this scene, it is the gentle and careful movement of his hands, the motion of the knife, the slices of fish separating and falling sideways on the cutting board, that captivate. We look pass his naked chest to focus on what he is doing with his hands. At the same time the piece of salmon, through displacement, can become the penis concealed by the table. In a sense, his slicing of the fish with a very sharp knife can suggest castration, bringing an ambivalent sense of violence to the scene.

In her work 'Cinematic Gesture: The Ghost in the Machine', Mulvey analyses a short

clip of Marilyn Monroe's performance in film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953),* in which Marilyn moves towards the camera fractionally with four dance gestures and ends the scene with a close-up of her 'Marilyn pose', to explore the relationship between movement and stillness, cinema and photography.

> As though in some way cognisant of the tension between stillness and movement in the cinema, as well as the tension between film and photograph, she could take up and hold a pose either within the flow of film or the instant of the photograph […] Marilyn's photogenic sensibility inhabits an uncertain space, somewhere between the paradoxical relationship between still and moving images that her 'photogenie' touches on.[189]

As discussed in the first chapter, photography is more likely to function as a fetish due to its stillness that opens up a possibility of an extended look. In Mulvey's visual analysis of Marilyn's gestures, or in other words, 'photogenie', it can be seen that the "still" frame of the scene has created a fragment, an inbetween-ness, a photograph within the filmic continuum. During her performance, she moves and pauses, and moves and pauses again, untill she ends her dance movement with the final pose. The frame freezes there, allowing the viewer to look at Marilyn's beautiful face and pose like a still image.

My moving image works are more akin to fetish than my photographic works. While my photographs are normally highly constructed scenes that contain numerous elements and ambiguous narratives, most of my moving image works are single static shots of a naked man conducting a mundane activity in front of a simple domestic background. Even though these men are moving, their movement is always within a small range, which never moves away from the original composition. Moreover, the simpleness of these scenes and the repetition of the gestures leave more 'off-frame' space for the viewer to wonder what is happening outside the frame and on the other side of the screen.

---

189. Mulvey, 'Cinematic Gesture: The Ghost in the Machine', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 19 (2015), 6–14 (11).

It is worth noting that I did not intend to turn these men into fetishised objects through my work, even though the accessibility of the Internet might promote the fetishisation of images in general. In these video chats, I chose daily activities that involve contact with flesh to stage a relationship between the body and the object which is sensual, attentive and more complex than a one-way subject/object relationship. By portraying these moments of a stranger's life in an unspectacular way, I try to create a temporary maternal space, in which we look at the stranger with a solicitude that is a response to the care they themselves take in the tasks they perform. There is always some gentleness, slowness and precision in these scenes I create, in which we see not only these men's bodies but also their actions and movement. In other words, we see beyond their appearance, rather than simply objectifying and reducing them to an image.

During these chats, I try to instruct these men's behaviour through my text or voice messages without showing myself, neither in person nor via the webcam. My attempt to be in full control of them is demonstrated not only through directing what they do and how they do it, but also by executing the power inherent in their total visibility and my invisibility. I also turned the sound off on the videos to make myself completely unavailable, leaving just a black, silent rectangle at the right-hand top corner of the screen. In a sense, I'm like the digital eye, neither a woman nor a man, that is constantly looking at us from all sides in the contemporary image world.

However, my attempt to be in full control in these virtual encounters is only a fantasy that guarantees no actual power over these men. As they are on the other side of the screen, I cannot physically force them to stop doing anything. Instead, I can only look at them through my computer screen, which both presents and protects them. Meanwhile, these men gaze at me without actually seeing me when they look at themselves on the screen to adjust their poses and actions according to my instructions, and when they look at the black rectangle at the right top side of the screen to imagine how they are seen by me.

In the history of the concept, the meaning of the word 'screen' in English has evolved from an object for protection and concealment, to an architectural structure for dividing spaces, to a surface for projection and display and to a metaphorical term that involves 'a relationship between what is shown and what remains

under cover.'[190] In the Internet age, screen usually means a flat panel on a digital device, such as a computer or a smartphone. However, a screen is much more than a rectangular surface for displaying images and data; it is also a shield that protects us from exposing ourselves to the non-virtual world, a mirror in which we can see ourselves as we want to be, thanks to digital image manipulation, and a window through which we can explore and communicate with the rest of the world.

In his essay 'Intersections Between Showing and Concealment', Giorgio Avezzù discusses how the screen is used as 'a device primarily of protection and segregation but also of illusory, deceptive representation' in Italian poet Dante's work *Vita Nuova*.[191] When Dante met his lover Beatrice, another beautiful woman was sitting in between them. Her presence provided both the pretext for Dante to look in Beatrice's direction and a screen behind which to hide his secret love for Beatrice. Avezzù stresses that this woman between them is not only a concealing and protective screen, but also a symbol of the unattainability of Dante's desire: Beatrice.

Similarly, in our current age of the image, a screen also functions to give us access to what we desire while separating us from it. The accessibility of the Internet gives us an illusion of reaching the desired object. However, the images and data displayed on the screen are merely illusory and deceptive representations of what we desire. For instance, for someone who enjoys watching naked women on the Internet, what this person desires are not these sexy photos/videos, but the endless search for the next image itself – an ultimate enjoyment he or she will never find. This person looks at the screen and keeps scrolling from one image to the next image, hoping to find the 'ideal' image that embodies everything he or she desires. Even though the image, the object of desire, keeps changing, the desire remains the same and unfulfilled. In the Symbolic order, the gaze is interpreted as the look, which is constantly searching for visual pleasure. In the Real dimension, the gaze is not the look from the looker, but a hole within the screen that is gazing back at the looker. Therefore, the screen is a protective and concealing partition that allows us to indulge ourselves in the desiring process from a distance. The screen gazes at

---

190. Dominique Chateau and José Moure, "Introduction: Screen, A Concept in Progress", in *Screens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p. 15.
191. Giogio Avezzù, 'Intersections Between Showing and Concealment in The History of The Concept of Screen', in *Screens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 29-41.

us, reminding us of the impossibility of attaining the desired object.

In his essay 'The Concept of the Mental Screen', Roger Odin discusses how things are framed in a certain aesthetic space through the screen.[192] Nowadays, we not only look at things through this framing process, but also show ourselves through this 'framed' vision. As Lacan says,

> Only the subject – the human subject, the subject of the desire that is the essence of man – is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation.[193]

The screen here refers to a mask – a shield that hides us from the gaze of the Other. In the current Internet age, anything can be mediated through the pervasive digital screen at almost anytime, anywhere. The screen mediates the gaze of the Other through this 'framed' vision that renders the world and ourselves with the digital translation of light and the process of photographing, editing, uploading and circulating the image on the Internet, while our own desire and lack are reflected on the screen, gazing at us from all sides.

The screen itself is a frame, within which the virtual world is contained and separated from the physical world beyond it. This frame conveys the quality of a picture to the virtual goings-on on our screens. In a way, people's obsession with the screen in the current age of the image can be seen as a form of fetishism. In psychoanalysis, fetishism is a form of perversion, through which the normal sexual object, such as sexual organs, is replaced by an intrinsically non-sexual object.[194] Nowadays,

---

192. Roger Odin, 'The Concept of The Mental Screen: The Internalised Screen, The Dream Screen, And The Constructed Screen', in *Screens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p. 184.
193. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 107.
194. de Mijolla, p. 582. According to Freud, fetishism derives from the child's confrontation with the mother's lack of a penis. The fetishist both affirms and disavows this lack by using an object to substitute the missing phallus. As discussed in previous chapter, the phallus here is not the actual penis, but a signifier for what the (m)Other essentially lacks. Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', pp. 147-157.

some people prefer watching pornography or having Internet sex chats to having sexual intercourse with another person in real life. The screen has become the ultimate substitute, which is not only an object in itself but also a frame that contains thousands of other objects. However, behind all of these shiny objects, behind the glossy screen, there is nothing but our own lack.

The screen is also a mirror. When we look at endless images on the Internet, we see not only the depicted view, but also our own reflection on the screen. As White says,

> When the spectator's image is reflected on the screen and both spectator and operator are working at the computer, then they seem to be conjoined. Rather than the singular and empowered spectator indicated by apparatus theory and promised by Internet sites, this morphed position may be closer to the fragmented and unstable forms of identification proposed by Lacan, other psychoanalysts, and feminist film theorists.[195]

It is worth noting that most screens nowadays are actually non-reflective, so the reflection on the screen described by White is no longer commonly experienced anymore. We do not see ourselves conjoining with the looked-at on the screen. Instead, we only see our own reflection sometimes when the screen turns black, in other words, when there is no image shown on the screen. This 'black screen' usually appears when we turn off the computer/phone or when we are waiting for the loading or transitioning moments of the games/videos we are playing/watching. At these moments, the screen suddenly turns dark and becomes a mirror. Looking at the reflection of our own faces, which sometimes surprises or startles us, we realise the distance created by the physical screen and see the gap between the imagined self – the one that is immersed in and identifies with someone or something in the virtual world – and the real self, the one that is reflected on the screen.

Despite the prevalence of non-reflective screens, I think the morphed and multiple position suggested by White is still valid, and realised not through an actual reflec-

---

196. White, p.77.

tion on the screen, but through a reflection of our own desire shown in the search for the image itself. Through the digital eye, the positions of the looker and the looked-at are not fixed, but fluid and interchangeable. When we look at something on the Internet, multiple gazes are conjoined through the screen: the gaze from the digital eye that renders and visualises the data, the gaze onto the screen from the viewer, the gaze from the looked at/looker on the other side of the screen and the gaze from the image or the empty screen, looking back at the viewer.

With the development of virtual reality technology, people can now wear a pair of goggles to enter the virtual world in a much more immersive way, instead of look-ing at it, at a distance, on a framed screen. The screen is now that of the panoramic virtual reality headset on which a three-dimensional virtual image is shown directly in front of our eyes. The frame of the screen of the headset is no longer detectable as we put it on whereas the frame of the image dissolves in the continuous space of a spherical panorama. In this new virtual world, the screen becomes less of an external object, but an inhabited scene that invites us not only to look at but also to look through and to live in. When we look through the goggles, what we see is not in front of us but wrapped around us. We can neither look away from the image, nor escape the gaze from the image. We experience what Merleau-Ponty describes as, 'my body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle'.[196] While we look at the virtual reality through the goggles, we also become a part of this visual world that is also gazing back at us from all sides. The screen here functions as the mediation between the subject and the gaze of the Other through both rendering what we see within the virtual world and also blocking the view of the real world. It is worth noting that even though we cannot see what is outside of the visual real-ity headset, we can still be seen by the others in the real world. The gaze from the Other is then doubled, from both the virtual and the real.

Further, Wanda Strauven stresses that the image today is more than a visual rep-resentation – it is an interface, a portal that can lead us to something else on the Internet.[197] For instance, with the touchscreen, not only can we look at the image,

196. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 138.
197. Wanda Strauven, 'The Screenic Image: Between Verticality And Horizontality, Viewing And Touch- Ing, Displaying And Playing', in Screens (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p. 150.

but we can also touch the image on the screen for certain reaction, which creates a more interactive relationship between the looker and the looked-at. However, as Strauven says, we do not touch the actual thing inside the image nor the image itself, but merely the surface of the electronic device.

The new screenic image is an invisible image, since it only truly exists as data, or as code. By clicking icons on the screen, we might have the illusion of making the invisible image visible again; at the same time, it also tells us that the image is just a gate to something else, away from that particular image.[198]

Therefore, the relations of looking built through the screen are no longer between the looker and the looked-at thing or person, but between the viewer/operator and the visual representation of the operational data.

> Seeing images mediated and made visible by technological vision thus enables us not only to see technological images but also to see technologically.[199]

Further, with the development of artificial intelligence, the digital-born image is not only stored, shown and transmitted as data, but also created directly by data. For instance, a recently developed artificial intelligence system called DALL·E 2 can create original and realistic visual art, including different kinds of paintings, illustrations and photographs, from a text description. So, we can look at a picture of someone or something that never existed in the world and is fundamentally a permutation of data. In a sense, the image itself has become a screen, behind which there is nothing but our desire for the next image.

---

198. Ibid.

199. Vivian Sobchack, 'The Scene Of The Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, And Electronic "Presence"', in *The Lives Of Images Vol. 2* (New York: Aperture, 2021), p. 213.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to review different theories of the gaze and explore how the idea of the gaze and the looking relations have changed in the current Internet age, in which there is always a constant connection with the Other.

Through my academic research, I have identified that there are a lot of misunderstandings and confusion around the question of the gaze. It is evident that early Lacanian film theorists actually take a Foucauldian understanding of Lacan's theory of the gaze. The well-referenced 'male gaze' conceptualised by Mulvey suggests that the active-passive relationship between the looking subject and the looked-at object is broadly embedded in the equation of men with activity and women with passivity. Being a woman is being passive, being a hole, being looked at and waiting to be looked at, to be penetrated by the active man.

Through looking at both paintings from art history and my own work, I have identified that this image of women is flawed and outdated. The dichotomy that associates masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity is dissolved by the facticity of the male sexual body. Men too have the same flesh as women, which can be looked at and objectified by the female viewer.

By approaching the notion of the gaze through psychoanalysis, the assumption of the gendered gaze raised by Mulvey is thrown into crisis, as the unconscious does not recognise gender difference, even though psychoanalysis has been critiqued for using an essentialist model of male and female, as nowadays there are other gender positions beside the masculine and feminine gender positions. Psychoanalytic theory, far more radically, posits a subject who never achieves a stable position, who never coincides with the gender position assigned by the symbolic order.

In the Internet age, the distinction between the looking subject and the looked-at object is substitutable and obscured. Everybody, both men and women, can look at and be looked at by the other. Moreover, the gaze is not only between us and the others, but also between us and ourselves. To be looked at does not necessarily mean to be in a passive position, where the gaze can only be objectifying, controlling and suppressing. In contrast, the desire to be looked at, or in other words, to be the desired object of the Other, is an aim that is as equally active as the desire to look. The Internet gaze can be a kind of validation from the other, a maternal gaze that offers care and attention, or simply a sense of connection with the other.

It is evident that the idea of the gendered gaze is inadequate to explain the complex relations of looking and the fluidity of the looking positions today. When we look at something online, there are multiple gazes rather than a singular gaze invoked in the viewing process: the gaze onto the looked-at, the gaze from the looked-at through not directly looking back at the looker, the gaze from the algorithmic data and the gaze from the screen that reflects the looker's own face and desire. The gaze, therefore, is more than ever detached from the eye, constantly drifting between the looker and the looked-at, between different screens and between the subject and the Other that are constantly connected through the Internet.

In my practice, different kinds of gaze intertwine and drift between the looker, the looked-at and the image. When I photograph, I look at both the scene in front of me and the image projected onto the ground glass of the camera. Since I normally use a large format camera, the image I see through the camera is always upside down, which makes it difficult for me to construct the scene directly behind the camera. When I look through the camera, I have to look under a piece of dark cloth, which creates a small dark space for me to view the image on the ground glass, thus separating me from the actual scene even more. There is always a to-and-fro between the actual scene, the image that forms in my mind and the image framed by the viewfinder of the camera. Unlike with the small format of single-lens reflex camera, the projected configuration I see on the ground glass already suggests the finished picture, in its size, in the material support of the ground glass, and in its delineation by the frame of the viewfiner. Every time when I go in and out of the dark cloth, I experience a shift of scene and vision, from an upside down framed flat image to a live three-dimensional reality.

> Between photographer and subject, there has to be distance. The camera doesn't rape, or even possess, though it may presume, intrude, trespass, distort, exploit, and, at the farthest reach of metaphor, assassinate – all activities that, unlike the sexual push and shove, can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment.[200]

When I look at the men I photograph, I look at the shape of their bodies, how they in-

---

200. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: RosettaBooks LLC, 2005), p. 9.

teract with the rest of the scene and where they look at. The sense of distance created through the interposition of my camera between the men and myself, made more physical when I enter the small viewing space underneath the dark cloth, allows me to imagine myself looking without being seen looking. My look here is observational, intrusive and controlling, as I strip these men naked to expose them completely in front of my lens and try to place them in the fantasy that I have in mind. In her book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag mentions the film *Peeping Tom* (1960), in which the protagonist Mark Lewis kills women when he photographs them and never touches them. Sontag stresses that 'he doesn't desire their bodies; he wants their presence in the form of filmed images.'[201] Through photographing these men, I too try to 'possess' them in in the form of photographs in a similar way as Mark in the film. However, my gaze does not try to hurt anyone, but to create an image in which these men are not simply objectified as passive objects but always involved in certain activities.

In some of my works, I also put myself in the scene, in which I become both the looker and the looked-at. Being the photographer and the model at the same time, I am not only under the look from other models, the look from the potential viewer of the work, and also my own look, imagining how I would be captured by the film inside the camera, which is out of my sight. In most of these photographs, I look at the camera directly holding a shutter release in my hand, while all the men are asked to look away from the camera. My look, and more importantly, the long cable of the shutter release signifies the dominant position I take, my desire to be in control, gazing at the viewer of the work.

Throughout the process of photographing, my fantasy is realised in the form of a still image, which I cannot see until the film is developed and scanned or printed. This is also the moment when this fantastic image stops being my fantasy, but a physical object, a photograph on the negative that is captured by the camera and fixed by the chemicals. Looking at the photograph, I start to see a lot of details that I did not see when I was at the actual scene. For the American film theorist Vivian Sobchack, a photograph

201. Ibid.

> does not really invite the spectator into the scene so much as it in-
> vites contemplation of the scene. In its conquest of temporality and
> its conversion of time's dynamism into a static and essential mo-
> ment, the photograph constructs a space on can hold and look at.[202]

The stillness of the photograph allows us to see, scrutinise and even contemplate every single detail inside the frame of the image. Those unplanned or unwanted details are the stains on the image, which slipped away from my look/control when I was taking the photograph, now gazing back at me.

In my Internet work, I look at different men performing different domestic activities via live video chats. During these online meetings, I look at my computer screen directing these men through my voice or typed messages only. Different from my look when I photograph, my look onto the subject via the Internet is mediated through the digital medium, which comes between the model and I in its material-ity and also in its artefacts, such as glitches and delays, which are out of my con-trol. Since I block the webcam on my computer, both the man and I can only see a blank rectangle, showing nothing but complete blackness where I should appear on the computer screen. The man looks at himself on the screen while he adjusts his movement or gestures according to my instructions; and he looks at the blank rectangle, imagining how I might look like and how I might be looking at him.

When I look at these men during these video chats, my look flows with their moving bodies and engages with them as I direct them to move and act in the way I want. The look here is more fluid and interactive, which is always on the move, instead of trying to fix one single moment for a photograph. My look, or in other words, my control over these men, via the Internet is also more uncertain, as I am not phys-ically in the same space with them and cannot control what they do at the other side of the screen.

From then on, every time when I look at these videos on a screen, I find myself look-ing at an everlasting present. Unlike photographs, which are still documentation

---

202. Vivian Sobchack, 'The Scene of The Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, And Elec-tronic "Presence"', in *The Lives of Images Vol. 2* (New York: Aperture, 2021), p. 213.

of certain moments/scenes and function 'to fix a "being-that-has been", the moving image is 'a visible representation not of activity finished or past but of activity coming into being and being.'[203] I look at the man in the video, my look caresses his body, following him doing the requested mundane activity repeatedly, as if I am reliving the moment recorded in these videos over and over again.

Part of the video installation I have been working on recently, consists of images of mothers that are created by the artificial intelligence system DALL·E 2. In this case, the image of 'mother' is neither a portrait of a particular person nor a depiction from someone's imagination, but a digital image created by the algorithm's interpretation of the text prompt I type in. Through mapping from textual semantics to corresponding visual semantics, DALL·E 2 can generate images that allow us to take a glance at 'the Internet's *objective imagination*: the data-set of images on which it has been trained,'[204] The mother is neither a subject, nor an object, but a random assortment of related data. When I first tested this artificial intelligence platform, I tried simple sentences like 'A mother lying on a sofa' or 'A mother taking a bath'. After a few attempts, I quickly realised that the face of the 'mother' is always blurred and distorted as in the image below.[205] In order to avoid the disturbing facial distortions, I then try to make images of a mother seen from the back by providing a more detailed descriptions, such as: *A mother cooking in the kitchen in a British house, back view, photograph.*[206]

---

203. Ibid.

204. Tom Whyman, 'The 'Online Grotesque' Of DALL-E Art', *Artreview*, 2022 <https://artreview.com/the-online-grotesque-of-dall-e-art/> [Accessed 4 September 2022]. The idea of the Internet's *objective imagination* is questionable, as DALL·E 2 is also subject to the biases embeded in the data that has been fed into it. The difference is that this imagination does not belong to one particular individual, but a collective imagination calculated by the algorithm.

205. In June 2022, OpenAI allowed users to create photorealistic faces of non-existing people with DALL·E 2, which was previously blocked for fear of creators generating deceptive content, such as fake images of celebrities and politicians. Apart from security reasons, I am not sure if this is simply due to the limitations of the algorithm or it is because the word 'mother' is too broad and too vague for the algorithm to produce any specific outcome. Gloria Levine, 'You Can Now Share Realistic People Generated In DALL-E 2', *80.Lv*, 2022 <https://80.lv/articles/you-can-now-share-realistic-people-generated-in-dall-e-2/> [Accessed 2 August 2022].

206. It is worth noting that unlike images found through searching 'mother cooking in the kitchen' on Google, most of which are images of women cooking with children, images created by DALL-E 2 are images of mature women.

Conclusion

In this image, the 'mother' looks more realistic. However, the face of the 'mother' remains unavailable to me save as a blurry appearance, sometimes monstrous, like a memory or a dream image. Through the algorithmic lens, I try to see what is underneath the veil that covers the phallus via the algorithm that calculates thousands of collected data and possibilities. However, after lifting the veil, what I see is only another veil, behind which there is nothing but my endless desire for the (m)Other.

Fig. 5.1

A mother taking a bath in a British house, photograph

Fig. 5.2

A mother cooking in the kitchen in a British house, back view, photograph

Bibliography

Aimee, 'Aimee Live Profile: Internet Conferencing', About. <http://net conference. about.com/internet/netconference/library/cammers/blcammer002.htm> [Accessed 1 April 2001]

Andrews, Jorella, *Showing Off!: A Philosophy of Image* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014)

Avezzù, Giogio, 'Intersections Between Showing and Concealment in The History of the Concept of Screen', in *Screens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 29-41

Barthes, Roland, *A Lover's Discourse* (London: Vintage Books, 2002)

Berger, John, *John Berger / Ways of Seeing, Episode 3 (1972)* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7wi8jd7aC4> [Accessed 2 September 2021]

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972)

Black, Hannah, 'Further Materials Toward a Theory of the Hot Babe', *The New Inquiry*, 2013 <https://thenewinquiry.com/further-materials-toward-a-theory-of-the-hot-babe/> [Accessed 18 April 2021]

Blair, Kristine, and Pamela Takayoshi, 'Introduction', in *Mapping Gendered Academic Spaces* (Stamford, CT: Ablex, 1999) <https://kairos.technorhetoric.net/2.2/coverweb/invited/kb3.html> [Accessed 4 July 2021]

Boothby, Richard, 'Figurations of the Objet A', in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations In Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 159-191

Borzello, Frances, *The Naked Nude* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012)

Boyd, Danah, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 30-31

Brody, Jennifer DeVere, 'Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's Olympia', *Theatre Journal*, 53 (2001), 95-118

Burgin, Victor, 'Jenni's Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude', *Critical Inquiry*, 27 (2000), 77-89 <https://doi.org/10.1086/448999>

Burgin, Victor, *Thinking Photography*, ed. by Victor Burgin (London, England: Macmillan, 1982)

Burns, Anne, 'Selfie Control: Online Discussion of Women's Photographic Practices as a Gendered Form of Social Discipline' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Loughborough University, 2015)

Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."*, 2nd edn (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2011)

'Castration - Cahiers Pour L'Analyse (An Electronic Edition)', *cahiers.kingston.ac.uk* <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/concepts/castration.html#_note3_return> [Accessed 30 August 2021]

Cavanagh, Sheila L., 'Queer Theory, Psychoanalysis, and the Symptom: A Lacanian Reading', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 20 (2019), 226-230 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2019.1673974>

Chateau, Dominique, and José Moure, 'Introduction: Screen, a Concept in Progress', in *Screens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 13-24

Copjec, Joan, *Read My Desire* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1994)

Davenport-Hines, *Richard Peter Treadwell, Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil, and Ruin* (New York: North Point Press, 1999)

Derrida, Jacques, 'Aletheia', *Oxford Literary Review*, 32 (2010), 169-188

Doane, Mary Ann, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams, *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (American Film Institute Monograph Series) (Los Angeles: University Publications of America, 1984)

Dotson, Sarah, 'Why Titian's "Venus of Urbino" Is One of Art History's Most Iconic Nudes', *Artsy*, 27 August 2020 <https://www.artsy.net/series/stories-10-art-historys-iconic-works/artsy-editorial-titians-venus-urbino-one-art-historys-iconic-nudes> [Accessed 18 August 2021]

Dumas, Tara M., Matthew Maxwell-Smith, Jordan P. Davis, and Paul A. Giulietti, 'Lying or Longing for Likes? Narcissism, Peer Belonging, Loneliness and Normative Versus Deceptive Like-Seeking on Instagram in Emerging Adulthood', *Computers in Human Behavior*, 71 (2017), 1-10 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.037>

Edelman, Aliza, 'Eunice Golden's Male Body Landscapes and Feminist Sexuality', *Woman's Art Journal*, 41: 2 (2020), 16–28

Evans, Caroline, and Lorraine Gamman, 'The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing', in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 12-61

Evans, Dylan, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Felluga, Dino, *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2015)

Fink, Bruce, 'The Subject and the Other's Desire', in Slavoj Žižek, ed. *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 243-263

Flusser, Vilém, *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011)

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1979)

Freedberg, Sydney Joseph, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995)

Freud, Sigmund, '"A Child Is Being Beaten" a Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XVII (1917-1919), An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp.179-204

Freud, Sigmund, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 1-64

Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962)

Freud, Sigmund, 'Femininity', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965)

Freud, Sigmund, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 113-138

Frew, Kate, 'The Age of The Instagram Portrait' (unpublished Postgraduate, Royal College of Art, 2020)

Golden, Eunice, 'The Male Nude in Women's Art: Dialectics of a Feminist Iconography', *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, 3 : 4 (1981), 40–42

Groys, Boris, 'Modernity and Contemporaneity: Mechanical Vs. Digital Reproduction', in *The Lives of Images, Vol.1* (New York: Aperture, 2021), pp.69-80

Hammer-Tugendhat, Daniela, 'On the Semantics of Male Nudity and Sexuality. A Retrospective', in *Nude Male: From 1800 to the Present Day* (Munich: Hirmer, 2012)

Hinton, Laura., '(G)Aping Women; or, when a Man Plays the Fetish', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 48 (2007), 174-200 <https://doi.org/10.1353/frm.2007.0012>

'Jacques Lacan', Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/> [Accessed 12 October 2021]

Jansen, Charlotte, *Girl on Girl: Art and Photography in the Age of the Female Gaze* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2017)

Jansen, Charlotte, 'Zara's Female Gaze Collection Is Cynical Capitalism at its Worst', *ELEPHANT*, 30 October 2022 <https://elephant.art/zaras-female-gaze-collection-is-cynical-capitalism-at-its-worst-30102020/> [Accessed 11 July 2022]

Jennings, Catherine Marie, 'Paintings and the Nuanced Gaze: Studies in the Application, Complication, and Limitations of Psychoanalytic Gaze Theory' (unpublished PhD thesis, Texas Tech University, 2001)

Lacan, Jacques, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 2007)

Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005)

Lacan, Jacques, *My Teaching* (London: Verso, 2008)

Lacan, Jacques, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 2010)

Lacan, Jacques, T*he Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998)

Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar, Book X, Anxiety* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 45

Laplanche, Jean, and J, B. Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality'', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 49 (1968), 1-18

Laplanche, Jean, and J, B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1973)

Lauwers, Sophie, 'Lili Dujourie – Poetic Strategies', in Gabriele Schor, ed. and curator, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s: the Samlung Verbund Collection, Vienna* (Munich: Prestel, 2016)

Leader, Darian, *Hands: What We Do with Them – And Why* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2016)

Levine, Gloria, 'You Can Now Share Realistic People Generated In DALL-E 2', 80.Lv, 2022 <https://80.lv/articles/you-can-now-share-realistic-people-generated-in-dall-e-2/> [Accessed 2 August 2022]

MacKinnon, Kenneth, *Uneasy Pleasures: The Male as Erotic Object* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1997)

Mahony, Patrick Joseph, '"A Child Is Being Beaten" A Clinical, Historical, And Textual Study', in *On Freud's "A Child Is Being Beaten"*, 2nd edn (London: Karnac Books, 2013)

Manovich, Lev, Instagram and Contemporary Image, 2017 <http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/instagram-and-contemporary-image> [Accessed 21 March 2021]

McCarthy, Amy, '#Feministselfie Reinforces Why Selfies Are Empowering', Bustle, 2013 <https://www.bustle.com/articles/9421-feministselfie-reinforces-why-selfies-are-empowering> [Accessed 12 March 2021]

McGowan, Todd, *The Real Gaze* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007)

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 'Eye and Mind', in T*he Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwest University Press, 1993), pp.121-149

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Visible and The Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1968)

Metz, Christian, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, 34 (1985), 81–90 (84).

Metz, Christian, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982)

Mieszkowski, Katharine, 'Candy From Strangers', Salon, 2001 <https://www.salon.com/2001/08/13/cam_girls/> [Accessed 4 July 2021]

Mijolla, Alain de, *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005)

Minsky, Rosalind, *Psychoanalysis and Gender* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996)

'Monster/Beauty: An Exploration of the Female/Femme Gaze', *lycheeone.com*, 2020 <http://lycheeone.com/wp/female-gaze-press/> [Accessed 23 August 2021]

Mulvey, Laura, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Inspired by King Vidor's Duel in the Sun', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), pp.29-38

Mulvey, Laura, 'Cinematic Gesture: The Ghost in the Machine', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 19 : 1 (2015), 6–14 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2014.920185> [Accessed 30 August 2023]

Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), pp.14-28

Murphy, Paula, 'Psychoanalysis and Film Theory Part 2: Reflections and Refutations', *Intertheory*, 2021 <https://www.intertheory.org/psychoanalysis2.htm> [Accessed 23 August 2021]

Nead, Lynda, *The Female Nude* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Novick, Jack, and Kerry Kelly Novick, *Fearful Symmetry: The Development and Treatment of Sadomasochism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007)

Odin, Roger, 'The Concept of the Mental Screen: The Internalised Screen, the Dream Screen, and the Constructed Screen', in *Screens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 176-185

Oyler, Lauren, 'How Instagram Makes You Basic, Boring, and Completely Deranged', *Vice*, 30 August, 2017 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/vbbjbx/how-insta-gram-makes-you-basic-boring-and-completely-deranged>

Parker, Rozsika, and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (I. B. Tauris & Company, 2013)

Power, Nina, *One-Dimensional Woman* (Winchester, UK: 0 [Zero] Books, 2009)

Queen, Carol, *Switch Hitters: Lesbians Write Gay Male Erotica and Gay Men Write Lesbian Erotica* (Cleis Press, 2014)

Reich, June L, 'Genderfuck: The Law of the Dildo', *Discourse*, 15 : 1 (1992), 112–27

Richardson, Mary, 'Miss Richardson's Statement', *The Times*, 11 March 1914

Rodowick, David Norman, *The Difficulty of Difference* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014)

Rubenstein, Daniel, Johnny Golding, and Andy Fisher, *On the Verge of Photography* (Birmingham: ARTicle Press, 2013)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness - An Essay on Phenomenological Ontolo-gy* (London: Routledge, 2003)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Nausea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)

Semmel, Joan, and April Kingsley, 'Sexual Imagery in Women's Art', *Woman's Art Journal*, 1 (1980), 4 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358010>

Shaviro, Steven, 'Stranded in The Jungle—29', *Shaviro* <http://www.shaviro.com/Stranded/29.html> [Accessed 4 July 2021]

Smith, Anna Marie, '"By Women, for Women and about Women" Rules Ok? The Impossibility of Visual Soliloquy', in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 209-227

Snow, Edward, 'Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems', *Representations*, 25 (1989), 30-41 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928465>

Sobchack, Vivian, 'The Scene of The Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, And Electronic "Presence"', in *The Lives of Images Vol. 2* (New York: Aperture, 2021), pp. 207-250

Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (New York: RosettaBooks LLC, 2005)

Stewart, Charles, 'Erotic Dreams and Nightmares from Antiquity to the Present", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 8 (2002), 279-309 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.00109>

Steyerl, Hito, *The Wretched of The Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012)

Storr, Melinda Jill, 'The Gaze in Theory: The Cases of Sartre and Lacan' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 1994)

Strauven, Wanda, 'The Screenic Image: Between Verticality and Horizontality, Viewing and Touch- Ing, Displaying and Playing', in *Screens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 143-156

Ulman, Amalia, 'Amalia Ulman: Why I Staged My Own Instagram Meltdown', *Financial Times*, 3 January 2020 <https://www.ft.com/content/d2cb7650-279b-11ea-9a4f-963f0ec7e134> [Accessed 12 March 2021]

Wallace, Natasha, 'Velazquez's: Venus at Her Mirror', *Jssgallery*, 2021 <http://jssgallery.org/Other_Artists/Velazquez/Velazquez_Venus_at_her_Mirror.htm> [Accessed 22 August 2021]

Ward, Maryanne C., 'A Painting of the Unspeakable: Henry Fuseli's "The Nightmare" And the Creation of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"', *The Journal of*

the Midwest Modern Language Association, 33 (2000), 20 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1315115>

Weinstock, Tish, 'Feminism 2.0 - The Women Who Rule the Web', *i-D,* 21 July 2014 <https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/d3vz5x/feminism-20> [Accessed 22 March 2021]

White, Michele, *The Body and the Screen* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006)

Whyman, Tom, The 'Online Grotesque' of DALL-E Art', *Artreview*, 06 July 2022 <https://artreview.com/the-online-grotesque-of-dall-e-art/> [Accessed 4 September 2022]

Winnicott, D. W, *Playing and Reality* (London; New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986)

Žižek, Slavoj, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 2008)

Žižek, Slavoj, *Welcome to the Desert of The Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002)