

Laura Mulvey's Theory of Male Gaze and Kaja Silverman's Theory of Female Voice

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Abstract

The paper examines two films, one from the old times and the other belonging to the modern era. Both movies are studied and observed under the light of the theory of the male gaze proposed by Laura Mulvey, who was the director, author, and professor of Film and Media Studies, and Kaja Silverman's theory on the female voice. Kaja Silverman was the professor of Contemporary Arts (kajasilverman.com). Both theories support each other in different ways since both women were against the way women were shown and displayed in the narrative films. We applied these theories to the movie "The Postman Always Rings Twice", released in the year 1946, and the film "Die Another Day", which came out in the year 2002. These movies well displayed the essence of both the theories suggested. The paper first studies what the theories are about and their significance and impact, and then their application in both movies.

Introduction

Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist, is known for her famous work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." This famous writing describes different theories regarding cinema and its operation, and the way both genders are displayed on the screen. Laura's thoughts and works were known to be revolutionary despite their issues and shortcomings (studentnewspaper.org). Her views brought about inspiration in the new era of film criticism. Laura was a professor of Film and Media Studies and has been the director of many films made in the time period of the 1970s and 1980s (Mambrol, 2017). One of the [famous theories](#) of Laura Mulvey is the theory of the male gaze. The engagement of the viewers with the media is what the term 'gaze' describes. In other words, it tells how we perceive the visual representation. According to the theory of the male gaze, the male character of the film is the active figure through whom the audience watches the film. This notion of centralization of the male character impacts how the opposite gender is viewed and perceived. The term 'male gaze' refers to the sexual politics of the gaze and indicates the sexualized manner of looking that intends to empower or strengthen males and weaken or objectify females. Women are portrayed as objects whose subject is the man's desire.

Her sexual drives, thoughts, and feelings are not as significant as compared to her being bound by male wishes or desires. "One of the most obvious results of the Male Gaze is the way a (usually male) director/cameraman's interest in women informs his shots, leading to a focus on breasts, legs,

buttocks, and other jiggly bits even when the film isn't necessarily supposed to be a feast for the eyes of their admirers" (tvtropes.org). Mulvey conveys her opinions and views using the language of psychoanalysis and says that the conventional films of the Hollywood industry react to a drive called scopophilia, which refers to the pleasure in a sexual manner that is gained by looking (Loreck, 2018). "The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect" (Mulvey, 2003, p.345).

Mulvey argues that the majority of the famous films are produced or filmed in a manner that is intended to meet the masculine scopophilia. Such media sexualizes women for the male audience. Thus, the woman is something to be seen or looked at, while a man is the one who looks. "It is only the Male Gaze theory if these curves are highlighted with specific conventions such as slow motion, deliberate camera movements, and cutaways" (christimothy12, 2013).

Not only is the female appearance under consideration here, but there is another aspect of the film industry that significantly impacts the audience. Kaja Silverman's work is based on the voices in the films and their impact. Film sound experts have always been interested in the way vocal sounds are generated, recorded, and reproduced, and the way the audience reacts to those sounds (Shingler, 2006, p.3). Some scholars realized the requirement for a conceptual framework and a brief vocabulary to make an analysis and for the description of voices. "The Acoustic Mirror" of Kaja Silverman generated a challenging and greatly polemical argument or debate in the time period of the 1980s, but did not succeed in producing a conclusive shift away from the analysis and conception of film as predominantly a graphical medium. The work has a psychoanalytic nature, which has, no doubt, contributed to restricting the impact and diffusion of research and study on the cinematic voice (Shingler, 2006, p.4).

Kaja Silverman directed a feminist discussion regarding the voice in cinema. She questioned and analyzed many of the conventions that are the basis of the concept Chion had regarding the maternal voice in the third chapter of the book (Shingler, 2006, p.4). Silverman gained the idea of the acoustic mirror from Guy Rosolato, the psychoanalytic theorist, and provided a more critical and complex comprehension of the maternal voice as compared to that of Chion. The maternal voice, according to her, is a fantasy that had been enunciated in psychoanalysis. She proceeded with her thoughts in order to find out the different versions of the fantasy for the assessment of its importance for feminism and female subjectivity. Her theories were related to films, and many bold stances were forwarded by her about the incapability of typical chronicle cinema to allocate voice-off and voice-overs to the female roles.

The views and opinions of Silverman worked as an extension of Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory. The exploration and examination of the uneven or imbalanced treatment of voices of both genders by Silverman in the conventional cinema served the purpose of applying the rules of "gaze theory" to the film soundtrack and confirming the majority of the expectations and deductions. For instance, the theory is able to demonstrate and explain the primary sexism of leading cinema, the standard continuity of the pragmatist narrative fiction film is masculinist and unreceptive, and that the

unconventionality proposes a source of enunciating more advanced and feminist cinematic depictions. Kaja Silverman believed that the voice-overs and voice-offs, especially the male characters, always link the female voice to the female body, are preserved by the conventional narrative fiction film.

Following this interpretation, the way male and female voices were used in narrative cinema simulated some of the disparities that feminist film erudition had exposed concerning the notion of visual pleasure and desire. Nevertheless, while the proposition Mulvey verified is extremely persuasive within film studies, in many other subjects, and even in the film world away from academia, the psychoanalytic discussion on voice in the film proved to be more self-sufficient. Britta Sjogren states, 'The voice offers another perspective, a subject placement that allows for multiple subjectivities, rather than "centring" just one' (Sjogren, 2010, p. 174).

Movie no.1: The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946)

This movie is one of the popular instances of the male gaze. The film's main female character, Cora Smith, is introduced to the audience by means of close-ups, which urges the viewers to look at Cora's body. This is the creation of a way of looking that is voyeuristic, sexual, and linked with the perception and point of view of a male protagonist. Some major plot points that have been established by the film are that the leading male character, or the hero of the film, desires Cora, who realizes his lustful feelings towards her. However, the main message given or perceived by the viewers was that Cora has a sexy figure. This will be the first thought of every person sitting in the audience before they even know the name of the female they are admiring. The scenes showing Cora's body in different ways are still impacting, even if a viewer isn't that much inclined towards the woman in their actual life. The camera first focuses on her legs, the lustful eyes of the hero, and then the whole body of the female character. Cora applies lipstick in front of the hero, making him desire her more. This gives the perception to the audience that a female body is something to be seen and admired, and that the woman is nothing without the desire or lust of a man. If a man doesn't lay his eyes on the woman, she is not being given any importance.

Looking at women being sexualized and being perceived as a sexual object has become so common that now everyone has become comfortable with presuming the male gaze. In all kinds of media, and for a very long time, females have been sexualized in music videos and advertisements (Loreck, 2018). In many forms and shapes, the male gaze can be found and realized in situations where women are controlled and the idea of what they represent in terms of the hero. The director of the classic Westerns in the 1950s says, "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself, the woman has not the slightest importance" (Loreck, 2018). Even in the three-minute trailer of the movie, the opening line is "A

woman who's ready for anything." This tells that a woman has been shown not having any self-respect and significance of her own, and is completely controlled by the male character.

The violent romance of the hero with the female character shows his control over the woman, which gives the male audience an urge for such passionate love and control over the opposite sex, and induces a wish to be desired like that in the female minds. "I took her in my arms and mashed my mouth up against hers. "Bite me! Bite me!" I bit her. I sank my teeth into her lips so deep I could feel the blood spurt into my mouth. It was running down her neck when I carried her upstairs" (Cain, 1989, p.15). There's a scene where Cora admits in a sexual and intimidating voice, "I didn't know what to do, but I've got to have you. It's just us; it's just you and me." The impact of the female voice and the expressions she's supposed to make help induce the sexual desire of the man in front of him. This gives the audience the thought that it is a woman who is responsible for the male gaze and his sexual attraction towards her.

Movie no.2: Die Another Day (2002)

James Bond's movies are all examples of the male gaze, depicting the weakness and objectification of the opposite sex (Ajit, 1970). Men are the dominant and leading characters in the movie. A woman's body is just for visual pleasure. "Die Another Day" is the perfect example of urging the viewers to look at the females through a male gaze and make them the target of sexual objectification. "Woman displayed as a sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (Mulvey, 2003, p.346). The scene where Bond meets Jinx proves this notion by means of a vignette in the post-production of the film. This implies that the character of Jinx is deliberately being objectified and viewed through the eyes of the hero, i.e., James Bond. The audience now views the female character just as Bond is looking at her. The vignette effect makes Jinx the centre of attention in the eyes of Bond. Apart from the vignette effect, the slow-motion effects caused by the cameramen highlight the bodies of the female characters, giving a sexual or sensual impact. There's a scene where Halle Berry's character comes out of the water wearing a bikini.

The scene makes her body in a sexual way. The audience isn't even aware of who she might be, but there's still an impact of having a visual pleasure in looking at the female's body. The slow-motion effect makes the audience yearn more for such sexual scenes. It wasn't just the provocative clothing or the naked body that had a sensual impact. Rather, there were some movements associated with the scene and the female character that made the audience and the hero look at her as if she's an object and something by whom they could satisfy their sexual desires. These movements involved throwing her hands up while walking towards the shore and also skimming her hands along the water; the character accentuates her breasts and makes the scene very sensual. Such scenes help the audience satisfy their scopophilia, the sexual pleasure received by looking. A mid shot is used in the scene, which enables the viewers to praise and admire the expressions and movements of the female character, and since she is alone in the scene, all the eyes, thoughts, and attention are only on her.

Here, all the eyes are referring to the male character as well as the audience's eyes. Since the audience looks at the female character from the viewpoint of the male character, their experiences are the same. After the female character comes out of the water, the hero's reaction is focused, and then again towards the woman, who looks more groomed now and is walking towards the hero. This induces a notion of an ideal woman after being in the water. Both male and female audience set their standards after viewing the 'perfect' lady whom the 'handsome' hero admires and desires. It makes a normal woman feel less significant since she has been given the thought that she isn't like the woman in the film, and no male would look at her the way Bond looks at that woman. On the other hand, the male audience sets their level that this is what they want in their actual lives, a woman as sexy as in the movie. "Sexual instincts and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire" (Mulvey, 2003, p.346).

Many factors in several scenes in the movie contributed to these perceptions and thoughts of the audience. These aspects include the bikini worn by the female character, the manner in which she comes out of the water, the movement of her hips in a non-realistic way, and the manner in which she dries herself up using the towel on the deck; all give a sensual impact. The music played in the background of these scenes exaggerates and intensifies the effect along with every move she makes (Hope, 1970). Everything combined creates a whole fantasy and imagination inside the hero as well as the audience's mind. The male audience keeps itself in the place of the hero and perceives the female characters as their objects of pleasure. "In popular cinema, point-of-view shots and shot/reverse-shot editing techniques are used to achieve the effect of seeing the female characters as objects of desire through the eyes of the male character" (Stacey, 2013).

Mulvey, in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", mentions that females are always given a passive role, and if they are to be displayed as active characters, they adopt the male role. This leaves no space for the female spectatorship (Mulvey, 1975). In the film, there's a scene at the end where the female character dresses the same as Bond. And then again, the male gaze comes into play when another female character, Miranda, comes on screen with a revealing and provocative outfit, which makes Jinx take her jacket off, exposing the curves of her upper body. Both female characters are now playing the role of satisfying the male gaze, which implies how Jinx comes back to her passive character. The cameramen show the manner in which Bond sees the female character and how his eyes move from her face to the back of her head and other parts of her body. This leads the other males in the audience to see everything in the same manner as the hero (thefilmstudies.blogspot.com).

Conclusion

Studying the aspects of the theories and how they applied to the two different movies of two different times, we can conclude that there isn't that much difference in the portrayal of women in both periods. Women are still objectified and are considered important only through the male gaze, just as they were in previous times. The same provocative and exposed outfits, controlling the behaviour of

men, and the weakness of women; all aspects are seen to be similar in both eras. The female characters were given the roles of seductive women who wore revealing dresses and used seductive voices, while the male characters satisfied their scopophilia along with the male audience, just as in today's time. We come across a lot of Hollywood movies, both old and new, which perfectly depict what Mulvey and Silverman stated in their works.

Both women used a psychological approach to describe the cinematic impact on the audience. The camera and its various effects play a major role in objectifying women and telling how the hero desires the female character in the film, and this then leads the audience to view those women the same way as the hero does. This accounts for the satisfaction of the pleasure the audience seeks through just looking at the female bodies. The female voices sound seducing enough to induce desire and lust in the hero's heart, and so in the audience's heart. This makes the audience put themselves in the place of the male character and also leads the male and female audience to change their thoughts and perceptions regarding their self-worth. Mary Anne Doane says in her essay "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space" that the voice "generally in **Hollywood cinema** voices are anchored to visualized bodies" (Shingler, 2006, p.5).

Women consider themselves incomplete and insignificant if they're unable to catch the male's attention. They believe this is their real power, while men think that women are dependent on them and they must meet those standards of being sexy and attractive to catch their eyes, as they have seen in the films. Hence, the passivity of the females and the activeness of the males have always been observed and are still prevalent in cinemas, movies, and films. And though the feminist movements and ideas are being recognized by people, no one stands against the objectification of females and the way they are being displayed in films and advertisements (ginacalnan.pbworks.com). This is due to the fact that people are now used to the notion of the male gaze and the female dependence on males for her identity to be realized and known to the world.

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