



# The Male Gaze of the Early 2000s

By Michael Desmangles

# Understanding The Origins of The Male Gaze

## The origins of the Male Gaze.

“This protest sign I’ve created focuses on the feminist film theory term, the male gaze. This term was coined by renowned film theorist Laura Mulvey in her essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). This theory is one that I have anyways been very interested in, ever since I learned of it. I even entered into a research fair and I expanded on the idea of a “male gaze” and how it reaches to many aspects of our daily lives from advertisement, to art, to film, and other forms of media.

**Essentially, the male gaze is the idea that the film industry has long been dominated by a male presence and lead.** Due to this, films have long been made by men for the pleasure and consumption of men (the same could even be said for many other mediums, such as art and literature). As a result of this, female characters in films are either: A, not as complex as their counterparts, or B, merely serving a sexual purpose for the viewer based on the viewpoint of the male gaze (think Megan Fox in Transformers, she’s fixing a car but all the viewer see’s is a slow tilt up and across her body).”



# Evolution of the male gaze in art



The concept of gaze in relation to art appeared in scholarly conversation with post-modernist french intellectuals during the 1940s. Michel Foucault for example spoke about the medical gaze and Jacques Lacan's analysis on the gaze's role in the mirror stage (identifying oneself) and development of human psyche. The male gaze was identified as a feminist theory to identify how many sought to identify hypersexual components to art and movies through their own work or seen through the work of others.

# Evolution of the male gaze in photography



"In a world ordered by sexual unbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy unto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be seen to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*."  
*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema; Laura Mulvey*

The evolution of the male gaze in photography is spoken about in most feminist movements and it is stated that most of the time photography is almost subconsciously used to oversexualize women in most photos they are in. "In substance, the male gaze depicts women and the world from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that presents and represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer." Emil Prakertia Raji

# Evolution of the Male Gaze in design

The male gaze have been spoken about heavily and examined by many artist and feminist writers. For instance in this article by Maria X Lu is a cinema analysis and she stated “When women are reduced to visual pleasure, that's when rigid expectations of body types and age are created. It's not about their strength of character, wisdom, intellect, nor a capacity to love. This vulnerability makes it easier to sell unneeded beauty products and treatments.”



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# **DISRUPTING THE MALE GAZE**

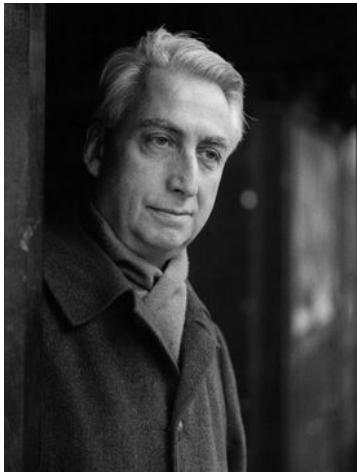
BY NANCY M. BRANNO

understanding the role of women as defined by the male gaze is central to the critical analysis of women's representation in Hollywood cinema. Though this may not necessarily be common knowledge, we can all begin the process of understanding the male gaze by examining the definition of patriarchy as it is traditionally understood. Patriarchy is defined as the control of power by men over women. The term was coined by Simone de Beauvoir, and that definition has been widely accepted by gender studies scholars. Simone de Beauvoir's definition of patriarchy is as follows: "Women are defined as objects."<sup>1</sup> This definition is based on the assumption that women are not subjects but rather are seen as objects to be used. Women were not recognized as subjects in society at large. It is also this that creates the difference between the male gaze and the female gaze. The male gaze is the way that men look at women, and the female gaze is the way that women look at themselves. The male gaze is based on the assumption that women are objects to be used, while the female gaze is based on the assumption that women are subjects who have agency and autonomy. The male gaze is based on the assumption that women are objects to be used, while the female gaze is based on the assumption that women are subjects who have agency and autonomy.

# Male gaze relating to early cinema



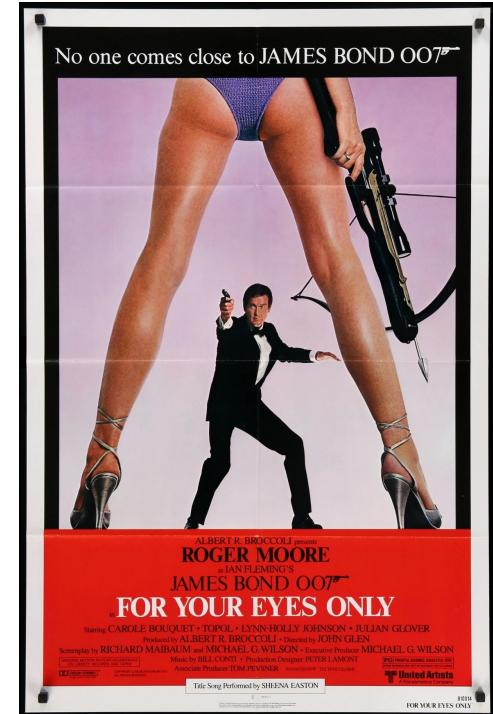
# Barthes interpretation to the Male Gaze in Design



Thinking about method of deconstruction of the male gaze and the rhetoric of most of these provocative movie posters it's important to understand the literal messages and the underlying subtext.

The denotative message of the James Bonds poster is the idea there is women with no pants with a cross boy and a man with a gun and a suit and tie about to shoot her. There is a block of text explaining the movie. However the name of the movie is in white while the other blocks of text. The tagline says "No one comes to James Bond 007"

The connotative portion of the movie poster is controversial history of women in James Bond media where they were just used as accessories to James Bond to make him look cool. They have women in bikinis and provocative dresses and then gave them weapons to overcompensate and try to justify it.



# Lack of Female Representation in Cinema



**Bechdel test** defined by Merriam Webster's dictionary as a set of criteria used as a test to evaluate a work of fiction (such as a film) on the basis of its inclusion and representation of female characters. The usual criteria of the Bechdel Test are (1) that at least two women are featured, (2) that these women talk to each other, and (3) that they discuss something other than a man.

This on paper sounds easy and if anything very simplistic and a piece of cake to pull off however; you'd be surprised how it has alluded most movies .

For example Lord of the Rings and an astonishing piece of fiction adapted by JJ R Tolkein books have only three female characters, strong ones, in Arwen, Eowyn, and Galadriel.

# Shift away from the Male Gaze



# Change in perception for female leads



However as of recently the story around female representation has changed with strong and influential female leads dominating the movie screens. Movies like I, tonya, Hidden figures, Mad Max Fury Road, Hunger Games etc. The mindset of a bygone era of early 2000s movies that sexualized and degraded women have now completely move to more confident, intelligent and sexually revigorated women who have control of there own narrative.