

9-1. How does the “capture” of the body by a scopophilic regime or gaze transform its functioning in space and power?

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scopophilia

: a desire to look at sexually stimulating scenes especially as a substitute for actual sexual participation: sexual stimulation or satisfaction from looking at naked people, most often without their knowledge; a love of looking at people in this way; also called scoptophilia, voyeurism

“...the French term for pregnant, enciente, meaning walled or enclosed, was preferred by many doctors in England.” (1)

“Wife in the kitchen. Whore in the street.” (2)

“Agoraphobia and anorexia are, after all, chiefly disorders of middle and upper middle-class women – women for whom the anxieties of possibility have arisen, women who have the social and material resources to carry the language of femininity to symbolic excess.” (3)

The flâneur and the voyeur are perhaps the same character. Through his habit of walking, the flâneur observes/sees that which surrounds him. He transforms the exterior into an interior – a home in which he feels comfort, despite the surrounding activities and crowds. Glass architecture provides additional visibility, as the barrier between interior and exterior dissolves during the 19th century. Views are provided along the city streets, and watching [women] becomes an activity of the public sphere. It is in this same landscape that the middle-class woman begins to fear the exterior.

Agoraphobia, originally meaning the fear of the agora or marketplace, became more generally defined through Freudian psychoanalysis to mean the fear of urban spaces (4). Women came to be known as the predominant victims of the affliction. Yet, in an early study of Freud's, *The Architecture of Hysteria*, agoraphobia is linked to a man's experience with a prostitute. This reflects Benjamin's depiction of the vulnerability of the flâneur in the arcade: “...a sort of phantasmagoria produced by the comings and goings of these women along a routine circuit, which has the effect of multiplying them to infinity...” (5)

As the street becomes the space of the male flâneur, the interior is designated to women and the tasks of domesticity. This assignment of the female body to the interior of the home is presented through the description of the birthing rituals of the Victorian middle-class in the Adams's essay *Childbirth at Home*. It is in this essay, that the author describes the relationship of body and architecture, as “...birth itself was a transgression of the boundaries between the woman's body and the house as the child emerged from the womb.” During this time, medical theories supported beliefs that the conditions of the

exterior – the rural landscape, or the urban cityscape – directly attributed to the health of a mother or mother-to-be.

The interiority of the womb was to represent a protective barrier that a pregnant woman of the middle-class would recreate in built form (an “architecture of confinement”) in her “lying-in room”. This space represented the most interior zone of the Victorian home, set towards the back of the home. (6) The front of the house, composed of social spaces within the home, was the men’s space – a threshold between home and street. It is through the repression of her own image as middle-class women in the public sphere, that she becomes afraid of the outdoors.

Moving from the Victorian home to the post-war suburb, the gaze no longer belongs to the flâneur (detective) moving through urban space. Instead, it has shifted to a “cyborgian gaze”, watching oneself outside of one’s body, as part of a “three-dimensional network of glances and reflections. (7) It is the “home” described by Donna Haraway, in Vidler’s 1990 essay *Homes for Cyborgs*, that suggests a reconstruction of the spaces of the exterior and domestic interior according to the reconstruction of the bodies and social constructs. Haraway suggests that through the technological enhancement of the domestic interior and the tasks that occur within it, that women are left without a space.

It is these women without a space, that Diane Agrest theorizes in her essay *An Architecture from Without: Body, Logic and Sex*, will use the street as her own. Here we have an inversion of Benjamin’s flâneur, an appropriation of the public at the moment the interior is lost. The effect of the gaze on the woman renders her “dispossessed (of her body)”, condition that provides her the freedom of the “outside”: “The scene of the city, of the street, of the public place, is that of the dispossessed; it is there where she is ‘at home.’” (8).

(1) Annmarie Adams, “Childbirth at Home”, in *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women, 1870-1900*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) 111.

(2) Diane Agrest, “Architecture from Without: Body, Logic and Sex”, in *Gender Space Architecture*. (London: Routledge, 2000) 367.

(3) Esther Da Costa Meyer, “La Donna è Mobile: Agoraphobia, Women, and Urban Space” in *The Sex of Architecture*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996) 148-9.

(4) *Ibid*, 147.

(5) Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999) 501.

(6) Adams, 115.

(7) Anthony Vidler, *Homes for Cyborgs*, in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) 172.

(8) Agrest, 368.

Gaze

Nathalie Westervelt

The capture of a body never results in the true expression of that which is captured. For Benjamin, as discussed in Anne Friedberg's article "The Passage from Arcade to Cinema," once the body is captured, it may be reproduced, and this reproduction loses the aura of the original. Power is both lost through the loss of aura and gained again through the alluring effect of the "spell of personality." The voyeur becomes enamored of the representation on the screen and watching it in secret, he does not desire the actual object, but the representation of that. "The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of personality," the phony spell of a commodity."(48 Friedberg) Film allows directors to create a sense of intimacy due to the close-up and the ability to slow down time.(48 Friedberg) According to Laura Mulvey, the dark theater, this sense of intimacy combine with the viewer's desire to connect with the character on screen, thus empowering the voyeur to own the character as it were a commodity.

Cindy Sherman, in her "Film Stills," depicted scenes from films that evoke ambiguous moments of desire from film. By knowingly representing characters objectified females, near victims, she empowered herself by consciously becoming the object of desire for the voyeur. Sherman allows the objectified female, played by the artist herself, to take control of the scopophilic gaze. She toys with our recognition of understood scenarios, and uses them to control the viewer's response. (Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema)

Memory is of essence when thinking about the capture and redisplay of anything. In her article, Friedberg, weaves the ideas of memory and desire when she talks about the commodity of memory. Miniature memories encased in shop windows, the movie screens for Benjamin's flâneuse, are objects of desire. If the independent females shopper (flâneuse) bought an object without consent from a patriarch, it may be seen as allegorical to a movie-goer watching a woman undress on screen in a dark theater. Therefore the captured objects in the store window have the ability to empower the flâneuse because she obtains the orgasmic excitement of surpassing the boundaries of what society had previously allowed her. In addition, the objects (bodies) encased therein are juxtaposed out of context. The meaning of each is dependent upon the memory of the beholder. Here Mulvey would cite Laçan and his reinterpretation of Freud's mirror stage (i.e. the child recognizes his or herself in the mirror before the speaking stage, in addition, the child recognizes his or herself in things from then on). "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. "(48 Friedberg) For one person an object may be powerful and for another, it may not, it depends upon experience.

This is why Friedberg calls the flâneuse the mobilized scopophilic gaze. She is a combination of flâneur and movie-goer, but instead of sexual power, she seeks power

through economy. Female power is manifest in the power to own. Deviance is the key to pleasure through ownership. The female is especially empowered when purchasing without the permission of a man. The flâneuse and the City were developing at the same time – during this mechanized age. And “the shop window was the proscenium for visual intoxication, the site of seduction for consumer desire.” (65 Friedberg)

To conclude, film and shopping, seen as examples for arousal in men and women, in that order, act as the scopophilic agents in the question. The female body, and the product can gain or lose power depending upon the way that the voyeur (male or female) understands the body, product, thing in question. The voyeur has power through deviance, but Cindy Sherman subverts this power, the flâneuse has power when obtaining a desired object, but her position in life is subjugated.

Lilly Donohue

In “Architecture in the Family Way”, Annemarie Adams discusses the claustrophobic relegation of women in the Victorian middle-class to the domestic interior. It was viewed as acceptable for women to leave the boundary of the home in order to walk in the country, provided that they were not “with child”. However, in the urban context, where they might be looked upon by working-class men, women were completely confined to the interior space where they were expected to consume themselves with the overseeing of ventilation and other health concerns related to the household.

This anxiety surrounding the male gaze renders the female completely powerless in defining her own spatial boundaries. The male is free to roam about the city at his leisure while the woman is held hostage, recoiling fearfully into the domestic in order to escape the potential danger of the gaze. At the onset of pregnancy, her environment continues to shrink even more radically, consisting solely of a “lying –in room”, a total privileging of insulation from the potential of the intrusive gaze over any autonomy of the female body in space.(1)

Laura Mulvey, in her essay, “Visual pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, hypothesizes the Freudian theory of scopophilia as a root for the fascination with looking at the human body in cinema. She identifies scopophilia as encompassing both the pleasure of “looking-at” and the pleasure of “being looked at”. Mulvey clearly breaks down this duality of scopophilia as a male/ female dichotomy. The male is the active viewer, transforming both the audience and his female counterpart with his piercing gaze. The female is the object of beauty and pleasure- submissively awaiting the gaze of the spectator and simultaneously deriving her own pleasure from being looked upon.(2)

Potentially an extension of these themes from the object-woman of cinema to the prostitute of the city begins to illuminate one of the opportunities that woman were able to seize during this historically neurotic period in the pursuit of acquiring freedom from the domestic interior. It is through this total annihilation of the social structure of acceptability, the appropriation and exploitation of the gaze itself, that the prostitute is relieved of the anxiety and claustrophobia forced upon respectable women. The prostitute is free to wander the streets, indulging in the male gaze. Walter Benjamin writes of the prostitute’s ability to disguise and reinvent herself in order to create the illusion of an array of social classes as well as her liberty to explore different streets in these altered incarnations.(3) It is her understanding of the power implicit in very her appearance, the shallow reaches of the male gaze, that permits the prostitute, as woman, to find freedom from the confines of the domestic, however scandalous, and achieve the power to define her own spatial boundaries.

1. Adams, Annmarie. Ch. 4, “Childbirth at Home”, In *Architecture in a Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women, 1870-1900*. Montreal: McGill’s- Queens University Press, 1996

2. Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasures in Narrative Cinema", in *Women and Cinema*, Toronto: ed. Karen Kay and Gerald Perry, 1977

3. Benjamin, Walter. [Prostitution, Gambling], *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999