

2020

## Radical Queer Gazes : How lesbian and nonbinary contemporary photographers are destabilizing the male gaze

Eliza McDonough  
*Sotheby's Institute of Art*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.sia.edu/stu\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.sia.edu/stu_theses)



Part of the [Contemporary Art Commons](#), [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), and the [Photography Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

McDonough, Eliza, "Radical Queer Gazes : How lesbian and nonbinary contemporary photographers are destabilizing the male gaze" (2020). *MA Theses*. 72.  
[https://digitalcommons.sia.edu/stu\\_theses/72](https://digitalcommons.sia.edu/stu_theses/72)

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship and Creative Work at Digital Commons @ SIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ SIA. For more information, please contact [nylibrary@sia.edu](mailto:nylibrary@sia.edu).

Radical Queer Gazes:  
How Lesbian and Nonbinary Contemporary Photographers  
Are Destabilizing the Male Gaze

by  
Eliza McDonough

A thesis submitted in conformity  
with the requirements for the  
Master's Degree in Contemporary Art  
Sotheby's Institute of Art  
2020

14,970 words

## Abstract

Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* laid the groundwork for feminist theory surrounding the objectification of women in media by introducing the concept of the male gaze. Since its publication, theorists and critics have responded by proposing the possibility of alternate gazes such as the female gaze, the black gaze, and the queer gaze. This thesis will analyze those responses along with the psychoanalytical backing of Mulvey's original theory to determine how the heteropatriarchal structure Mulvey presents can be dismantled through alternative identity gazes. Mulvey's original proposition is limited by her focus on the relationship between white cisgender heterosexual men and white cisgender heterosexual women. By looking at intersectional gazes and specifically queer gazes in photography as documentary measures, this thesis explores the way artists with identities outside of those two archetypes can utilize their gazes to destabilize the heteropatriarchal scaffolding of male gaze theory. I will highlight case studies of contemporary queer female and queer nonbinary photographers (Laura Aguilar, Zanele Muholi, Catherine Opie, and Elle Perez) as examples of practical applications of alternative identity gazes in contemporary art practices. While objectification of women in media is certainly present, queer female and nonbinary artists are disrupting those patterns by creating archives of diverse, lived queer experiences with photography.

## Table of Contents

Illustrations List	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Gaze Theory and Its Responses	13
Chapter 2: Renegotiating Queer Gazes	29
Chapter 3: Case Studies of Lesbian & Nonbinary Gazes: Laura Aguilar, Zanele Muholi, Elle Pérez, and Catherine Opie	41
Conclusion	56
Illustrations	58
Bibliography	74



## List of Illustrations

- Figure 1: Ross, Henryk. Police in the Lodz Ghetto, run by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland, escort residents for deportation during World War II. Art Gallery of Ontario/Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/insight/wp/2017/03/06/i-buried-my-negatives-in-the-ground-in-order-that-there-should-be-some-record-of-our-tragedy-henryk-ross/>.
- Figure 2: Frare, Therese. *David Kirby on his deathbed, Ohio, 1990*. 1990. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.life.com/history/behind-the-picture-the-photo-that-changed-the-face-of-aids/>.
- Figures 3 & 4: Wojnarowicz, David. *Untitled*. 1987. The Estate of David Wojnarowicz. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/david-wojnarowicz-still-burning-rage>.
- Figure 5: Wojnarowicz. 1988. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/13/david-wojnarowicz-close-to-the-knives-a-memoir-of-disintegration-artist-aids-activist>.
- Figure 6: Bronson, AA. *Jorge, February 3, 1994*, 1994/2000, Esther Schipper Berlin, accessed January 4, 2021, <https://momus.ca/the-manner-of-their-dying/>.
- Figure 7: Bronson, AA. *Felix Partz, June 5, 1994*, 1994, Private Collections, accessed January 4, 2021, <https://www.estherschipper.com/artists/31-aa-bronson/works/16092/>.
- Figure 8: Aguilar, Laura. *Latina Lesbians (Yolanda Retter)*. 1987. The Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.artnews.com/feature/laura-aguilar-who-is-she-1202684828/>.
- Figure 9: Aguilar, Laura. *Laura V*, 1988, gelatin silver print, 14 × 10 15/16 in., The J. Paul Getty Museum / Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016, accessed January 4, 2021, <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/35-prints-by-laura-aguilar-photographer-of-radical-vulnerability-join-the-getty-collection/>.
- Figure 10: Aguilar, Laura. *Carla*. 1987-90. Gelatin silver print with phototext, 11 x 14 inches. Artist's Collection. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://docplayer.net/84292716-The-unconventional-photographic-self-portraits-of-john-coplans-carla-williams-and-laura-aguilar.html>.
- Figures 11 & 12: Muholi, Zanele. *Faces and Phases*. 2007-2014. Gelatin Silver Prints, Installation View. Yancey Richardson. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/exhibitions/zanele-muholi2?view=slider#32>.

Figure 13: Opie, Catherine. *Self-Portrait/Cutting*, 1993, chromogenic print, Guggenheim, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/30354>.

Figure 14: Opie, Catherine. *Self-Portrait/Pervert*, 1994, chromogenic print, Guggenheim, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/12201>.

Figure 15: Opie, Catherine. *Dyke*. 1993. Chromogenic color print. MoMA. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/214470>.

Figure 16: Pérez, Elle. *Dahlia and David (fag with a scar that says dyke)*. 2019. Accessed January 3, 2021. <http://cargocollective.com/elleperez>.

Figure 17: Pérez, Elle. *Wilding and Charles*, 2019, digital silver gelatin print, Whitney Museum of American Art, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/elle-perez-wilding-and-charles>.

Figure 18: Pérez, Elle. *Mae (three days after)*, 2019, archival pigment print, Whitney Museum of Art, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/elle-perez-mae-three-days-after>.

Figure 19: Hujar, Peter. *Candy Darling on Her Deathbed*. 1973. Gelatin silver print. MoMA. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/192664>.

Figure 20: Pérez, Elle. *Binder*. 2018. Archival Pigment Print. 44 3/8 × 31 inches. 47 Canal, New York. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://flaunt.com/content/elle-perez>.

## Acknowledgements

2020 was a crazy year to write a thesis, but I am so grateful I was able to research this topic and learn more about feminist theory, queer theory, and contemporary photography practices. I want to thank my thesis advisor Aliza Shvarts for supporting and inspiring me in the process of my thesis research and writing. I am so grateful to have you as my advisor. I couldn't have completed this project without the support of my MACA friends who talked through theory with me and answered copious questions about handbook guidelines. Thank you to my parents for motivating me and supporting me throughout. This thesis is dedicated to better years ahead hopefully filled with more in-person art.

## Introduction

Laura Mulvey describes her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*<sup>1</sup> as a polemic, a manifesto. The essay dissects common Hollywood practices through a feminist psychoanalytic lens. By utilizing such a lens, Mulvey conceives of the concept of the 'male gaze,' which verbalizes the cinematic practice of reinforcing patriarchal norms by placing men in active roles and women in passive ones. Mulvey's theory has become seminal not only to the ways in which feminist academics look at cinema, but also to art theory and feminist activism as a whole. The essay allows for a conversation surrounding the impact of the gaze, how it functions, and how it can be subverted. Mulvey's theory is centered around the male gaze, but more specifically the white cisgender heterosexual male gaze onto the white cisgender heterosexual woman. Since its publication, many have responded to the paper to add analysis, to refute it, and to create alternate theories from its roots. If there is a male gaze, can there be a female gaze? Can it simply be the inverse, the filmographic negative of the original or does our societal scaffolding prohibit that possibility? Does the male gaze function differently if that male is gay? If desire and pleasure are inherently a part of the operation of the male gaze as a force, how does the queer gaze work? Can the idea of a queer gaze disrupt, decenter, reclaim ways of looking and being looked at?

---

<sup>1</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminism and Film Theory*, by Laura Mulvey, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 57-68, previously published in *Screen*, vol. 16 (n.p., 1975).

Many academics have written about the female gaze as a contrary measure, one that may serve to destabilize or counteract the negative impacts of the objectification inherent in the male gaze framework. A few have written outside the paradigm of the gaze relationship between the white cisgender heterosexual male and the white cisgender heterosexual female to look into the ways other identities involved in visual politics alter the structure of the gaze Mulvey diagnosed in her essay. There are papers surrounding the Black gaze (also known as the oppositional gaze), the black female gaze, the gay male gaze, and the queer gaze by authors like bell hooks<sup>2</sup>, Christopher Pullen<sup>3</sup>, Karyl E. Ketchum<sup>4</sup>, and Zoe Dirse<sup>5</sup> to name a few. However, the queer gaze is often written to be synonymous with the gay male gaze. To that I ask, how does a lesbian gaze function? Would it be at the intersection of the female gaze and the gay male gaze? And how does a nonbinary or genderqueer gaze function? When the creator exists outside of the gender binary, how can a theory cemented in the binary be applicable? Mulvey's theory is centered around both heterosexuality and the gender binary, so in order to apply it to alternative artists, subjects, and viewers, its principles must be renegotiated.

In this thesis, I will look at the ways the original theory is structured, how critics have currently re-negotiated the theory to account for alternate identity factors, and how artists whose identities exist outside of the two archetypes Mulvey presents (the white passive cisgender heterosexual female and the white active cisgender heterosexual male)

---

<sup>2</sup> bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115-131.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Pullen, "The Hetero Media Gaze in Film and Television," in *Straight Girls and Queer Guys* (n.p.: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 41-64, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bgzbtn.8>.

<sup>4</sup> Karyl E. Ketchum, "'Women' Filmmakers: Jill Soloway's Queer Gaze," *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*, 1-6, WILEY.

<sup>5</sup> Zoe Dirse, "Gender in Cinematography: Female Gaze (Eye) behind the Camera," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 15-29, HEIN.

can destabilize the theory with their work. Since Mulvey's theory does not account for intersectionality in marginalized identities, artists whose work addresses that intersectionality can exist radically outside of Mulvey's male gaze paradigm. Queer gazes in photography specifically have evidentiary functions as queerness has so often been forced to be transmitted covertly. By creating and fostering ways of gazing that dismantle the binaries essential to male gaze theory, those impacted by the objectification of patriarchal apparatuses have the opportunity to view and create artwork outside of those structures. I choose to look at the queer female and queer nonbinary gazes through the lens of artists rather than subjects because the starting point to disrupting any entrenched conventions of the gaze lies in the authorship of new artworks. Those who control the production of representation and documentation can control the ways in which we break free from harmful conventions of heteropatriarchal supremacy.

Mulvey's male gaze theory examines psychoanalysis and scopophilia in cinema. Mulvey writes, "[this paper] takes as starting point the way film reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle."<sup>6</sup> Thus, by utilizing psychoanalytic theory Mulvey is able to look into the unconscious ways patriarchal society has structured cinema. While this thesis is surrounding queerness, Mulvey uses "straight" and "sexual difference" here to refer not necessarily to sexuality, but rather to differences in gender between cisgender men and cisgender women. For this, Mulvey highlights the concepts of phallocentrism and castration anxiety. Phallocentrist psychoanalytic theory draws on Freud's (in)famous Oedipus complex (first proposed in his 1899 book *The*

---

<sup>6</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in *Feminism and Film*, 57.

*Interpretation of Dreams*)<sup>7</sup> in which, during a young boy's development, he starts to have unconscious desires for his mother and jealousy for his father.<sup>8</sup> In this theory, castration anxiety results from a fear of losing his phallus as a punishment for his feelings towards his mother. In this, the mother represents the castration threat both in the child's desire for her and in her absence of a phallus herself. Thus, she raises her child into that symbolic order and her meaning or purpose ends as Mulvey writes "except as a memory which oscillates between memory of maternal plentitude and memory of lack."<sup>9</sup> This lack being the lack of the phallus. Mulvey describes the sexual difference she is pointing to when she writes,

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.<sup>10</sup>

Mulvey then translates this to film. As the woman is bearer of meaning and not maker of meaning, the roles that she embodies in the filmmaking process are passive while those of her male counterparts are active.

Mulvey also brings in scopophilia, the pleasure of looking,<sup>11</sup> to talk about the voyeurism of film, which is there to be looked at. Looking comes into play in film through the filming of the work (artist), the staging of the work (characters or subjects), and the consumption of the work (audience). In Mulvey's analysis, the female subjects

---

<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; 1899).

<sup>8</sup> Kendra Cherry, "The Oedipus Complex in Children," Verywell, last modified May 14, 2020, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-an-oedipal-complex-2795403>.

<sup>9</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in *Feminism and Film*, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> "Scopophilia," in *Oxford Reference*, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100448183>.

are generally subjected to the male gaze of the director/artist, other actors/characters within the film, and the audience. Mulvey utilizes the concepts of phallocentrism and scopophilia to underscore the ways traditional film depends on patriarchal, voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms.

I am analyzing queer female and queer nonbinary gazes in photography because photography holds a unique position in its supposed function of the documentation of the real. When photography first became a popular form of media, it was meant to be more realistic, more true than art forms like painting, drawing, or sculpture.<sup>12</sup> We now know that photography is a representation of its subject that can be manipulated just like any other art medium.<sup>13</sup> However, since it is a utilization of light and chemistry to capture a real-life image it still seems more rooted in fact than other mediums. Mulvey's paper was an analysis of cinema, the moving image. Cinema, video, and filmic art are rooted in photography because they come from still images.<sup>14</sup> Video and still images have the potential for manipulation from filters, editing, props, and staging. While there is framing and splicing in both, documentary videography allows for the capture of movement, of a fuller "picture" than the photograph. In the photograph, one moment, one second, one instance is captured and made still forever for future viewing. Roland Barthes highlights this idea in his book entitled *Camera Lucida* when he writes, "When we define the photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents

---

<sup>12</sup> Andy Grundberg, "History of photography," in *Britannica*, last modified December 3, 2020, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/photography>.

<sup>13</sup> Eduardo Valdes-Hevia, Edwin Antonio, and Ronald Ong, "Beginners Guide to Photo Manipulation in Photoshop," Adobe, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.adobe.com/creativecloud/photography/discover/photo-manipulation.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Phillip Prodger, "Photography and Cinema: A Tale of Two Closer-Than-You-Think Siblings," *Time*, last modified October 29, 2015, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://time.com/3818034/photography-and-cinema/>.



do not move; it means that they do not emerge, do not leave: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the question becomes, is that capturing, that stilling ethical?

Susan Sontag, a queer filmmaker and writer, has written extensively on the ways in which the images we are inundated with impact us. In her 2003 book *Regarding the Pain of Others*<sup>16</sup> Sontag looks specifically at images of war and violence. Sontag writes:

Let the atrocious images haunt us. Even if they are only token, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing—may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don’t forget.<sup>17</sup>

In essence, that is what the photograph sets out to do: to capture a memory; to make it harder to forget. The photograph becomes a document, evidence that this event happened to this person at this time.

Prior to the invention of photography, images of war or atrocities were mostly representations with paint or pigment of some form. When photography became more popular and accessible, news photographers were sent to document war and violence along with daily occurrences like sports events and portraits. Coupled with the violent language inherent in photographic terms such as capture, shoot, and expose, the ethicality of capturing someone’s pain became a question, one that still permeates photographic discourse today. How helpful is photographing a starving child on their death bed? Or someone bleeding after an explosion? Do these photos of people at some of the worst times of their lives actually serve to increase awareness? Sontag argues these images

---

<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (n.p.: Hill and Wang, 1982), 57.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

should not have to make us feel their pain to be effective: “It is not a defect that we are not seared, that we do not suffer *enough*, when we see these images.”<sup>18</sup> The point of the documentary image is not to feel the suffering of the subject. Similarly, the photograph cannot teach us the complete history of the moment it documents, as it only shows one moment, a small fraction of time. Sontag states:

Such images cannot be more than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers. Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible? Is it excusable? Was it inevitable? Is there some state of affairs which we have accepted up to now that ought to be challenged?<sup>19</sup>

A photograph is not a transfer of experience or suffering. It can be a document, which, coupled with a narrative, may allow for understanding of why or how such suffering occurred. Photographs have often been used to create evidence or a record of suffering.

While there is a tendency to debate the ethicality or efficacy of photographers sent into war zones or crime scenes to document violence, there are also those who document the violence they themselves are subject to. In this case, the photograph is evidentiary and can often feel more like first-hand narrative. One example of this is Henryk Ross, a Jewish Polish man who was held in the Lodz Ghetto under Nazi rule.<sup>20</sup> Ross used photographs to covertly document what was going on around him and to him (Figure 1). He later buried the negatives to unearth after the war. Ross said, “I buried my negatives in the ground in order that there should be some record of our tragedy.”<sup>21</sup> While not a self-portrait, in this instance the creator is also the subject, documenting the conditions of

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Chloe Coleman, “‘I buried my negatives in the ground in order that there should be some record of our tragedy.’ The photographs of Henryk Ross,” *Washington Post*, March 6, 2017, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2017/03/06/i-buried-my-negatives-in-the-ground-in-order-that-there-should-be-some-record-of-our-tragedy-henryk-ross/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

his own survival and his community. So, if the photograph can be used as evidence, can claim a narrative, can be used to disseminate information about a moment or experience, how is that photograph received? Sontag writes, “For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock.”<sup>22</sup> The necessity of shock for change is what often draws people experiencing suffering to document their pain.

In the case of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, photographs of people afflicted with the disease were taken and disseminated after years of the US government largely ignoring AIDS since it mostly impacted gay men, IV drug users, and queer communities of color.<sup>23</sup> One example of this is the photograph taken by Therese Frare of David Kirby on his deathbed in Ohio (Figure 2).<sup>24</sup> The photograph shows Kirby in his dying moments surrounded by family in 1990. The image is visceral and has that shock factor described earlier not only because he is in his final moments, but also because of the way AIDS visually impacts the body (often patients are extremely emaciated). *Life Magazine*, which published the photo in 1990, now describes this image as “The Photo That Changed the Face of AIDS.”<sup>25</sup> The image has since been lauded as pivotal to altering public opinion around AIDS. While this photograph was not taken by someone diagnosed with AIDS, Kirby and his family requested that photographs be taken of his last moments. Frare told *Life Magazine* reporter Ben Cosgrove, “David was an activist, and he wanted to get the word out there about how devastating AIDS was to families and communities. Honestly, I think he was a lot more in tune with how important these photos might become.”<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain*, 81.

<sup>23</sup> “HIV/AIDS Timeline,” New York City AIDS Memorial, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.nycaidsmemorial.org/timeline>.

<sup>24</sup> Ben Cosgrove, “The Photo That Changed the Face of AIDS,” *LIFE*, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.life.com/history/behind-the-picture-the-photo-that-changed-the-face-of-aids/>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Kirby wanted these photos taken to get the word out because although at the time of the photograph in 1990 AIDS had been a pandemic for 9 years and already killed over 120,000 people<sup>27</sup> (nearly twice as many Americans as died in the Vietnam War),<sup>28</sup> there was still stigma around the disease because it impacted mostly gay men initially.<sup>29</sup> In contrast to our current COVID-19 pandemic, it took years for this disease to be addressed by the U.S. government.<sup>30</sup> Kirby decided to document his pain, his family's pain, and the representative pain of an entire generation of gay men with a photograph.

While Frare's photograph of Kirby is lauded as changing the face of AIDS, David Wojnarowicz had done a similar photography series of artist Peter Hujar right after his death in 1988, two years earlier.<sup>31</sup> Hujar was briefly romantically involved with Wojnarowicz but later became his close friend and mentor. Wojnarowicz was at Hujar's bedside when he died and took 23 photographs of Hujar's hands, feet, and face (Figures 3 & 4).<sup>32</sup> Christine Smallwood of the *New York Times* writes of the series,

These photographs are poignant and loving and confer dignity on Hujar. They also contain the furious truth that although we all die, we don't all die in the same way, and this particular death was not inevitable — it was bound up in the choices of a society that did not value AIDS victims enough to work harder to save them.<sup>33</sup>

Wojnarowicz died of AIDS himself in 1992. Before his death, he wrote about the importance of art as documentation of his lived reality as a gay man during the AIDS

---

<sup>27</sup> "HIV/AIDS Timeline," New York City AIDS Memorial.

<sup>28</sup> Ronald H. Spector, "Vietnam War," in *Britannica*, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>.

<sup>29</sup> "HIV/AIDS Timeline," New York City AIDS Memorial.

<sup>30</sup> Olivia Waxman, "On World AIDS Day, Those Who Fought the 1980s Epidemic Find Striking Differences and Tragic Parallels in COVID-19," *Time*, December 1, 2020, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://time.com/5915401/world-aids-day-covid-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

<sup>31</sup> Moira Donegan, "David Wojnarowicz's Still-Burning Rage," *The New Yorker*, August 18, 2018, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/david-wojnarowicz-still-burning-rage>.

<sup>32</sup> Christine Smallwood, "The Rage and Tenderness of David Wojnarowicz's Art," *New York Times*, September 17, 2018, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/07/magazine/the-rage-and-tenderness-of-david-wojnarowicz-art.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

pandemic within his 1991 memoir *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. In it he writes,

To place an object or piece of writing that contains what is invisible because of legislation or social taboo into an environment outside myself makes me feel not so alone. It is kind of like a ventriloquist's dummy – the only difference is that the work can speak by itself or act like that magnet to attract others who carried this enforced silence.<sup>34</sup>

And that's exactly what his work has done. In 2016, Hillary Clinton made a comment at Nancy Reagan's funeral celebrating the Reagans for starting a national conversation around AIDS when in fact the Reagan administration (1981-1989) long refused to even mention AIDS while hundreds of thousands of their citizens died.<sup>35</sup> After Clinton's apology, one of Wojnarowicz's photographs started circulating the internet again (Figure 5). An article written by Olivia Laing in *The Guardian* describes the photograph as showing "a lanky man from behind, wearing a denim jacket hand-painted with a pink triangle and the words 'IF I DIE OF AIDS – FORGET THE BURIAL – JUST DROP MY BODY ON THE STEPS OF THE FDA.'"<sup>36</sup>

After Wojnarowicz and Frare's photographs of the dead, AA Bronson's *Felix Partz, June 5, 1994* continued the documentation.<sup>37</sup> Bronson co-founded an artists group called General Idea with Jorge Zontal and Felix Partz in 1969.<sup>38</sup> All three lived and

---

<sup>34</sup> Olivia Laing, "David Wojnarowicz: still fighting prejudice 24 years after his death," *The Guardian*, May 12, 2016, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/13/david-wojnarowicz-close-to-the-knives-a-memoir-of-disintegration-artist-aids-activist>.

<sup>35</sup> Sam Levin, "Hillary Clinton says she misspoke about how Reagans dealt with Aids crisis," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2016, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/11/hillary-clinton-comments-reagan-aids-crisis-backlash>.

<sup>36</sup> Laing, "David Wojnarowicz."

<sup>37</sup> AA Bronson, *Felix, June 5, 1994*, 1994/1999, ektachrome, Esther Schipper, Berlin, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.estherschipper.com/artists/31-aa-bronson/works/16092/>.

<sup>38</sup> AA Bronson, "AA Bronson," AA Bronson, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.aabronson.com/aaindex.html>.

worked together from 1969 to 1994 when both Zontal and Partz died of AIDS.<sup>39</sup>

Bronson's first solo works were images of Zontal (Figure 6) and Partz (Figure 7) dying of AIDS (four months apart), Zontal a week before his death and Partz a few hours after his death.<sup>40</sup> Queer artists and activists at the time wanted their deaths to be documented, photographed, their bodies to be dropped at the steps of the FDA, their ashes to be thrown on the white house lawn<sup>41</sup> because those physicalities, that evidence, that documentation was harder to deny, to ignore than dwindling numbers in queer communities. These photographs evidence marginalized groups literally putting their bodies on the line through this painful documentation in order for these photographs to become documents, tragic moments captured so that the pain of communities can be seen. Sontag writes, "Photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed."<sup>42</sup> Photographs objectify, and Mulvey tells us that the white cisgender heterosexual male gaze instructs much of the tradition of cinema and photography. But reclamation is possible. In the queer community, where our documentation, our history is so often erased, silenced, or rewritten by other gazes, we can create our own objectifications, our own evidence that is framed, staged, spliced, and edited to tell our stories.

In renegotiating the principles of the gaze in photographic practices through a queer lens with increased representation of queer artists, the objectification of the gaze can function as a documentary device of marginalized community lived experiences

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Andy Patton, "The Manner of Their Dying," *Momus*, June 15, 2018, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://momus.ca/the-manner-of-their-dying/>.

<sup>41</sup> Jason Silverstein, "Why the Ashes of People With AIDS on the White House Lawn Matter," *Vice*, August 29, 2016, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/vdqv34/why-the-ashes-of-aids-victims-on-the-white-house-lawn-matter>.

<sup>42</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain*, 81.

instead of a support to heteropatriarchal structures. First, the current scaffolding of the male gaze theory must be analyzed, which I will do in my first chapter by looking through Mulvey's psychoanalytical lens. I will look at key alternate gaze responses such as the female gaze, the black male gaze and the black female gaze to see some ways Mulvey's male gaze structure has already been challenged. Alternate gazes that exist outside of the binary white cisgender heterosexual male vs. white cisgender heterosexual female categorization system Mulvey has focused on destabilize its authority. Thus, in my second chapter, I will look at how queer theory disrupts the focus on those archetypes as binary and instead informs the possibility of the queer gaze as a way to document lived experiences of queerness. Finally, to examine the functionality of the reclamation of the gaze by queer female and queer nonbinary photographers, I look at four artists in my third chapter: Zanele Muholi, Laura Aguilar, Elle Pérez, and Catherine Opie. All four of these artists have series surrounding the documentation of queer communities and their marginalizations. These artists serve as examples of ways lesbian and nonbinary gazes in contemporary photography are already functioning to document queer communities from within and, through those evidentiary practices rooted in alternate identities, disrupting the hold of the male gaze on our media.

## Chapter 1: Gaze Theory and Its Responses

As discussed in the introduction, Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*<sup>43</sup> underscores the heteropatriarchal structure inherent in the operations of the gaze in visual media. Her male gaze theory is rooted in psychoanalytic theory and notions of phallocentrism and scopophilia. Mulvey utilizes these elements to highlight the ways in which women are cast in passive roles and men in active ones throughout their positions as creators, subjects, and audiences. However, since Mulvey's 1975 essay, critics have dissected its efficacy in representing alternate identity factors. This chapter will unpack Mulvey's theory and a few key responses that investigate the female gaze, Black male gaze, and Black female gaze.

Mulvey bases her male gaze theory on psychoanalytic theory. This theory is rooted in the Oedipus complex blueprint and castration anxiety, where the woman represents both the male other and the lack of a phallus or fear of losing a phallus.<sup>44</sup> Woman is inevitably tied to the image of man, fated to be opposite to him. Mulvey writes about Freud's castration anxiety, "Woman's desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it."<sup>45</sup> Thus, woman is always existing in relation to man and as "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning"<sup>46</sup> because she holds meaning as one who lacks a phallus so that the man can be the creator of meaning as the one with the phallus. In this quote, Mulvey uses the word desire to speak about the woman's desire to have a phallus of her own, which the woman

---

<sup>43</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in *Feminism and Film*.

<sup>44</sup> Cherry, "The Oedipus," Verywell.

<sup>45</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in *Feminism and Film*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



realizes through having a child, the signifier of her desire. So, the woman is “bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command.”<sup>47</sup> Mulvey claims analyzing this theory brings feminists closer to understanding the structures of patriarchy by illuminating its tools. Mulvey mentions that the female unconscious, the growth of the female child, and female desire are all still missing from this analysis. However, she writes, “there is no way in which we can produce an alternative out of the blue, but we can... at least advance our understanding of the status quo, of the patriarchal order in which we are caught.”<sup>48</sup> So, Mulvey, in this paper, is not focused on alternative gazes such as the female gaze because she instead wants to analyze the existing state of affairs.

However, after criticism of this narrow scope of the paper, Mulvey wrote another paper six years later in 1981 entitled “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by ‘Duel in the Sun’ (King Vidor, 1946).”<sup>49</sup> In her original 1975 paper, Mulvey’s opening sentence reads as follows: “This paper intends to use psychoanalysis to discover where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him.”<sup>50</sup> “Him”— the subject in Mulvey’s first paper is exclusively male. Mulvey defends this decision in her 1981 response paper when she writes,

At the time, I was interested in the relationship between the image of woman on the screen and the ‘masculinisation’ of the spectator position, regardless of the actual sex (or possible deviance) or any real life movie-goer. The in-built patterns of pleasure and identification seemed to impose masculinity as a ‘point of view’;

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by 'Duel in the Sun' (King Vidor, 1946)," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 15/17 (Summer 1981): 12-15, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/44111815>.

<sup>50</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in *Feminism and Film*, 57.

a point of view which is also manifest in the general use of the masculine third person.<sup>51</sup>

In this response, Mulvey expands the focus of her paper from the male point of view to the masculine one. She describes the spectator as being masculinized due to this patriarchal structuring of the gaze regardless of the spectator's gender. Mulvey also may imply that this "masculine" point of view is imposed regardless of sexuality when she includes "possible deviance" in her descriptors. In seeing this through a queer lens, defining the oppressive, patriarchal gaze as masculine instead of male, implicates those who present masculine, such as butch lesbians, alongside cisgender men. However, Mulvey goes on to describe this masculinization as relating to active female desire that has been repressed for femininity instead of anything to do with gender-bending expression.

In returning to Mulvey's 1975 paper, the female figure always implies the threat of castration. In order to escape that castration anxiety the male spectator does one of two things. First, he becomes preoccupied with "the re-enactment of the original trauma," that being the castration or loss of phallus by "investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery."<sup>52</sup> That also includes devaluing, punishing or saving the woman "guilty" of being castrated. The second option is a "complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous"<sup>53</sup> because she is a "perfect product, whose body, stylized and fragmented by close-ups is the content of the film and the direct

---

<sup>51</sup> Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual,'" 12.

<sup>52</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in *Feminism and Film*, 64.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

recipient of the spectator's look."<sup>54</sup> In this narrative, the woman becomes an object and it is her body that is seen instead of herself. The body bears the gaze, bears the meaning, not the woman.

The setup of the male gaze is influenced by scopophilia, the mirror stage and voyeurism. Mulvey describes two contradictory aspects of pleasure (as diagnosed by psychoanalytic theory) that come together in the cinema: "the first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen."<sup>55</sup> Thus, the male spectator both gains pleasure from viewing the female characters as objects and identifying with the male character. The groundwork for this is laid out in Mulvey's discussion of the mirror stage. According to Jacques Lacan, the mirror stage occurs in a child's development when his "physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity," so when he looks in the mirror, he imagines his mirrored self as "more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body."<sup>56</sup> Thus, the child participates in a mis-recognition of the self. He is not the ideal, superior mirror version of himself, but nonetheless that mirror recognition becomes his ego ideal which he can utilize to identify with others in the future. In the case of the cinema, the spectator identifies with the male protagonist as "he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence."<sup>57</sup> This becomes a voyeuristic "phantasy" as the male spectator cannot

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 63.

project their own ego, own self in the dark theater, but can project onto the performer; “the position of the spectators in cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer.”<sup>58</sup> So, is the same voyeurism and scopophilia present for a female spectator? While Mulvey addresses the female spectator in greater detail in her 1981 response paper, in the original 1975 paper, she maintains, “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.”<sup>59</sup> While Mulvey’s focus on the male gaze does give a blueprint of the current heteropatriarchal structures in place as she intends, it also opens up discussion for the functionality of female gazes.

Eva-Maria Jacobsson questions whether there can be a female gaze in her 1999 piece entitled “A Female Gaze?”<sup>60</sup> Jacobsson utilizes the movie *Fatal Attraction*, where the female character is key to the plot and the male character is the object of desire to underscore the futility of a female gaze within Mulvey’s male gaze structure. Jacobsson writes, “She is adopting the masculine traits and the masculine position as a bearer of the gaze. The gaze could be said as being feminine in this scene. The object of desire is not a female character, rather a male, Dan.”<sup>61</sup> When the gaze is female, as the woman is objectifying the man and in control, it is still a masculine gaze as the woman has to adopt masculine traits in order to have that control. The woman is merely inhabiting the male gaze rather than creating a female gaze. Jacobsson further describes this as “a defence mechanism on behalf of masculinity and male desires, a defence of the male gaze and the

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>60</sup> Eva-Maria Jacobsson, “A Female Gaze?,” *Kungl Tekniska Högskolan: Royal Institute of Technology*, May 1999, 5-28.

<sup>61</sup> Jacobsson, “A Female,” 13.

patriarchal ideology. No woman is allowed to attain power over the men. No woman is allowed to be the definer and constructor of a female gaze.”<sup>62</sup> The male gaze cannot be penetrated by a female gaze because it comes with a defense system to uphold patriarchal ideology. In order to avoid women having their own female gaze, the woman can step into the male gaze temporarily while posturing as a man does in the male gaze, but cannot be the creator or definer of the gaze and must eventually revert to a passive role. Jacobsson writes, “to survive, the male identity and masculinity can be seen as being dependent on the female inferiority, and this is why the women has yet again to be repressed as a narrative and a female gaze.”<sup>63</sup> The male gaze is dependent on female inferiority and actively enforces it by blocking the female gaze. Thus, the male gaze continues to function even as female protagonists appear to foster female gaze.

However, Zoe Dirse, in her 2013 paper entitled “Gender in Cinematography: Female Gaze (Eye) behind the Camera,”<sup>64</sup> does think that there is a female gaze possible if the creator, the filmmaker, the artist is a woman. Dirse cites Anne Ross Muir’s interpretation:

recent feminist debates have used psychoanalytic theory to explore why the 'male gaze' is dominant in mainstream cinema. But there may be a more concrete (if related) explanation: that the masculine point of view is prevalent simply because men control the industry.<sup>65</sup>

According to Muir, the basis of Mulvey’s theory may be able to be uprooted if the conditions of production in the film industry change. If more women are creators and

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>64</sup> Dirse, "Gender in Cinematography."

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 18.

protagonists, the gaze may shift from that dominant psychoanalytic theory. Dirse uses herself as an example in her filmmaking of a friend's funeral:

The lens is so intimate... My own feelings of sadness are transmitted through the camera lens, and so, when the look of the camera and the narrator become one, and are both female, this radically changes the natural (or unnatural) order of the cinematic gaze and throws into question Mulvey's theory.<sup>66</sup>

While Dirse uses this example to illustrate the impact of a female camera and female narrator gaze, this example highlights another key factor in the efficacy of a female gaze: connection. If all that is replaced is a female author and female protagonist in place of a male one, the gaze would shift back to a feminine inhabitation of the male gaze as Jacobsson described. This case is different because Dirse has a connection to the people she is filming, so the lens she takes on to document her community is nuanced.

Dirse uses the CBC biography *A Tale of Two Sisters*<sup>67</sup> to illustrate the ways in which both male and female gazes can function in tandem. In an excerpt, the Dale sisters (Cynthia and Jennifer), two Canadian actresses prepare to greet an audience. Although they are preparing to be under the male gaze inherent in the normative structure of the television audience, in this prior scene “the gaze of the narrator and the camera is female, and something seems to shift...the two sisters relax in front of the camera and lose some of their self-conscious performing role.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, the effect of the narrator and the camera being female allows the sisters to remove themselves from any forced production of femininity even if only as a short reprise. Dirse describes the effect of female documentary narration when she writes, “subjects are given a voice so that the audience

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

is forced to draw its own conclusions.”<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, the male narration in documentary often instructs audiences on what to think. It is this compassion for the subject that creates an alternate female gaze.

Finally, Dirse questions the premise of dividing a gaze into female vs. male. For Dirse, “binary notions in language - such as man/woman and Black/White - are not immutable but constructed oppositional pairs.”<sup>70</sup> Here, Dirse highlights a key issue with Mulvey’s original text: it is inherently rooted in binaries. While it may be useful to understand the initial structures put in place by men who have controlled the industry since its conception, by opposing man and woman in the gaze, one must fit into one of two roles to fight it. Furthermore, Dirse writes, “femininity is disconnected from a specific female identity. Femininity can be regarded as a discursive construction and not as exclusively related to a specific biological social group.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, to be feminine is not to be female and to be masculine is not to be male. As gender is constructed, often through combinations of femininity and masculinity, the binary notions of female vs. male as being inherently oppositional lose their merit.

Mulvey’s 1981 afterthoughts response paper reinforces the masculine vs. feminine binary from her first 1975 paper by analyzing female psychoanalysis and child development. Mulvey writes,

the female spectator may find herself so out of key with the pleasure on offer, with its ‘masculinisation’ that the spell of fascination is broken. On the other hand, she may not. She may secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoy the freedom of

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, Mulvey underscores that the female spectator may gain pleasure from viewing a movie not because she is identifying with the passive female character, but rather with the active male one just as a male spectator would. In Freud's writings on female psychoanalysis through childhood development, he states that a girl goes through a lot of the same phases of mental and emotional development, but has to repress them in learning femininity. Mulvey cites Freud's *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* when she quotes, "In females, too, the striving to be masculine is ego-syntonic at a certain period - namely in the phallic phase, before the development of femininity sets in."<sup>73</sup> The development of femininity is described as a "momentous process of repression"<sup>74</sup> that allows the woman to become feminine. Furthermore, Freud uses masculine to represent conventional and feminine to represent oppositional and passive. In order to be properly feminine, one must repress the inherent active desires of the ego; "The correct road to femininity leads to increasing repression of 'the active.'"<sup>75</sup> So, female viewers seeing films about masculine pleasure can identify with the active point of view allowing "a woman spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity, the never fully repressed bed-rock of feminine neurosis."<sup>76</sup> In this, the female spectator still succumbs to the male gaze as she cannot truly experience the same scopophilia that a male spectator can, due to her repressed "feminine neurosis."

---

<sup>72</sup> Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual,'" 12.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



While both female and male spectators can identify with active male roles in a film in different manners, the male cannot be objectified under the male gaze. In her 1975 essay, Mulvey highlights that in “an active/passive heterosexual division of labor... the male figure cannot bear the burden of objectification.”<sup>77</sup> This addresses the idea that the solution to removing power from the objectification of women under the male gaze is to objectify men right back. Objectification of men does not fix the objectification of women. In Mulvey’s argument, it is not even possible to objectify a man in film while the heteropatriarchal structures are in place. Since the man cannot be objectified while the woman is passive and the man is active, he is free to relate to any men on screen as projections of his perfect ego ideal. Mulvey writes, “A male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror.”<sup>78</sup> Not only does the male spectator get to be free from objectification, but he also is allowed to identify with a more perfect, more handsome, active version of himself on screen.

While white heterosexual women may be only able to view passive, repressed versions of themselves on screen, bell hooks underscores the erasure of almost any relation to on-screen narratives for Black men and Black women in her analysis of the oppositional gaze. In hooks’ 1992 essay entitled “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,”<sup>79</sup> hooks highlights how the gaze differs for Black viewers. The history of the gaze is entrenched in slavery because white slave-owners “punished enslaved black

---

<sup>77</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in *Feminism and Film*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> hooks, "The Oppositional," 115-131.

people for looking” and therefore “slaves were denied their right to gaze.”<sup>80</sup> The act of looking itself became “a rebellious desire” and that is why hooks terms the Black gaze as the oppositional gaze. hooks writes, “By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: ‘Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.’”<sup>81</sup> By prohibiting Black slaves from having the agency to have a gaze, the gaze itself became something that one longed for. hooks emphasizes the real-life consequences of Black men being murdered or lynched for simply looking at a white woman such as the case of Emmett Till. Till’s looking at a white woman was interpreted (through white supremacist structures) “as violation, as ‘rape’ of white womanhood.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, the Black male gaze “was always subject to control and/or punishment by the powerful white Other.”<sup>83</sup> So, while Black men may not have representation in these white films, the dark theater allowed them to “unleash the repressed gaze”<sup>84</sup> as they could gaze freely upon both white women and white men without punishment. The white man cannot control the Black male gaze in cinema. hooks explores the psychoanalytic implications for Black men when she writes, “In their role as spectators, black men could enter an imaginative space of phallogentric power that mediated racial negation.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, by focusing on their relation to phallogentrism and freedom in looking at the screen, the Black male gaze can allow Black male spectators to be a part of an imagined reality.

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

However, these histories also serve to give the oppositional gaze different functionality. The oppositional gaze becomes “a critical gaze, one that ‘looks’ to document.”<sup>86</sup> This documentation is of representation. The viewer who has been both denied the right to look and denied bountiful or accurate representation, looks to critique any half-forms or representation of their identity. Due to this lack of representation, hooks underscores that for Black people, “to stare at the television, or mainstream movies, to engage its images, was to engage its negation of black representation.”<sup>87</sup> So, one had to develop a critical gaze in order to avoid simply accepting the erasure of one’s existence. hooks highlights the debate around Black films that were created in response to lack of representation in mainstream media. Those films too were subject to a critical gaze. hooks writes,

since they came into being in part as a response to the failure of white-dominated cinema to represent blackness in a manner that did not reinforce white supremacy, they too were critiqued to see if images were seen as complicit with dominant cinematic practices.<sup>88</sup>

It would never be enough to simply take the same tropes and representations that occur in mainstream white media and supplant Black characters into them because the context of gazing and being gazed upon is completely different within Black historical contexts.

Additionally, the Black female gaze functions differently than the Black male gaze because the Black female spectator cannot embody the imagined reality of being the white male protagonist. The gaze as set forth by Mulvey is inherently gendered. Thus, the Black female gaze is impacted by aspects of the both the white female gaze and the Black

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

male gaze, while being structurally different. Since Black female characters were often missing from cinema, “black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within a cinematic context that constructs our presence as absence, that denies the ‘body’ of the black female so as to perpetuate white supremacy and with it a phallocentric spectatorship where the woman to be looked at and desired is ‘white.’”<sup>89</sup> Since, as described in the mirror stage Mulvey highlights, pleasure in looking comes from identification with what is on the screen, the Black female spectator must imagine herself as a white woman to feel that recognition.

hooks describes a viewer named Pauline who imagines herself as white main characters to feeling pleasure while watching. However, Miss Pauline says, “‘it made coming home hard.’”<sup>90</sup> hooks writes, “we came home to ourselves.”<sup>91</sup> When Pauline gave in to imagining herself as being white in society, while she enjoyed watching the film, coming back home to a reality of structural white supremacy was harder. Furthermore, in that imagination of identification, hooks cites “A Denial of Difference: Theories of Cinematic Identification,” an essay written by Anne Friedberg in which Friedberg writes that, “‘all recognition is itself an implicit confirmation of the ideology of the status quo.’”<sup>92</sup> The Black female spectator who does not want to identify with the film in order to not confirm the ideology of the status quo, the white patriarchy, deconstructs the binary Mulvey describes. By refusing to either be the “victim or the perpetrator”<sup>93</sup> of phallocentric gazes and instead critically assessing the cinema’s construction of those

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 122.

gazes, the Black female spectator creates a “critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of ‘woman as image, man as bearer of look’ [is] continually deconstructed.”<sup>94</sup> While within this critical lens, one cannot temporarily inhabit the pleasure of recognition with the white character as Pauline did, there is pleasure gained instead in going against the grain: the pleasure of resistance.

hooks criticizes Mulvey’s implicit assumption that women cannot construct an oppositional gaze and in doing so destabilizes the premise of Mulvey’s assertion that the male gaze is inextricably cemented into our viewing. According to hooks, Mulvey “does not even consider the possibility that women can construct an oppositional gaze via an understanding and awareness of the politics of race and racism.”<sup>95</sup> While Mulvey describes her text as being focused on patriarchal structures in order to diagnose what is currently at play, her text being the foundation of feminist gaze theory (which she could not have foreseen), creates a narrative of women entrapped within the gaze. hooks writes that the problem is in the “totalizing narrative of woman as object whose image functions solely to reaffirm and reinscribe patriarchy.”<sup>96</sup> By allowing women to be perceived as objects in the gaze structure (even in Mulvey’s afterthoughts piece which further emphasizes this web of objectification as inescapable), this white feminist film theory “participates in the abstraction of women...For it is only as one imagines ‘woman’ in the abstract, when woman becomes fiction or fantasy, can race not be seen as significant.”<sup>97</sup> Mulvey’s male gaze theory is drenched in white feminism because it places gender at its

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 122-123.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 124.

center as “the primary and/or exclusive signifier of difference.”<sup>98</sup> To escape the trap of the active male passive female dichotomy, one must move beyond resistance through a white female gaze.

hooks describes centering narratives around Black women as an alternative gaze. When Black women instead are allowed to control the gaze to look at each other, it allows for “the direct unmediated gaze of recognition,”<sup>99</sup> which enables Black female characters to “define their reality, apart from the reality imposed upon them by structures of domination. The shared gaze of the two women reinforces their solidarity.”<sup>100</sup> hooks utilizes Julie Dash’s film *Illusions* as an example of the power of a Black female creator centering narratives around Black women: “How they see themselves is most important, not how they will be stared at by others... they display their bodies not for a voyeuristic colonizing gaze but for that look of recognition that affirms their subjectivity.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, the gaze can go beyond exploitation and instead create recognition of a shared identity that has been erased. Instead of resisting erasure, Black female creators make alternative artworks that are not reactionary, but visionary of a new reality of a gaze rooted in recognition and representation.

It is Mulvey’s focus on the status quo of male-centered cinema, as stated in her 1981 afterthoughts paper that restricts Mulvey from imagining and recognizing alternate identity gazes. Mulvey’s narrow white heterosexual lens becomes a handicap that, even in her response paper, embeds her in a gaze ruled by Freud’s male-centered

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 130.

psychoanalytic theory. hooks writes of the possibility of constructing alternate gazes through awareness of the politics of race and racism. Similar alternate gazes can be constructed that include the nuances of queer representation through awareness and representation of queer culture and homophobia. Thus, alternate, nuanced gazes such as critical Black female gazes or queer gazes allow for the production of documentation of the lived experiences of those viewers (allowing them to relate to that media), while at the same time allowing groups oppressed by the male gaze structure (such as repressed white cisgender heterosexual women) to break free of their own imprisonment in the fallacy of contemporary male gaze hegemony.

## Chapter 2: Renegotiating Queer Gazes

Queer gazes, through a multifaceted look at gender and sexuality coupled with a nuanced awareness of the politics of queer history and erasure, have the ability to destabilize the heteropatriarchal scaffolding of male gaze theory. Many have debated the efficacy of the white female heterosexual gaze as it still operates within the white heterosexual patriarchal male gaze theory Mulvey describes. However, real change can be made in the way the male gaze permeates our media when intersectional identity factors are taken into account in the structure of gaze theory. While Mulvey seems to think that queer or gender variant gazes cannot break from the male gaze framework, writers like Christopher Pullen,<sup>102</sup> Judith Butler<sup>103</sup> and José Esteban Muñoz<sup>104</sup> underscore the ways queer gazes alter psychoanalytic gaze architecture. Similarly, Zoe Dirse<sup>105</sup> and Karyl E. Ketchum<sup>106</sup> give examples of ways a queer female gaze functions in opposition to Mulvey's presuppositions about gendered desire in media.

Christopher Pullen underscores practice of queer coding and erasure in his 2016 book entitled *Straight Girls and Queer Guys*.<sup>107</sup> Pullen's chapter "The Hetero Media Gaze in Film and Television"<sup>108</sup> underscores queer spectators. Pullen writes, "queer audiences to some degree are coerced into the position of the voyeur, as there is an expectation of absence, and yet there is a drive to continuously find representations of the

---

<sup>102</sup> Pullen, "The Hetero," 41-64.

<sup>103</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519-531, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893>.

<sup>104</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 8: 5-16, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07407709608571228>.

<sup>105</sup> Dirse, "Gender in Cinematography," 15-29.

<sup>106</sup> Ketchum, "'Women' Filmmakers," 1-6.

<sup>107</sup> Pullen, "The Hetero," 41-64.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



self.”<sup>109</sup> Since there are not many mainstream films that show central characters who are openly gay (even though this representation is increasing), queer audiences have typically gone to the cinema knowing that they would not see themselves reflected back on the screen. So, queer spectators end up becoming voyeurs as they try to find fragments of their experiences in straight characters. Furthermore, there is a history of queer coded characters, who are often written with enough queer signals or tropes that queer audiences can understand that they are written as queer, but no overt queerness that would upset conservative audiences. Pullen cites that these representations were designed to comply with a set of 1930s industry guidelines called the Motion Picture Code.<sup>110</sup> Pullen writes that these “subliminal or covert” representations of queer sexuality are limited because this industry monitor “offered advice on the censorship of a range of explicit sexual and social representations” and often censors “wanted to extinguish any direct references to homosexuality.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, queers have had a hard time finding themselves reflected in media because the industry has intentionally made it hard.

#### Subliminal messages of queer desire

offered new ways of representing the queer male, as both a subject of the gaze and as one who could gaze upon others. The sense of absence and presence, related to notions of narcissism and voyeurism is a key factor in the construction of the queer gaze, and its setting within mainstream cinema.<sup>112</sup>

Covert glimpses of queerness on the screen allowed queers to see fragments of their identities, without heterosexual audiences catching on to the codes. While in the case of the Black viewer the oppositional gaze functions as an act of defiance, the act of being

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 63.

seen, that is, being made an object of the gaze in a positive representation holds similar radical possibility for the queer viewer. This is why openly queer representations of queer people created by queer artists is so radical and destabilizing to heteropatriarchal media.

Mulvey introduces notions of sexuality or gender difference in her 1981 afterthoughts paper, but she denies that queer gazes can do anything besides fall into the heteropatriarchal gaze structure she insists we all inhabit. Mulvey once again cites Freud copiously throughout her analysis. She includes a quote from Freud's *On Femininity* in which he writes,

Sexual life is dominated by the polarity of masculine-feminine...It would not be surprising if it were to turn out that each sexuality had its own special libido appropriated to it, so that one sort of libido would pursue the aims of a masculine sexual life and another sort those of a feminine one. But nothing of the kind is true.<sup>113</sup>

Freud cements his belief in a “necessary” masculine/feminine binary when he writes, “And the reason for this may lie - thinking once again teleologically - in the fact that the accomplishments of the aims of biology has been entrusted to the aggressiveness of men and has been made to some extent independent of women's consent.”<sup>114</sup> In Freud's reasoning, all sexualities must enforce a feminine/masculine binary because biologically an aggressive man and submissive women are needed to continue humanity. This argument is so male-oriented that even within its claim of focus on biology, it somehow ignores the fact that humanity relies on people with wombs to permit human beings to be created within them, not on the “aggressiveness of men.”

Mulvey completely ignores the possibility of queerness while using queer terms when writing about women repressing masculinity for femininity during their psychoanalytic

---

<sup>113</sup> Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual,'" 13.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

development: “for women (from childhood onwards) trans-sex identification is a *habit* that very easily becomes *second Nature*. However this Nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes.”<sup>115</sup> This quote is ironic because it uses terms like “trans-sex identification” and “transvestite” to describe the development of cisgender heterosexual women. Mulvey closes her afterthoughts paper with, “the female spectator’s phantasy of masculinisation is always to some extent at cross purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes.”<sup>116</sup> Mulvey refers to a character who plays out masculinization by being an active figure with “‘tomboy’ pleasures”<sup>117</sup> who can only remember her masculine phase fondly when dead. Whether or not this character is queer coded, Mulvey utilizes it to speak about how the female cannot escape her role through an active “phantasy.” The terminology Mulvey uses to discuss female spectator and character agency underscores a common practice in feminist theory of overlooking the histories and intricacies of female masculinity. Jack Halberstam’s book *Female Masculinity*<sup>118</sup> highlights how female masculinity destabilizes binary notions of feminine and masculine, female and male, thus disrupting the male gaze theory. Halberstam underscores how female masculinity confuses those who think in binaries when he writes, “she was both phallic and obviously castrated— she was a riddle that neither psychoanalysis nor sexology could adequately solve.”<sup>119</sup> Butch or masculine women live outside of the norms of gender expression by presenting as masculine without identifying as men.

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>118</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (2018; repr., Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., xv.

However, there is also a history of relating butchness to maleness, and by extension male privilege. Halberstam cites Otto Weininger, who proclaimed, “A woman’s demand for emancipation and her qualification for it are in direct proportion to the amount of maleness in her.”<sup>120</sup> Halberstam underscores that when Weininger says emancipation, he does not mean “economic autonomy, political enfranchisement, or gender equality, he mean[s] rather the ‘deep seated craving to acquire man’s character, to attain his mental and moral freedom, to reach his real interests and creative power.’”<sup>121</sup> Thus, Weininger conflates female masculinity with a desire to be male. While this connection is rooted in misogyny and the phallocentric belief that all people want to be men to hold power and agency, it is debated within feminist circles. When a woman claims masculinity, does she also claim the powers that maleness holds? Halberstam poses the question that many butch women are asked to consider, “Does the masculine woman cleave to a masculinist politics that sets her at the top of a hierarchy of women or does she recognize her solidarity with feminine women and set her sights on feminist goals?”<sup>122</sup> This is rooted in a supposition that by presenting masculine, a butch woman can discard her lived experiences of womanhood and gain the privilege men do from being masculine. This ignores lived histories of womanhood and intricacies of queerness that often (not always) accompany female masculinity. However, as a “betrayal to womanhood,”<sup>123</sup> the female masculine expression is also depicted as “a threat to natural, heterosexual love.”<sup>124</sup> Some feminists want to work within heteropatriarchal systems to change them and see

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., xviii

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

masculine lesbians or transgender people as threats to that work by taking the focus off of cis-heterosexual women.

Regardless of those debates, butch women exist as both masculine and women. And that mere existence of female masculinity disrupts the binaries set forth in the male gaze;

Butch is always a misnomer— not male, not female, masculine but not male, female but not feminine, the term serves as a placeholder for the unassimilable, for that which remains indefinable or unspeakable within the many identifications that we make and that we claim.<sup>125</sup>

It is the unassimilable, the unspeakable, that which we cannot classify that has the ability to dismantle a structure based on strict classifications and binaries. Halberstam writes, “If masculinity is not the social and cultural and indeed political expression of maleness, then what is it?”<sup>126</sup> The mischaracterization of gender as binary haunts the efficacy of male gaze theory in a time with visible and abundant queer gazes.

Judith Butler uproots our typical conceptions of gender as a stable identity in her 1988 paper entitled “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.”<sup>127</sup> While Mulvey (and in her references Freud) has set up gender as being something essential to our gaze, Butler argues that gender is societally constructed:

gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*...in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>127</sup> Butler, "Performative Acts," 519-531.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 519.

A woman is not born a woman, but becomes a woman through acting out that gender every day. Acts do not inherently stem from our gender, our gender stems from series of acts. Butler emphasizes the body is in an “active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities, a complicated process of appropriation which any phenomenological theory of embodiment needs to describe.”<sup>129</sup> This correlates with the change in mannerisms and clothing associated with genders over time. Butler is not arguing that biological sex does not exist, as it is very clear that people can be born with sex organs like a penis or vulva (though not all people are born with sex organs and some intersex people are born with combinations of sex organs like testes with ovaries).<sup>130</sup>

However, Butler argues that sex has no inherent meaning;

To be female is...a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project.<sup>131</sup>

Gender is performative and not essential to our being because it changes its markers over time as it is informed by cultural movements and historical backgrounds.

While gender is performative, its performance is concealed as natural or necessary. Gender is necessary for “cultural survival”<sup>132</sup> because those who stray outside of performing prescribed gender norms face social consequences. Those who perform their gender “wrong” tend to be punished or marginalized. Butler takes this

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 521.

<sup>130</sup> Planned Parenthood Federation of America, "What Is Intersex?," Planned Parenthood, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/sex-gender-identity/whats-intersex>.

<sup>131</sup> Butler, "Performative Acts," 522.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

marginalization as evidence that those who claim gender is natural and necessary know that to be false;

that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated.<sup>133</sup>

In a society that is gendered, everything that you do either conforms to or rebels against gendered expectations. Butler's idea of gender as an ongoing performance contradicts the stability of gendered positions that Mulvey asserts in her use of psychoanalysis. Butler directly critiques feminists who want to radically "transform the social situation of women without first determining whether the category of woman is socially constructed in such a way that to be a woman is, by definition, to be in an oppressed situation."<sup>134</sup> Butler offers Mulvey an escape from the trap of the male gaze she claims to be stuck within. While those heteropatriarchal structures exist and do objectify women, working within those structures and thus affirming those structures will never allow women to escape societally constructed oppression.

Butler's performative gender theory affirms trans people. While Mulvey's theory is based on a child growing up and developing an ego (male) or suppressing an ego (female), Butler's gender performance theory highlights how all gender expressions are equally real. Those who critique trans people for the way they perform gender perform gender themselves:

Indeed, the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations. Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 528.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 523.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 527.

Butler uses an example of spectators reacting with pleasure when seeing a trans performer onstage versus with anger when seeing them on a bus. On stage, the gender performance is just that, a performance, while on a bus we think it somehow “real” and different rules apply. Looking at gender through a performative lens can allow feminists to break free of static conceptions of gendered psychoanalysis. Gender is socially performed and constitutes an identity, similarly, alternative identities allow for escape from the heteropatriarchal male gaze.

Zoe Dirse, referenced earlier as highlighting female gazes, explores the possibility of a lesbian gaze.<sup>136</sup> In her example, a lesbian photographer does a photoshoot with three women in an alley. Dirse writes,

The photographer is exploring her own sexuality through her lens, as she shoots the women playing to the camera and amongst themselves, while the cinema lens explores the dynamics of the scene...The bearer of the look is female, the subject is female, and the subject subverts the gaze and gazes at herself.<sup>137</sup>

Dirse describes this as a true female gaze because both the subject and creator are female and thus, the subject is able to gaze at herself instead of solely being an object to be gazed at. Dirse writes, “when the gaze is so deliberately subverted from the male to the female, we finally have an opportunity to view ourselves as we really are, in the case of this film, not as objects of male desire but as objects of female desire.”<sup>138</sup> For Dirse, women are able to really show themselves when they are objects of female desire.

However, I think that the female gaze, the queer gaze, even the lesbian gaze can exist outside of the objectification of one through desire. The photographer can relate to and

---

<sup>136</sup> Dirse, "Gender in Cinematography," 15-29.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 21.



care for subjects, thus creating a lesbian gaze that allows subjects to subvert the gaze without having to be an object of someone's desire.

Similarly, Karyl E. Ketchum underscores Jill Soloway's work as an example of queer female gaze in her 2020 essay entitled "'Women' Filmmakers: Jill Soloway's Queer Gaze."<sup>139</sup> Ketchum writes that Soloway's work has

upset traditional notions of the ideal spectator confidently immersed in a visual world designed to appeal to heterosexual masculine desires, supplanting this with a decidedly female and queer preferred viewer and opening up possibilities well beyond gender and heterosexual subject/object dichotomies.<sup>140</sup>

Mulvey's papers focus on the male spectator or how the female spectator succumbs to patriarchal structures that objectify her. However, Ketchum underscores that Soloway, as a queer female filmmaker, escapes from those dichotomies by making her audience focus queer women. Ketchum says Soloway has "a nuanced and intuitive understanding of the highly gendered politics of looking and being looked upon,"<sup>141</sup> which allows for "storytelling that is changing audience expectations and challenging many long-held assumptions about gender, sexuality and representation."<sup>142</sup> Ketchum also cites Guy Debord's *Society of The Spectacle* where he writes, "all that appears is good; all that is good appears."<sup>143</sup> If all that is good appears, then representation is critical. Ketchum declares that "to go unrepresented is symbolic erasure. A kind of violence."<sup>144</sup> While Mulvey asserts representations of women are objectifying and harmful, Ketchum

---

<sup>139</sup> Ketchum, "'Women' Filmmakers," 1-6.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

highlights the violence in erasure of unrepresented or severely underrepresented communities.

José Esteban Muñoz highlights the manifestation of queer erasure in his 1996 essay entitled “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts.”<sup>145</sup> Muñoz uses the example of performance art to underscore how queer practices are often disregarded as lacking proof and being anecdotal:

Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances.<sup>146</sup>

Queerness has historically been covert because it had to be. As discussed earlier, even fictional queer characters in media had to be coded instead of overt. This is often done to appease straight audiences while baiting gay ones with a false promise of representation. Thus, coded or covert queerness is often disregarded as queerness at all. Muñoz writes, “Central to performance scholarship is a queer impulse that intends to discuss an object whose ontology, in its inability to ‘count’ as a proper ‘proof,’ is profoundly queer.”<sup>147</sup> Performance becomes inherently queer because it is an expression without a record. Performances constitute queer acts, which can “stand as evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities.”<sup>148</sup> Photographing queerness is radical because it creates an archive of documented and displayed queerness. Queer photography asserts that the ephemeral, the

---

<sup>145</sup> Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence,” 5-16.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

covert, the coded, while important in our history, no longer has to be our only trace. The queer archive can be overt and determined.

Muñoz underscores the erasure of those who fall into more than one minority category. When one archetype of a minority becomes recognized, those who encompass multiple minority identities (such as being queer and BIPOC) “must choose from different categories of identity and evidence.”<sup>149</sup> Muñoz quotes Sue Houchins, a scholar in African American studies and women and gender studies, who writes,

if a Caribbean woman reveals herself as a lesbian, others look for ways in which she is foreign to the Caribbean because one can't be African or African American—within the Caribbean hemisphere, at least—and lesbian at the same time. If something is evidence of her queerness, it's evidence she's not black. If it's evidence of her blackness, clearly she's not queer.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, even queer archives are produced, they can fail to document points of interaction between minority identities. Our archive must be intersectional. This is one of the reasons why Mulvey's male gaze theory does not hold up as absolute. While it may or may not be accurate in describing gaze politics between white cis-heterosexual men and white cis-heterosexual women, it reduces people down to man vs. women or masculine vs. feminine when many other identities overlap in gaze politics. When we create queer archives through lesbian and nonbinary gazes to destabilize heteropatriarchal systems, those archives must include creators and spectators with intersectional identities.

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 9.

### Chapter 3: Case Studies of Lesbian & Nonbinary Gazes:

Laura Aguilar, Zanele Muholi, Elle Pérez, and Catherine Opie

Lesbian and nonbinary queer gazes in contemporary photography destabilize the heteropatriarchal apparatus of the male gaze. Photography as a medium surrounds ideas of documentation and evidence creation. By utilizing photography to document their own identities, queer female and nonbinary artists and activists are creating an archive of diverse, lived queerness that is rooted in a history of oppression and ephemera. Gregg Bordowitz, in his 1987 paper "Picture a Coalition,"<sup>151</sup> insists that his documentarian work "be recognized as itself a form of activism"<sup>152</sup> because documentation of those hidden, erased, ignored or misrepresented in history is a radical form of activism that says we are here and we will be seen. Mulvey's male gaze theory framework highlights how Mulvey believes white cis-heterosexual women are trapped within a passive, feminine role under the active, masculine patriarchy. Her analysis of the female spectator further entraps any possibility of a female gaze that is liberatory into the mold of the male gaze. However, all artists do not fall within the two archetypes Mulvey presents: white cis-heterosexual men and white cis-heterosexual women. By eroding the archetype binaries of established gazes, contemporary artists of alternative identities are not only opening space for their own gazes and their own communities, but also inviting those trapped within the heteropatriarchal objectification framework to escape too.

---

<sup>151</sup> Gregg Bordowitz, "Picture a Coalition," *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 182-196, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/3397573>.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

Laura Aguilar (she/her), a Californian photographer, exemplifies the potential of a lesbian gaze to document marginalized communities as evidence of ephemera with subject-centered methods through her series entitled *Latina Lesbians*. Yxta Maya Murray, in an article for *Aperture*, wrote of Aguilar's identities as central to her work:

Aguilar experienced auditory dyslexia, which caused her to write in a unique style; she also wrestled with fears of misunderstanding and being misunderstood as a consequence of her Mexicanness, her lesbianism, her large physical size, and her poverty.<sup>153</sup>

Aguilar's work directly explores her identity factors and employs her own body. Maximiliano Durón describes her as explicitly centering her works around "her identities as a large-bodied, working class queer Chicana woman" in an article for *ARTnews*.<sup>154</sup> Durón also quotes Sybil Venegas, the co-executor of Aguilar's estate as saying, "She was so out front with these issues in her work with her body and her identity that people just couldn't deal with it."<sup>155</sup> Aguilar's work is explicitly documenting and recording her community and her identity as a Chicana lesbian through her own gaze and with a focus on representation.

Aguilar's *Latina Lesbians* series underscores a way lesbian photographers can utilize their gaze to disrupt the objectification inherent in male gaze structures. The series is comprised of portraits and writings from Latina lesbians Aguilar chronicled, mostly in the late 1980s. The writings that accompany each photo are done by the subject themselves,<sup>156</sup> which gives the subject an agency in the creation of their own

---

<sup>153</sup> Yxta Maya Murray, "Laura Aguilar Was a Proud Latina Lesbian, and She Flaunted It," *Aperture*, November 12, 2019, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://aperture.org/editorial/laura-aguilar-yxta-maya-murray/>.

<sup>154</sup> Maximiliano Durón, "Laura Aguilar's Lasting Legacy: How the World Caught Up to the Pioneering Photographer," *ARTnews*, April 24, 2020, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.artnews.com/feature/laura-aguilar-who-is-she-1202684828/>.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Murray, "Laura Aguilar."

portrayal and the documentation of a moment of their experience as a Latina lesbian. One of the works features a black and white photograph of Yolanda Retter, a lesbian librarian, scholar and activist standing in front of a bookshelf, dark polo tucked into jeans with her hands in her pockets looking sternly to the right of the image (Figure 8).<sup>157</sup> Under the image, a handwritten paragraph addressing her identity and the image itself. Retter writes:

My latina side informs my lesbian side with chispa & pasión. I am a lifelong lesbian and I think that women hold powerful promise for changing conditions on the planet. You think I look hostile? Maybe it has to do with a passion for and an impatience with a vision. Maybe it comes from comparing what could be with what is. ¿Y qué?!<sup>158</sup>

Not only is Aguilar representing and affirming Latina lesbians by documenting them from her gaze as a Latina lesbian, but she is also allowing them to choose what narrative accompanies their portrait. While Aguilar is the author of the gaze here, Retter is the author of the piece as a whole. Her direct question to the viewer “you think I look hostile?” underscores that she knows how she is portraying herself, how she is being documented. In her portrait, Retter makes the viewer think about her as a Latina lesbian with a passion and a vision. Aguilar gives her that platform. This goes back to bell hook’s statement about black female gazes onto themselves as being a display not for colonizing gazes, but for recognition. The theory of the black female gaze author applies here because Aguilar is a Latina lesbian documenting & giving recognition to other Latina lesbians by creating a collaborative archive.

In including each subject’s own writing along with their powerful portraits, Aguilar utilizes her gaze to create this archive of her community. In her 1988 work

---

<sup>157</sup> Durón, "Laura Aguilar's."

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

entitled “Laura V,”<sup>159</sup> a woman stands with her hands in the pockets of her dark carpenter pants paired with a tucked-in button down almost completely unbuttoned (Figure 9). The woman looks confidently towards the right of the image, not directly at the camera, almost at something over the camera’s shoulder. The passage, neatly penned in capital letters is broken into two paragraphs. The first paragraph says,

I’m proud of my heritage and of my lifestyle. If I could start my life over, there might be a few things I would change, but being a Latina/lesbian wouldn’t be one of them. I didn’t always feel this way, but now I thank God for it. I feel that I have an unique view of life that I wouldn’t possess if I weren’t a Latina/Lesbian.<sup>160</sup>

In this pairing, we get not only a confident portrayal of a Latina lesbian (an identity we may otherwise have inaccurate representations or complete erasures of), but also, we get to read her words that affirm the way she loves being a Latina lesbian even though she may not have always been affirmed in that identity.

The last image I will highlight from the *Latina Lesbians* series is one taken of Carla Barboza in 1987 (Figure 10).<sup>161</sup> Carla sits in an armchair, wearing more masculine clothes: boots, dress pants, button up with a tie & suit jacket. Her legs are crossed, one arm resting on the side of the armchair, cigarette in hand. She has short cropped hair looks directly at the viewer. Her text reads, “I used to worry about being different. Now I realize my differences are my strengths.”<sup>162</sup> Aguilar’s *Latina Lesbians* series is powerful in disrupting the male gaze binary structure because the

---

<sup>159</sup> Tristan Bravinder, "35 Prints by Laura Aguilar, Photographer of Radical Vulnerability, Join the Getty Collection," *Getty* (blog), entry posted September 26, 2019, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/35-prints-by-laura-aguilar-photographer-of-radical-vulnerability-join-the-getty-collection/>.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Alice Di Certo, "The Unconventional Photographic Self-Portraits of John Coplans, Carla Williams, and Laura Aguilar" (master's thesis, GeorgiaState University, 2006), 77, accessed January 3, 2021, [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art\\_design\\_theses/4](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses/4).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

intersectional, marginalized subjects assert their identities and stake claim on their ephemera.

Zanele Muholi (they/them), a South African photographer who describes themselves as a visual activist, utilizes their art practice to raise consciousness for the Black lesbian, trans, and queer communities in South Africa. Andrew van der Vlies, in his 2012 paper entitled “Queer Knowledge and the Politics of the Gaze in Contemporary South African Photography”<sup>163</sup> writes that Muholi’s work attests to the fact of Black lesbians because their existence is so frequently attacked: “comment books at [their] public exhibitions frequently attract attacks on [their] presumption to perpetrate slurs on the ‘natural’ heterosexuality of black African women.”<sup>164</sup> Stephanie Selvick, in her 2015 paper entitled “Positive Bleeding: Violence and Desire in Works by Mlu Zondi, Zanele Muholi, and Makhosazana Xaba”<sup>165</sup> writes about when the Minister of Arts and Culture in 2009, Lulu Xinxwana made homophobic remarks about one of Muholi’s exhibitions. In Xinxwana’s opening remarks, Selvick quotes her as claiming, “nude images of South African lesbians embracing were ‘immoral’ and against nation-building.”<sup>166</sup> Vlies also quotes Xinxwana in this incident describing the images as “pornographic” and “offensive.”<sup>167</sup> Vlies cites Kylie Thomas speaking to Muholi’s work as creating an archive to counteract those notions:

---

<sup>163</sup> Andrew van der Vlies, "Queer Knowledge and the Politics of the Gaze in Contemporary South African Photography: Zanele Muholi and others.," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 24 (2012): 1-26, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13696815.2012.697647>.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>165</sup> Stephanie Selvick, "Positive Bleeding: Violence and Desire in Works by Mlu Zondi, Zanele Muholi, and Makhosazana Xaba," *Safundi* 16, no. 4 (2015): 443-465, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2015.1081353>.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>167</sup> van der Vlies, "Queer Knowledge," 1.



‘[a] certain kind of entry into the archive will mark queer lives as deviant, perverse, and criminal. Another mode of entry, one that Muholi’s work seeks to find, is that which will guarantee visibility within the social that is not at the same time a form of erasure.’<sup>168</sup>

While those like Xinwana may see queerness as deviant and offensive to portray, Muholi’s documentation of the real queer communities in South Africa allows for the subjects themselves to change that narrative.

Muholi’s work creates an archive of South African queer experience. Vlies describes their work as “self-consciously affirmative records for queer people themselves.”<sup>169</sup> Vlies analyzes Muholi’s use of the gaze as possibly “invoking, in order to destabilize, the idea that the gaze cast on representations of naked women, or on women in a state of intimacy in a domestic setting, is necessarily (or traditionally) a determining or desirous male gaze.”<sup>170</sup> Vlies also posits that Muholi’s work does not center around the male gaze to destabilize, but instead “record[s] lesbian subjects to allow them to be the subjects of their *own* gaze.”<sup>171</sup> The subject can escape the male gaze in this case because their queer experience is being recorded through a queer gaze.

Muholi’s ongoing *Faces and Phases* series (started in 2006) explicitly archives queer South Africans and their diversity.<sup>172</sup> Yancey Richardson describes the series as “an ongoing portrait project that documents the breadth of identities contained within the LGBTI communities of South Africa.”<sup>173</sup> In the series, each subject is shot at the center

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Deborah Willis, "Zanele Muholi's Faces & Phases," *Aperture*, April 21, 2015, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://aperture.org/editorial/magazine-zanele-muholis-faces-phases/>.

<sup>173</sup> "Zanele Muholi," Yancey Richardson, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/exhibitions/zanele-muholi2?view=slider#32>.

of the frame, looking directly into the camera and gazing back at the viewer. The subject is centered by neutral or complimentary backgrounds that do not distract from the subject's face. Our gaze is met by theirs. The images are titled with the subject's name, location and the year. Muholi described the start of their series in a 2015 interview with Deborah Willis for *Aperture*:

I dedicated it to a good friend of mine who died from HIV complications in 2007, at the age of twenty-five. I just realized that as Black South Africans, especially lesbians, we don't have much visual history that speaks to pressing issues, both current and also in the past... We should be counted and certainly counted on to write our own history and validate our existence... we deserve recognition, respect, validation, and to have publications that mark and trace our existence.<sup>174</sup>

In this, Muholi not only references the queer history of HIV/AIDS photography in an effort to be counted, but also connects to hooks' theory surrounding recognition that can come from writing our own history through creating our own archives with our gazes. Muholi consciously creates an archive of queer South Africans to record their history so that it can be recognized.

Muholi reclaims the photographic gaze as visual activism. They tell Willis, "I am reclaiming photography as a black female being. I'm calling myself a visual activist... before anything else, before my sexuality and gender, because photography doesn't have a gender."<sup>175</sup> This interview was in 2015, prior to Muholi identifying publicly as nonbinary and using they/them pronouns. Documenting queerness through a marginalized queer gaze is visual activism because the documentation itself creates a record of the lived experience of that queerness. As hooks discussed with the oppositional

---

<sup>174</sup> Willis, "Zanele Muholi's."

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

gaze, accepting standard media means accepting the erasure of one's existence when you hold alternate identities. Creating a queer South African record allows Muholi to disrupt male gaze structures while producing evidence of queer ephemera. This can also be tied back to the photographic work of AIDS activists discussed in the thesis introduction who utilized documentation of AIDS to bring focus to the issue that they themselves were facing, thus utilizing the queer gaze as a form of activism. Muholi underscores their work as being visual activism instead of art because their work is political and covers serious issue. Muholi told Willis,

Today, lesbians in South Africa are brutally murdered. 'Curative rape' is used on us. That forces me to redefine what visual activism is. If I were to reduce myself to the label 'visual artist,' it would mean that what I'm doing is just for play, that our identities, as black female beings who are queer or are lesbian, is just art. Art needs to be political—or let me say that my art is political. It's not for show. It's not for play.<sup>176</sup>

Here Muholi underscores the importance of their projects as documentary, as creating evidence of existence of marginalized people. Their Faces and Phases series was shown at Yancey Richardson in 2013.<sup>177</sup> Dozens of portraits lined across a wall, all at eye level, eyes of Black queers staring at viewers as they entered the room to view them (Figures 11 & 12).<sup>178</sup> By focusing on representation within their own community, Muholi gives their community an opportunity to be seen and to control the gaze, and in the curatorial decision of placing the photographs at eye level, an opportunity to gaze back at those who come to gaze.

---

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> "Zanele Muholi," Yancey Richardson.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Catherine Opie (she/her) is famous for her portraiture documenting queerness and the abject of violence. David J. Getsy highlights the queer coding Opie utilizes in her work in his paper entitled “Catherine Opie, Portraiture and the Decoy of the Iconographic”<sup>179</sup> when he writes, “Those deeper layers of coding, of shared private signs, of community attributes, were partially or fully opaque to me, even though I could see that they were there. Those closer to Opie, no doubt, see these works more readily for what they are: loving and enduring testimonies to shared lives and sympathies.”<sup>180</sup> In the last section, we discussed the history of queer coding as covert representation of queerness. By utilizing queer coding in her overtly queer work, Opie gives the subject some agency in their representation and who can have access to the intricacies of such codes. Getsy writes,

She catches the viewer in the detail, making her portraits about such cultural codes of legibility rather than the use of people as images. The sitters are in on this, with their confident deadpan stares. It’s a collusion between Opie and the sitter to do justice to the sitter as a person not able to be known merely by looking. These works demand to be read while also refusing to be fully legible.<sup>181</sup>

While Getsy is speaking of a specific group of works here, this theme permeates Opie’s portraiture. Opie’s photographs are mostly staged and orchestrated with the subjects themselves.

Opie’s images are inherently queer focused. The images assert queerness without leaving the subjects open for attack from heteropatriarchal gazes. The subjects own their gazes and their representations. Getsy writes,

---

<sup>179</sup> David J. Getsy, "Catherine Opie, Portraiture, and the Decoy of the Iconographic," in *Confronting the Abject* (n.p.: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2015), 15-37.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 32.

She knew all too well these individuals' distinct modes of self-presentation would seem unconventional, unnerving, or confusing to viewers at the time, and she...allowed those self-determined traits, modifications, and attributes to take the foreground without instrumentalizing or objectifying the friends she photographed. Their proud displays served to do justice to the sitters and their lives while also challenging the viewer with the partiality of their ability to read.<sup>182</sup>

Opie's subjects do not shy away from visually presenting as queer, wearing gender fluid clothing or stick-on mustaches for example. Through her gaze as a lesbian photographer, Opie utilizes her gaze to destabilize heteropatriarchal apparatuses of gazing by asserting a deviance from traditional masculine vs. feminine roles and documenting queer communities from within.

Opie also underscores embodied queer pain and rebellious expression. One of her most famous works is entitled "Self Portrait/Cutting," 1993<sup>183</sup> which features an image carved into Opie's back (Figure 13). It has two stick figure women, symbolized with triangles at the bottom like in restroom signs, holding hands with sun coming out of a cloud, two birds, and a house dripping with blood. In this image, Opie has carved her existence, her fiercely queer domestic scene. Shaun Caley Regen, Opie's gallerist told Ariel Levy in the *New Yorker* that the piece represented "an unattainable ideal—two women, a house, whatever it was she felt she couldn't have—cut into her back."<sup>184</sup> Opie uses her body as a canvas, but does not use pigment or stain to represent what she wants, she utilizes pain, her blood and flesh. Her identity is carved into her embodiment. The Guggenheim's description of this work says that it stands as "a reminder that she, as the

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>183</sup> Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Cutting*, 1993, chromogenic print, Guggenheim, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/30354>.

<sup>184</sup> Ariel Levy, "Secret Selves," *The New Yorker*, March 13, 2017, 58, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.regenprojects.com/attachment/en/54522d19cfaf3430698b4568/Press/5a3c3f1efdc038a623ad7def#:~:text=%E2%80%9C%20Self%20Portrait%20Cutting,marginal%20radical%20to%20establishment%20figure.>

photographer, does not stand apart from the groups she documents.”<sup>185</sup> Using similar techniques, Opie created another self-portrait entitled “Self Portrait/Pervert” 1994,<sup>186</sup> in which she sits before a tapestry, a black bandage mask covering her face, her arms evenly punctured with 23 needles going through each side, her palms lightly clasped in her palms (Figure 14). She wears black leather pants and a belt, but sits shirtless, with one pierced nipple and at the center of her chest another carving: the word pervert. Opie uses her body, her flesh, her blood to represent her connection to her community, in this case the queer leather subculture. During this time, Opie was also doing a series portraying fellow members of San Francisco’s queer leather scene,<sup>187</sup> so in doing this self-portrait Opie turns the gaze back onto herself. While Opie chronicles her community, she chronicles herself. This reflexive, shared gaze coupled with gender-variant subjecthood illuminates how queer photographers can break down the repressive structures of the male gaze by documenting their own communities.

Opie’s 1993 piece entitled “Dyke”<sup>188</sup> underscores themes of the photograph as a way to document and reclaim lesbian identity through the lesbian gaze (Figure 15). In this work the subject stands in front of a bright blue backdrop, bare back facing the viewer, short buzzed hair and small hoop earrings, there is a sliver of a tattoo visible on one arm, but the main focus is the tattoo on the subject’s neck that reads: “DYKE.” In this photograph, the subject has taken a slur most likely used against her for being a

---

<sup>185</sup> Opie, *Self-Portrait/Cutting*.

<sup>186</sup> Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Pervert*, 1994, chromogenic print, Guggenheim, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/12201>.

<sup>187</sup> Opie, *Self-Portrait/Cutting*.

<sup>188</sup> Catherine Opie, *Dyke*, 1993, chromogenic color print, MoMA, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/214470>.

lesbian and not only reclaimed it, but branded herself with it in retaliation. The subject claims that slur as her own and tattoos it onto her body. While a tattoo is less visceral and violent than the blood carving that Opie did in her self-portraits, it is more permanent and to some may even be more shocking because it is a slur.

Elle Pérez (they/them) utilized similar techniques in some of their works documenting queer embodiment. Their work 2019 “Dahlia and David (fag with a scar that says dyke)”<sup>189</sup> has obvious influences from Opie’s work (Figure 16). The photograph is of the word “dyke” written in blood, carved into a leg. Two black-gloved hands frame the sides of the leg, one holds a bloodied napkin, crumpled, the other a blue scalpel, poised as if to make another cut. The piece’s title “Dahlia and David (fag with a scar that says dyke)” implies that the hands belong to either Dahlia or David and the leg belongs to the other. No scar can be seen in the image, and yet it is described as one. This connotes the sense that while the written carving of “dyke” is a fresh wound, the slur itself may be the scar come to life on the flesh through this carving. In Annabel Paulsen’s review of Pérez’s piece in *Document Journal*, she writes, “I was first magnetized by it, and then frustrated...The photograph elicited in me a familiar vexation: why is queerness historically associated with pain?”<sup>190</sup> Pérez’s piece draws on the idea of the body as a canvas for painful carving in reflection of the queer experience as well as the reclamation and self-branding of the word “dyke.” However, their photograph moves forward from Opie’s as the canvas is not the subject’s bare back, but rather a forward-facing leg. In

---

<sup>189</sup> Elle Pérez, *Dahlia and David (fag with a scar that says dyke)*, 2019, accessed January 3, 2021, <http://cargocollective.com/elleperez>.

<sup>190</sup> Annabel Paulsen, "Why do curators still equate the 'queer experience' with pain?," *Document*, October 28, 2019, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.documentjournal.com/2019/10/why-do-curators-still-equate-the-queer-experience-with-pain/>.

Opie's pieces the cutting and tattoo processes are not shown. In Pérez's piece the hands are still in the image, gently poised to frame the leg, gloved, blotting with a napkin. In these subtle differences, the photograph takes on new meaning by underscoring the historical association between queerness and pain directly through a self-inflicted painful reclamation of the slur "dyke." The works also show the process of that carving instead of just the end result.

Pérez mostly takes images of their friends and community that underscore and document queer and trans experiences. Elyssa Goodman with *Photograph Mag* writes of their work, "they want their subjects to feel safe and fully seen; to feel an engagement with the work being made; and to have a stake in the images so that they're not exploitative. Instead of othering their subjects Pérez provides representation, hope, and motivation."<sup>191</sup> In "Wilding and Charles" 2019,<sup>192</sup> Pérez photographs two queer people sitting on what seems to be a bed (Figure 17). One sits with their legs open, the other laying in their lap cradled by their gloved hands, chest wrapped with plastic, several needles puncturing above their chest. The needles are visually referential of Opie's "Self Portrait/Pervert." Both subjects here are visually queer, androgynous, tattooed, and the use of medical gloves, needles, and chest wraps code as facets of trans experience. In "Mae (Three Days After)" 2019,<sup>193</sup> Pérez continues to document embodiments of transness (Figure 18). The portrait centers Mae in front of a light blue background, wearing a light blue sweater and black multicolored headwrap that has patterns of

---

<sup>191</sup> Elyssa Goodman, "Elle Pérez and the Power of Representation," *Photograph*, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://photographmag.com/issues/septoct-2019/feature/>.

<sup>192</sup> Elle Pérez, *Wilding and Charles*, 2019, digital silver gelatin print, Whitney Museum of American Art, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/elle-perez-wilding-and-charles>.

<sup>193</sup> Elle Pérez, *Mae (three days after)*, 2019, archival pigment print, Whitney Museum of Art, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/elle-perez-mae-three-days-after>.



butterflies and flowers. There is slim dark scarring at the top of Mae's hairline, yellowing bruising around the eyes, and stitches under the neck covered up by a slim bandage, the corner of one eye is bloodshot. Three days after implies the image was taken three days after surgery, mostly likely facial feminization surgery. The image is clearly made in collaboration with the subject. Mae stares at the camera, vulnerable in bruising and yet stern in gaze. The picture is a documentation of trans experience that is not typically seen, not "pre" surgical transition or "post" surgical transition, but the lived experiences in the process of surgical transition. Pérez is creating an archive of queer and trans lived experiences that show more of the visceral action involved in embodied queer pain. By including surgeries and carvings in their archive, the Pérez inhabits the recognition discussed earlier by being a trans person documenting their trans community, while also destabilizing ideas of gender and sexuality inherent in the male gaze theory.

Pérez inhabits a queer, trans gaze and allows their subjects to own their own gazes because they come from the lived experience of queerness and transness themselves. In an article written for *The New Yorker* entitled "Elle Pérez's Poetic, Visceral Bodies"<sup>194</sup> Thora Siemsen underscores how Pérez's work is rooted in queer history. Siemsen writes about how Pérez brought up Peter Hujar, the artist referenced in the introduction whose friend David Wojnarowicz photographed him after he died of AIDS. Pérez referenced Hujar's photograph entitled "Candy Darling on Her Deathbed" from 1973,<sup>195</sup> in which he used spotting to brighten Darling's face so that she could be the brightest part of the image (Figure 19). Of course, at this time photographers were working with negatives

---

<sup>194</sup> Thora Siemsen, "Elle Pérez's Poetic, Visceral Bodies," *The New Yorker*, April 5, 2018, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/elle-perezs-poetic-visceral-bodies>.

<sup>195</sup> Peter Hujar, *Candy Darling on Her Deathbed*, 1973, gelatin silver print, MoMA, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/192664>.

and physical development processes, so this was risky. Pérez told Siemsen that “they admire the late Hujar for his boldness in risking his image in order to dignify his subject.”<sup>196</sup> Siemsen writes, “Like Hujar, Pérez presents the trans body in a way that resists its prurient consumption.”<sup>197</sup> Pérez is able to create this representation effectively not only because they have studied artists who created queer archives such as Hujar, but also because Pérez’s work comes from a trans gaze themselves. Their 2018 work “Binder”<sup>198</sup> visualizes their own binder, hanging on a shower rail, worn and tattered, with small holes and tears throughout the front (Figure 20). This work references the trans body, the lived experience of binding and it is through the documentation of these lived experiences that Perez is able to utilize the gaze of the camera to show contemporary queerness.

Laura Aguilar, Zanele Muholi, Catherine Opie, and Elle Perez all utilize the queer female or queer nonbinary gaze to document queer experience. The gaze of their camera breaks subjects free from heteropatriarchal notions of objectifications from the male gaze. By destabilizing notions of essentialist gender and sexuality, queer gazes allow those held down by heteropatriarchal structures to be documented, their lives and histories recorded as they desire. Queer photographers can use photography as a queer tool that asserts our communities’ existence outside of the shackles of the binaries asserted in the male gaze.

---

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Jess Reytblat, “Elle Pérez,” *Flaunt Magazine*, November 2, 2018, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://flaunt.com/content/elle-perez>.

## Conclusion

Heteropatriarchal gazes still rule much of our media today. Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory is useful in its purpose of laying out the status quo of objectification in media through the male gaze and its roots in psychoanalysis. However, it loses its efficacy because of its narrow scope. By focusing only on two archetypes in opposition: the white cisgender heterosexual male and the white cisgender heterosexual female, all other identities are left with little to no representation within the foundation of gaze politics. This may be a blessing in disguise. By acknowledging the faults in such a black-and-white system of man vs. woman, masculine vs. feminine, active vs. passive, we can discard the weight of the objectification inherent in that system by creating new authors of the gaze. Change cannot be made within the system, Mulvey proved that herself in her analysis of the female spectator, which was echoed by Jacobsson's analysis. In order to dismantle the system of the male gaze, we cannot simply reform what is working exactly as intended: to oppress us. Our gazes must become intersectional, our alternative identities must be documented by our own communities under our own terms. This archival work through intersectional identity lenses is already being done. Artists are archiving their communities by utilizing their lived experiences in those communities and collaborating with their subjects to illustrate their own documentations. As media consumers, we can demand those gazes be lifted up, those artists be supported so that the male gaze structure can continue to break apart.

In this thesis, I looked at Mulvey's outline of the male gaze, key proposals of alternate gazes, queer theory, and lesbian & nonbinary artists who are doing the work of

constructing LGBTQIA+ intersectional gazes. Releasing ourselves from the male gaze edifice by destabilizing its qualifications of gender, desire, and nascent psychology opens up the ability to look at nuanced and multifaceted gazes. There are artists doing works around all sorts of identities that do not fall into two oppositional boxes from race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexuality, gender, class, body size, and more. Diverse, critical, nuanced archives of lived experiences could be a way out of the entrapments of heteropatriarchal systems that dominate the art that we create and consume. By eroding such limiting, binary definitions of the gaze, contemporary queer female and nonbinary photographers are creating space for their own communities to no longer exist solely in the coded, the covert, the ephemera, but instead to be the authors and the subjects of radical queer gazes.

## Illustrations



Figure 1. This is one of many photographs Henryk Ross took while detained in the Lodz Ghetto. In this image, police in the Lodz Ghetto, run by Nazi Germany in Occupied Poland, are escorting residents for deportation during World War II. Art Gallery of Ontario/Museum of Fine Arts Boston.



Figure 2. Therese Frare, *David Kirby on his deathbed, Ohio, 1990*, 1990. This image was one of several taken at Kirby's request as he was dying from AIDS. Life Magazine called this the photo that changed the face of AIDS.



Figures 3 & 4. These are two of 23 photos taken by David Wojnarowicz of his friend and mentor Peter Hujar hours after his death from AIDS. Both are *Untitled*, 1987. The Estate of David Wojnarowicz.



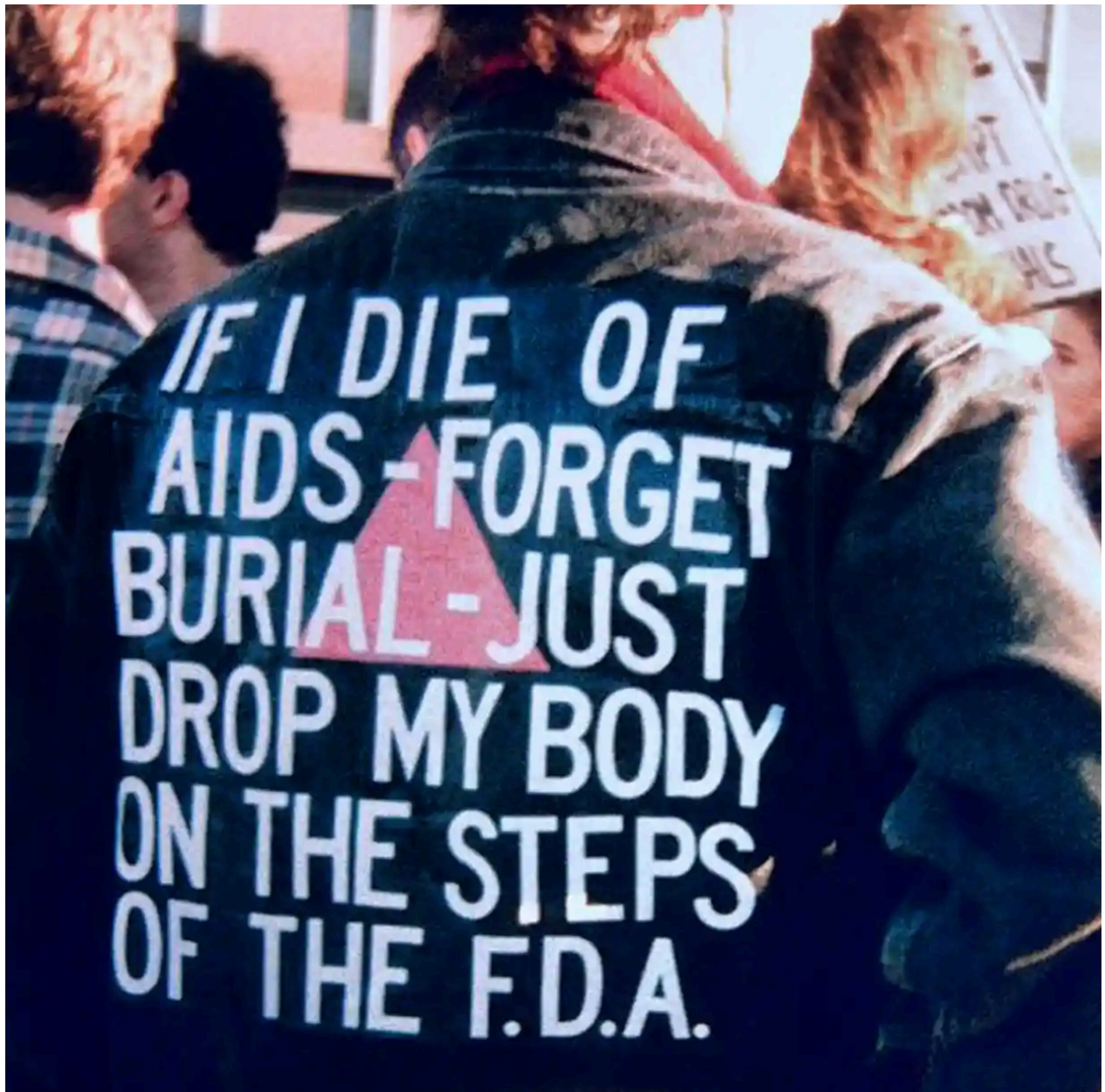


Figure 5. Wojnarowicz. 1988. This image is attributed to Wojnarowicz but also is said to be a portrait of him. It has recirculated around the internet as topics of AIDS activism re-emerge.

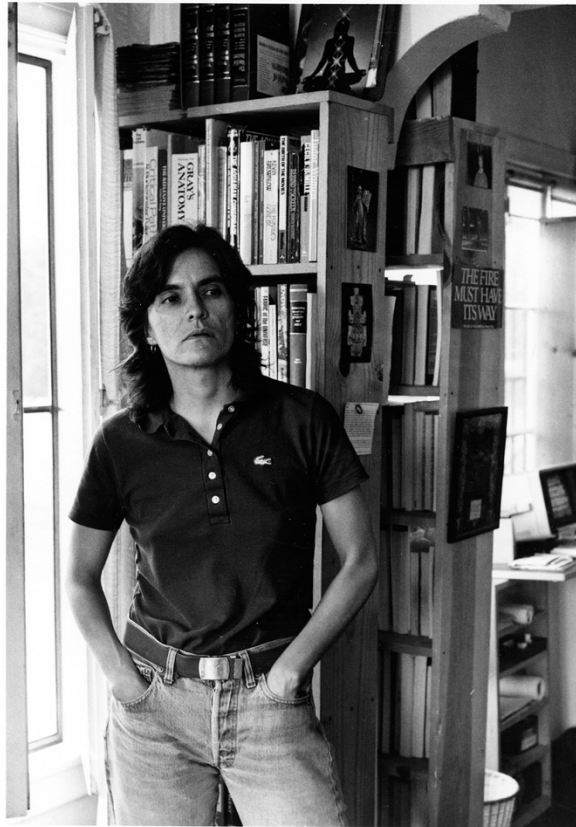


Figure 6. AA Bronson, *Jorge, February 3, 1994*, 1994/2000. Esther Schioper Berlin. This photo was taken of Jorge Zontal weeks before he died of AIDS.



Figure 7. AA Bronson, *Felix Partz, June 5, 1994*, 1994. Private Collections. This photo was taken of Felix Parts hours after he died of AIDS.





My latina side informs my lesbian side with chispa  
 & pasión. I am a lifelong lesbian and I think that  
 women hold powerful promise for changing conditions  
 on the planet. You think I look hostile? Maybe  
 it has to do with a passion for and an impatience  
 with a vision. Maybe it comes from comparing  
 what could be with what is. ¿! Y qué?!

Figure 8. Laura Aguilar, *Latina Lesbians* (Yolanda Retter), 1987. The Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016. This work is part of Aguilar's *Latina Lesbians* series, which coupled portraits with messages written by the subject.



I'M PROUD OF MY HERITAGE AND OF MY LIFESTYLE. IF I COULD START MY LIFE OVER, THERE MIGHT BE A FEW THINGS I WOULD CHANGE, BUT BEING A LATINA/ LESBIAN WOULDN'T BE ONE OF THEM. I DIDN'T ALWAYS FEEL THIS WAY, BUT NOW I THANK GOD FOR IT. I FEEL THAT I HAVE AN UNIQUE VIEW OF LIFE THAT I WOULDN'T POSSESS IF I WEREN'T A LATINA/ LESBIAN.

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE I HAVE SEEN THE TREMENDOUS IMPACT/INFLUENCE THAT YOU CAN HAVE OVER THEIR LIVES. IF I COULD TEACH THEM ONE THING, IT WOULD BE TO BE PROUD OF WHO THEY ARE.

Figure 9. Laura Aguilar, *Laura V*, 1988; gelatin silver print, 14 × 10 15/16 in., The J. Paul Getty Museum / Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016. This work is part of Aguilar's *Latina Lesbians* series, which coupled portraits with messages written by the subject.

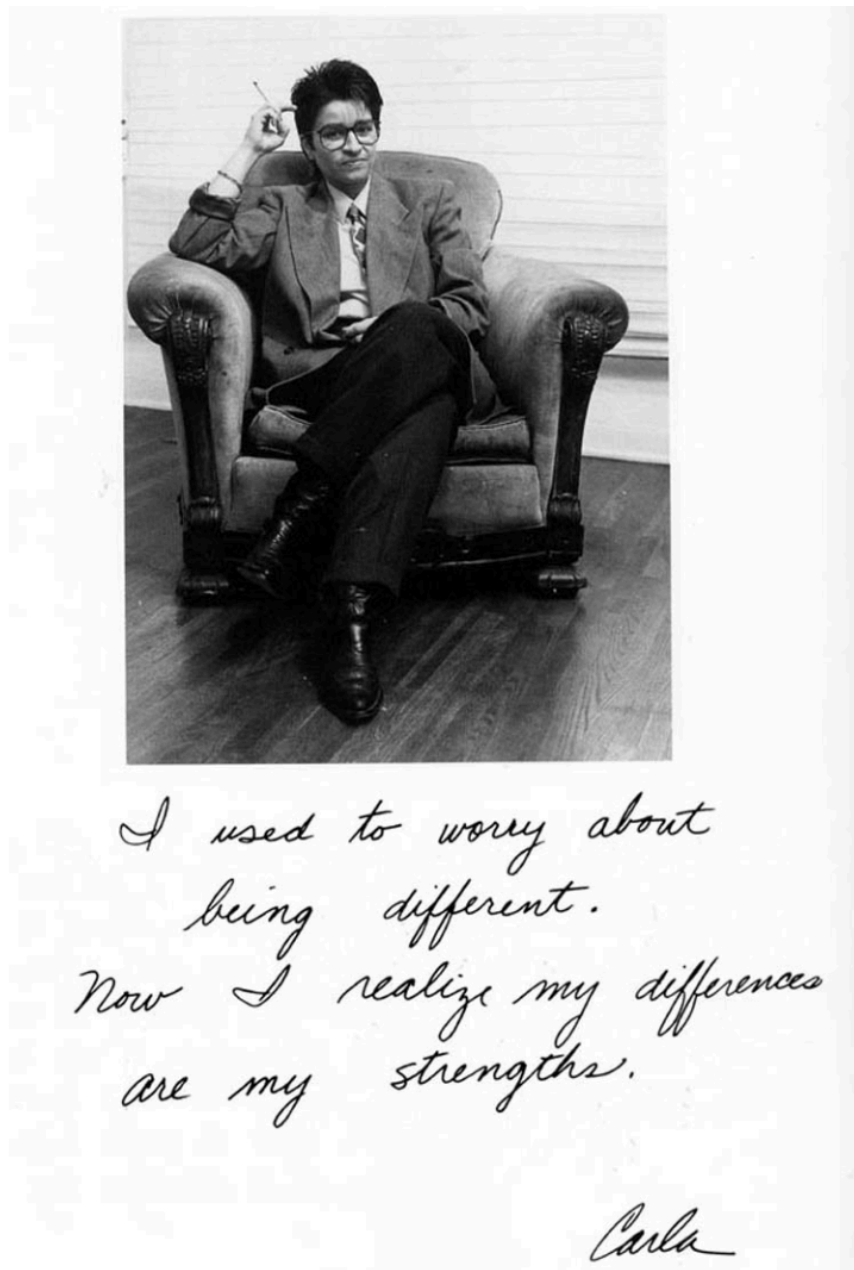


Figure 10. Laura Aguilar, *Carla*, 1987-90; gelatin silver print with phototext, 11 × 14 in., The Artist's Collection. This work is part of Aguilar's *Latina Lesbians* series, which coupled portraits with messages written by the subject.



Figures 11 & 12. Zanele Muholi, *Faces and Phases*, 2007-2014. Gelatin Silver Prints. These are installation views of Muholi's *Faces and Phases* show at Yancey Richardson. They are hung at eye level and seem to be gazing back at the viewer.





Figure 13. Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Cutting*, 1993, chromogenic print, 40 x 29 7/16 inches, Guggenheim Museum. This portrait is one of Opie's most famous pieces surrounding embodiment of queer identity. It is a self-portrait of Opie's back carved with the family stick-figure image.





Figure 14. Catherine Opie, *Self-Portrait/Perv*, 1994, chromogenic print, 40 x 29 7/8 inches, Guggenheim Museum. This portrait is another of Opie's most famous pieces surrounding embodiment of queer identity. It is a self-portrait of Opie's body pierced with needles, carved chest, and wearing leather kink attire.





Figure 15. Catherine Opie, *Dyke*, 1993. Chromogenic color print, 40 x 30 inches, MoMA. This work is part of the same portrait series as the previous too, but is not a self-portrait. This work has fostered discussions around the reclamation of slurs.



Figure 16. Elle Pérez. *Dahlia and David (fag with a scar that says dyke)*, 2019. This work was shown in the 2019 Whitney Biennial and draws is referential of Opie's earlier works surrounding body carving and the reclamation of slurs.





Figure 17. Elle Pérez, *Wilding and Charles*, 2019, digital silver gelatin print, Whitney Museum of American Art. This work was shown in the 2019 Whitney Biennial and is referential of Opie's earlier works.



Figure 18. Elle Pérez, *Mae (three days after)*, 2019, archival pigment print, Whitney Museum of Art. This work was shown in the 2019 Whitney Biennial and illustrates Mae's face healing after facial feminization surgery.



Figure 19. Peter Hujar, *Candy Darling on Her Deathbed*. 1973. Gelatin silver print, 14  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 14  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. MoMA. This photo was referenced by Elle Pèrez in an interview, but it was also taken by Peter Hujar of a friend dying of AIDS. Hujar's AIDS death was photographed by David Wojnarowicz in Figures 3 & 4.





Figure 20. Elle Pérez, *Binder*. 2018. Archival Pigment Print, 44  $\frac{3}{8}$   $\times$  31 inches. 47 Canal, New York. This work is a picture of Pérez's own binder, illustrating their own lived experience as a nonbinary person.

## Bibliography

- Abraham, Amelia. "Photographers creating work through the queer gaze." Dazed Digital. Last modified July 3, 2019. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/45069/1/kiss-my-genders-queer-gaze-hayward-catherine-opie-victoria-sin-juliana-huxtable>.
- Aguilar, Laura. *Carla*. 1987-90. Gelatin silver print with phototext, 11 x 14 inches. Artist's Collection. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://docplayer.net/84292716-The-unconventional-photographic-self-portraits-of-john-coplans-carla-williams-and-laura-aguilar.html>.
- . *Latina Lesbians (Yolanda Retter)*. 1987. The Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.artnews.com/feature/laura-aguilar-who-is-she-1202684828/>.
- . *Laura V*. 1988. Gelatin silver print, 14 × 10 15/16 in. The J. Paul Getty Museum / Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/35-prints-by-laura-aguilar-photographer-of-radical-vulnerability-join-the-getty-collection/>.
- Anderson, Tre'vell. "What Hollywood Can Gain by Placing the 'Queer Gaze' in the Spotlight." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 16, 2018. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-ca-mn-lgbtq-filmmakers-love-simon-20180316-story.html#:~:text=The%20%E2%80%9Cqueer%20gaze%2C%E2%80%9D%20meanwhile,people%20create%20and%20view%20art>.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. N.p.: Hill and Wang, 1982.
- Bittencourt, Ela. "The Importance of Laura Mulvey's Feminism in the Age of #MeToo." *Frieze*, December 11, 2018. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.frieze.com/article/importance-laura-mulveys-feminism-age-metoo>.
- Blakemore, Erin. "Stonewall Riots Apology: NYPD Commissioner Says 1969 Police Raids Were 'Wrong.'" *History*. Last modified June 28, 2019. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.history.com/news/stonewall-riots-nypd-apology>.
- Bordowitz, Gregg. "Picture a Coalition." *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 182-96. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/3397573>.
- Bravinder, Tristan. "35 Prints by Laura Aguilar, Photographer of Radical Vulnerability, Join the Getty Collection." *Getty* (blog). Entry posted September 26, 2019.

- Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/35-prints-by-laura-aguilar-photographer-of-radical-vulnerability-join-the-getty-collection/>.
- Bronson, AA. "AA Bronson." AA Bronson. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.aabronson.com/aaindex.html>.
- . *Ektachrome*. 1994. Private Collections. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.estherschipper.com/artists/31-aa-bronson/works/16092/>.
- . *Felix, June 5, 1994*. 1994/1999. Ektachrome. Esther Schipper, Berlin. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.estherschipper.com/artists/31-aa-bronson/works/16092/>.
- . *Jorge, February 3, 1994*. 1994/2000. Esther Schipper Berlin. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://momus.ca/the-manner-of-their-dying/>.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519-31. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893>.
- Cherry, Kendra. "The Oedipus Complex in Children." Verywell. Last modified May 14, 2020. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-an-oedipal-complex-2795403>.
- Coleman, Chloe. "'I buried my negatives in the ground in order that there should be some record of our tragedy.' The photographs of Henryk Ross." *Washington Post*, March 6, 2017. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2017/03/06/i-buried-my-negatives-in-the-ground-in-order-that-there-should-be-some-record-of-our-tragedy-henryk-ross/>.
- Cosgrove, Ben. "The Photo That Changed the Face of AIDS." *LIFE*. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.life.com/history/behind-the-picture-the-photo-that-changed-the-face-of-aids/>.
- Di Certo, Alice. "The Unconventional Photographic Self-Portraits of John Coplans, Carla Williams, and Laura Aguilar." Master's thesis, Georgia State University, 2006. Accessed January 3, 2021. [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art\\_design\\_theses/4](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses/4).
- Dirse, Zoe. "Gender in Cinematography: Female Gaze (Eye) behind the Camera." *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 15-29. HEIN.
- Donegan, Moira. "David Wojnarowicz's Still-Burning Rage." *The New Yorker*, August 18, 2018. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/david-wojnarowiczs-still-burning-rage>.

- Durón, Maximiliano. "Laura Aguilar's Lasting Legacy: How the World Caught Up to the Pioneering Photographer." *ARTNews*, April 24, 2020. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.artnews.com/feature/laura-aguilar-who-is-she-1202684828/>.
- Frare, Therese. *David Kirby on his deathbed, Ohio, 1990*. 1990. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.life.com/history/behind-the-picture-the-photo-that-changed-the-face-of-aids/>.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by Joyce Crick. 1899. First published 1999 by Oxford University Press.
- . *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Translated by A.A. Brill. 1905. Reprint, 1920.
- Fuery, Kelli. "Mulvey as Political Weapon." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 15, no. 4 (2017): 435-40. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17400309.2017.1376884?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=rfts20>.
- Getsy, David J. "Catherine Opie, Portraiture, and the Decoy of the Iconographic." In *Confronting the Abject*, 15-37. N.p.: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2015.
- Goodman, Elyssa. "Elle Pérez and the Power of Representation." *Photograph*. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://photographmag.com/issues/septoct-2019/feature/>.
- Grundberg, Andy. "History of Photography." In *Britannica*. Last modified December 3, 2020. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/photography>.
- Halberstam, Jack. *Female Masculinity*. 2018. Reprint, Duke University Press, 1998.
- "HIV/AIDS Timeline." New York City AIDS Memorial. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.nycaidsmemorial.org/timeline>.
- Hoeffner, Melissa Kravitz. "America's Lesbian Bars Are Dwindling—This Project Wants to Change That." *Condé Nast Traveler*, December 7, 2020. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/americas-lesbian-bars-are-dwindling-this-project-wants-to-change-that>.
- Hooks, Bell. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 115-31. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
- Hujar, Peter. *Candy Darling on Her Deathbed*. 1973. Gelatin silver print. MoMA. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/192664>.

- Jacobsson, Eva-Maria. "A Female Gaze?" *Kungl Tekniska Högskolan: Royal Institute of Technology*, May 1999, 5-28.
- Ketchum, Karyl E. "'Women' Filmmakers: Jill Soloway's Queer Gaze." *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*, 1-6. WILEY.
- Laing, Olivia. "David Wojnarowicz: still fighting prejudice 24 years after his death." *The Guardian*, May 12, 2016. Accessed January 3, 2021.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/13/david-wojnarowicz-close-to-the-knives-a-memoir-of-disintegration-artist-aids-activist>.
- "Laura Aguilar: Plush Pony #2." Whitney Museum of American Art. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://whitney.org/collection/works/61712>.
- Levin, Sam. "Hillary Clinton says she misspoke about how Reagans dealt with Aids crisis." *The Guardian*, March 11, 2016. Accessed January 3, 2021.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/11/hillary-clinton-comments-reagan-aids-crisis-backlash>.
- Levy, Ariel. "Secret Selves." *The New Yorker*, March 13, 2017, 58-67. Accessed January 3, 2021.  
<https://www.regenprojects.com/attachment/en/54522d19cfaf3430698b4568/Press/5a3c3f1efdc038a623ad7def#:~:text=%E2%80%9C'Self%2DPortrait%2FCutting,marginal%20radical%20to%20establishment%20fixture>.
- Muholi, Zanele. *Faces and Phases*. 2007-2014. Gelatin Silver Prints, Installation View. Yancey Richardson. Accessed January 4, 2021.  
<https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/exhibitions/zanele-muholi2?view=slider#32>.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by 'Duel in the Sun' (King Vidor, 1946)." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 15/17 (Summer 1981): 12-15. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/44111815>.
- . "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Feminism and Film Theory*, by Laura Mulvey, 57-68. Edited by Constance Penley. New York: Routledge, 1988. Previously published in *Screen*. Vol. 16. N.p., 1975.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts." *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 8:5-16.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07407709608571228>.
- Murray, Yxta Maya. "Laura Aguilar Was a Proud Latina Lesbian, and She Flaunted It." *Aperture*, November 12, 2019. Accessed January 3, 2021.  
<https://aperture.org/editorial/laura-aguilar-yxta-maya-murray/>.



- Navab, Aphrodite Désirée. "Re-Picturing Photography: A Language in the Making." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 69-84.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3333772>.
- O'Hagan, Sean. "<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/nov/02/zanele-muholi-interview-queer-photographer-lgbtq-south-africa-tate>." *The Guardian*, November 2, 2020. Accessed January 4, 2021.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/nov/02/zanele-muholi-interview-queer-photographer-lgbtq-south-africa-tate>.
- Opie, Catherine. *Dyke*. 1993. Chromogenic color print. MoMA. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/214470>.
- . *Self-Portrait/Cutting*. 1993. Chromogenic print. Guggenheim. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/30354>.
- . *Self-Portrait/Pervert*. 1994. Chromogenic print. Guggenheim. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/12201>.
- Patton, Andy. "The Manner of Their Dying." *Momus*, June 15, 2018. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://momus.ca/the-manner-of-their-dying/>.
- Paulsen, Annabel. "Why do curators still equate the 'queer experience' with pain?" *Document*, October 28, 2019. Accessed January 3, 2021.  
<https://www.documentjournal.com/2019/10/why-do-curators-still-equate-the-queer-experience-with-pain/>.
- Pérez, Elle. *Binder*. 2018. Archival Pigment Print. 44 3/8 × 31 inches. 47 Canal, New York. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://flaunt.com/content/elle-perez>.
- . *Dahlia and David (fag with a scar that says dyke)*. 2019. Accessed January 3, 2021. <http://cargocollective.com/elleperez>.
- . *Mae (three days after)*. 2019. Archival pigment Print. Whitney Museum of Art. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/elle-perez-mae-three-days-after>.
- . *Wilding and Charles*. 2019. Digital silver gelatin print. Whitney Museum of American Art. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/elle-perez-wilding-and-charles>.
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America. "What Is Intersex?" Planned Parenthood. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/sex-gender-identity/whats-intersex>.

"Plush Pony." *Lost Womyn's Space* (blog). Entry posted May 20, 2011. Accessed January 3, 2021. <http://lostwomynsspace.blogspot.com/2011/05/plush-pony.html>.

Pollock, Griselda. "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity." In *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. N.p.: Routledge, 1992.

Prodger, Phillip. "Photography and Cinema: A Tale of Two Closer-Than-You-Think Siblings." *Time*. Last modified October 29, 2015. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://time.com/3818034/photography-and-cinema/>.

Pullen, Christopher. "The Hetero Media Gaze in Film and Television." In *Straight Girls and Queer Guys*, 41-64. N.p.: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bgzbtn.8>.

Rensburg, Thelma Van. "Identity performance, masquerade, representation and the grotesque in the work of Leora Farber, Cindy Sherman, Orlan and Catherine Opie." PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2013.

Reytblat, Jess. "Elle Pérez." *Flaunt Magazine*, November 2, 2018. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://flaunt.com/content/elle-perez>.

Ross, Henryk. *Police in the Lodz Ghetto, run by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland, escort residents for deportation during World War II*. Art Gallery of Ontario/Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2017/03/06/i-buried-my-negatives-in-the-ground-in-order-that-there-should-be-some-record-of-our-tragedy-henryk-ross/>.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. N.p.: Washington Square Press, 1993.

Sassatelli, Roberta. "Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze, and Technology in Film Culture." *SAGE* 28, no. 5 (2011): 123-43. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://journals-sagepub-com.dartmouth.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1177/0263276411398278>.

"Scopophilia." In *Oxford Reference*. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100448183>.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You." In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, edited by Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Golderg, and Michael Moon, 123-51. N.p.: Duke University Press, 2003.

- Selvick, Stephanie. "Positive Bleeding: Violence and Desire in Works by Mlu Zondi, Zanele Muholi, and Makhosazana Xaba." *Safundi* 16, no. 4 (2015): 443-65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2015.1081353>.
- Siemsen, Thora. "Elle Pérez's Poetic, Visceral Bodies." *The New Yorker*, April 5, 2018. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/elle-perezs-poetic-visceral-bodies>.
- Silverstein, Jason. "Why the Ashes of People With AIDS on the White House Lawn Matter." *Vice*, August 29, 2016. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/vdqv34/why-the-ashes-of-aids-victims-on-the-white-house-lawn-matter>.
- Smallwood, Christine. "The Rage and Tenderness of David Wojnarowicz's Art." *New York Times*, September 17, 2018. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/07/magazine/the-rage-and-tenderness-of-david-wojnarowiczs-art.html>.
- Smith, Andrea. "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing." In *Feminist Theory Reader*, 4th ed., edited by Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim, 1-8. N.p.: Routledge, 2016. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/andrea-smith-heteropatriarchy-three-pillars-white-supremacy-rethinking-women-color-organizing-carole-mccann-seung-kyung-kim/10.4324/9781315680675-46>.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- Spector, Ronald H. "Vietnam War." In *Britannica*. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>.
- Stockton, Richard. "The Story Behind The Photo Of David Kirby That Changed The World's Perception Of AIDS." All That's Interesting. Last modified May 7, 2017. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://allthatsinteresting.com/david-kirby>.
- Valdes-Hevia, Eduardo, Edwin Antonio, and Ronald Ong. "Beginners Guide to Photo Manipulation in Photoshop." Adobe. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.adobe.com/creativecloud/photography/discover/photo-manipulation.html>.
- van der Vlies, Andrew. "Queer Knowledge and the Politics of the Gaze in Contemporary South African Photography: Zanele Muholi and others." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 24 (2012): 1-26. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13696815.2012.697647>.

- Waxman, Lori. "A Laura Aguilar retrospective turns an eye to her beautiful views of people outside the mainstream." *Chicago Tribune*, July 22, 2019. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-ent-laura-aguilar-retrospective-review-nmma-ttd-0725-20190722-zjpszqaeqwnb6ln6hrah3qojupm-story.html>.
- Waxman, Olivia. "On World AIDS Day, Those Who Fought the 1980s Epidemic Find Striking Differences and Tragic Parallels in COVID-19." *Time*, December 1, 2020. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://time.com/5915401/world-aids-day-covid-coronavirus-pandemic/>.
- Weber, Jasmine. "Protesters Stage Intervention at Whitney's Wojnarowicz Exhibition to Highlight the Enduring HIV/AIDS Crisis." *Hyperallergic*, July 30, 2018. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://hyperallergic.com/453524/act-up-protesters-whitney-museum-david-wojnarowicz/>.
- Willis, Deborah. "Zanele Muholi's Faces & Phases." *Aperture*, April 21, 2015. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://aperture.org/editorial/magazine-zanele-muholis-faces-phases/>.
- Wojnarowicz, David. 1988. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/13/david-wojnarowicz-close-to-the-knives-a-memoir-of-disintegration-artist-aids-activist>.
- Wojnarowicz, David. *Untitled*. 1987. The Estate of David Wojnarowicz. Accessed January 4, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/david-wojnarowiczs-still-burning-rage>.
- "Zanele Muholi." Yancey Richardson. Accessed January 3, 2021. <https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/exhibitions/zanele-muholi2?view=slider#32>.