

Gender and the Gaze

This week we looked at the idea of the *Gaze*: a theory of vision. Ideas of the *Gaze* were developed in the later part of the 20th Century by feminist film critics such as Laura Mulvey, the author of *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). Laura Mulvey used key terms from psychoanalysis to argue the 'the gaze' is an unconscious structural condition that results in the objectification of women in film and visual culture. Mulvey states that "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female." In class we discussed gender representation in film, and whether we agree with Mulvey that there is a difference between male and female characters: with male characters being central to narrative and plot and female characters occupying more decorative roles. We discussed some examples of feminist self-representation: Non-representation or anti-spectacular representation, focusing on narrative, developing a 'feminine' form of sensuality, using the body to shock the audience, or exposing the dynamics of the gaze through performance (for example in the work of VALIE EXPORT and Carolee Schneemann). We also considered some of the criticism of Mulvey's text, and second wave feminism, such as the failure to account for female pleasure or a queer gaze.