Notes on 'The Gaze'

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Introduction

I make no great claims for these somewhat fragmented notes which are offered by way of introduction to students concerned with examining the functions of 'the gaze' in the visual media (in particular in relation to television and to advertising in all its forms). ‘The gaze’ (sometimes called ‘the look’) is a technical term which was originally used in film theory in the 1970s but which is now more broadly used by media theorists to refer both to the ways in which viewers look at images of people in any visual medium and to the gaze of those depicted in visual texts. The term 'the male gaze' has become something of a feminist cliché for referring to the voyeuristic way in which men look at women (Evans & Gamman 1995, 13). My aim here is to alert students to existing material and frameworks which may assist them in their own investigations of the issue of the gaze in relation to media texts.

Mutual gaze is now possible in forms of interpersonal communication other than direct face-to-face interaction: current examples are video-conferencing and the use of 'cam-to-cam' communication via the World Wide Web. In the case of mass media texts as opposed to interpersonal communication, a genuine exchange of gazes through the textual frame is of course not possible - the viewer can look at those depicted in the text and cannot be seen by them - giving the viewing of all mass media texts and ‘realistic’ figurative art a voyeuristic aspect. The unseen viewing which is enabled by such indirect or 'mediated' viewing can be seen more positively as serving an 'information-seeking' function (Argyle 1975, 160) - an observation which alerts us to the issue of the viewer's purposes. The impossibility of mutual gaze between viewers and those depicted in media texts unfortunately means that much of the research by social psychologists which relates to the human gaze tends to be of limited relevance to media theorists. However, where possible I have tried to refer to empirical evidence which relates to the various theories discussed.

Forms of gaze

In the case of recorded texts such as photographs and films (as opposed to those involving interpersonal communication such as video-conferences), a key feature of the gaze is that the object of the gaze is not aware of the current viewer (though they may originally have been aware of being filmed, photographed, painted etc. and may sometimes have been aware that strangers could subsequently gaze at their image). Viewing such recorded images gives the viewer's gaze a voyeuristic dimension. As Jonathan Schroeder notes, 'to gaze implies more than to look at - it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze' (Schroeder 1998, 208).

Several key forms of gaze can be identified in photographic, filmic or televisual texts, or in figurative graphic art. The most obvious typology is based on who is doing the looking, of which the following are the most commonly cited:
• the spectator’s gaze: the gaze of the viewer at an image of a person (or animal, or object) in the text;
• the intra-diegetic gaze: a gaze of one depicted person at another (or at an animal or an object) within the world of the text (typically depicted in filmic and televisual media by a subjective ‘point-of-view shot’);
• the direct [or extra-diegetic] address to the viewer: the gaze of a person (or quasi-human being) depicted in the text looking ‘out of the frame’ as if at the viewer, with associated gestures and postures (in some genres, direct address is studiously avoided);
• the look of the camera - the way that the camera itself appears to look at the people (or animals or objects) depicted; less metaphorically, the gaze of the film-maker or photographer.

In addition to the major forms of gaze listed above, we should also note several other types of gaze which are less often mentioned:

• the gaze of a bystander - outside the world of the text, the gaze of another individual in the viewer’s social world catching the latter in the act of viewing - this can be highly charged, e.g. where the text is erotic (Willemen 1992);
• the averted gaze - a depicted person’s noticeable avoidance of the gaze of another, or of the camera lens or artist (and thus of the viewer) - this may involve looking up, looking down or looking away (Dyer 1982);
• the gaze of an audience within the text - certain kinds of popular televisual texts (such as game shows) often include shots of an audience watching those performing in the 'text within a text';
• the editorial gaze - 'the whole institutional process by which some portion of the photographer's gaze is chosen for use and emphasis' (Lutz & Collins 1994, 368).

James Elkins offers ten different ways of looking at a figurative painting in a gallery (Elkins 1996, 38-9):

1. You, looking at the painting,
2. figures in the painting who look out at you,
3. figures in the painting who look at one another, and
4. figures in the painting who look at objects or stare off into space or have their eyes closed. In addition there is often
5. the museum guard, who may be looking at the back of your head, and
6. the other people in the gallery, who may be looking at you or at the painting. There are imaginary observers, too:
7. the artist, who was once looking at this painting,
8. the models for the figures in the painting, who may once have seen themselves there, and
9. all the other people who have seen the painting - the buyers, the museum officials, and so forth. And finally, there are also
10. people who have never seen the painting: they may know it only from reproductions... or from descriptions.
In relation to viewer-text relations of looking, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen make a basic distinction between an ‘offer’ and a ‘demand’:

- an *indirect address* which represents an *offer* in which the viewer is an invisible onlooker and the depicted person is the *object* of the look - here those depicted either do not know that they are being looked at (as in surveillance video), or act as if they do not know (as in feature films, television drama and television interviews); and
- a *gaze of direct address* which represents a *demand* for the viewer (as the *object* of the look) to enter into a parasocial relationship with the depicted person - with the type of relationship indicated by a facial expression or some other means (this form of address is the norm for television newsreaders and portraits and is common in advertisements and posed magazine photographs). (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, 122ff)

Some theorists make a distinction between *the gaze* and *the look*: suggesting that *the look* is a perceptual mode open to all whilst *the gaze* is a mode of viewing reflecting a gendered code of desire (Evans & Gamman 1995, 16). John Ellis and others relate the 'gaze' to cinema and the 'glance' to television - associations which then seem to lead to these media being linked with stereotypical connotations of 'active' (and 'male') for film and 'passive' (and 'female') for television (Ellis 1982, 50; Jenks 1995, 22).

Here perhaps it should be noted that even if one's primary interest is in media texts, to confine oneself to the gaze only in relation 'textual practices' is to ignore the importance of the *reciprocal gaze* in the social context of cultural practices in general (rather than simply a textual/representational context, where a reciprocal gaze is, of course, technically impossible).

**Direction of gaze**

It is useful to note how directly a depicted person gazes out of the frame. A number of authors have explored this issue in relation to advertisements in particular.

In his study of women’s magazine advertisements, Trevor Millum distinguished between these forms of attention:

- attention directed towards *other people*;
- attention directed to an *object*;
- attention directed to *oneself*;
- attention directed to the *reader/camera*;
- attention directed into *middle distance*, as in a state of reverie;
- direction or object of attention *not discernible*. (Millum 1975, 96, 115, 139)

He also categorized relationships between those depicted thus:

- *reciprocal attention*: the attention of those depicted is directed at each other;
- *divergent attention*: the attention of those is directed towards different things;
- *object-oriented attention*: those depicted are looking at the same object;
• **semi-reciprocal attention**: the attention of one person is on the other, whose attention is elsewhere. (*ibid.*)

Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins note that 'the mutuality or non-mutuality of the gaze of the two parties can... tell us who has the right and/or need to look at whom' (Lutz & Collins 1994, 373).

In his study, Millum found that:

> Actors by themselves are likely to look at the reader. Women accompanied by women tend to look into middle distance, while women in mixed groups are more likely to look at people (though less so than men are). Women alone tend to regard themselves or to look into middle-distance. (Millum 1975, 138)

In a study of photographs accompanying articles in the magazine *National Geographic*, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins found that:

To a statistically significant degree, women look into the camera more than men, children and older people look into the camera more often than other adults, those who appear poor more than those who appear wealthy, those whose skin is very dark more than those who are bronze, those who are bronze more than those who are white, those in native dress more than those in Western garb, those without any tools more than those using machinery. Those who are culturally defined by the West as weak - women, children, people of colour, the poor, the tribal rather than the modern, those without technology - are more likely to face the camera, the more powerful to be represented looking elsewhere. (Lutz & Collins 1994, 370)

They add that 'if the gaze toward the camera reflected only a lack of familiarity with it, then one would expect rural people to look at the camera more than urban people. This is not the case. One might also expect some change over time, as cameras became more common everywhere, but there is no difference in rate of gaze when the period from 1950 to 1970 is compared with the later period' (*ibid.*, 371-2).

In everyday interaction, a high level of gaze is widely interpreted as reflecting *liking* (Argyle 1975, 162). In some well-known studies Hess found that pupil dilation can also be a reflection of sexual *attraction*, and that photographs of female models in which the pupils had been artificially enlarged elicited unconscious pupil enlargement from male viewers (Hess & Polt 1960, Hess 1972, cited in Argyle 1975, 163). Knowledge of this has led some 'glamour' photographers to enhance their photographs in the same way and thus to increase the attractiveness of the model.

Richard Dyer (1982) describes the gaze of males in images aimed at women (pin-ups, star-portraits, drawings and paintings):

> Where the female model typically averts her eyes, expressing modesty, patience and a lack of interest in anything else, the male model looks either off or up. In the case of the former, his look suggests an interest in something else that the viewer cannot see - it certainly doesn’t suggest any interest in the viewer. Indeed, it barely
acknowledges the viewer, whereas the woman’s averted eyes do just that - they are averted from the viewer. In the cases where the model is looking up, this always suggests a spirituality...: he might be there for his face and body to be gazed at, but his mind is on higher things, and it is this upward striving that is most supposed to please... It may be, as is often said, that male pin-ups more often than not do not look at the viewer, but it is by no means the case that they never do. When they do, what is crucial is the kind of look that it is, something very often determined by the set of the mouth that accompanies it. When the female pin-up returns the viewer’s gaze, it is usually some kind of smile, inviting. The male pin-up, even at his most benign, still stares at the viewer... Since Freud, it is common to describe such a look as ‘castrating’ or ‘penetrating’... (Dyer 1992a, 104-9)

Stereotypical notions of masculinity are strongly oriented towards the active. Dyer argues that the male model feels bound to avoid the ‘femininity’ of being posed as the passive object of an active gaze.

Paul Messaris notes that historically, ‘direct views into the camera have tended to be the exception rather than the rule in some ads aimed at men’ (Messaris 1997, 45). However, ‘during the past two decades or so, there has been a notable countertrend in male-oriented advertising, featuring men whose poses contain some of the same elements - including the direct view - traditionally associated with women’ (ibid.). This seems likely to indicate both ‘a more explicit concern about how men look in the eyes of women’ and an acknowledgement of the existence, interests and spending power of gay consumers (ibid. 46). It may also reflect the rise of ‘homosociality’ - with ‘straight’ men becoming more accustomed to looking at images of other men (Mort 1996, Edwards 1997).

Charles Lewis reports that from the mids-1980s onwards American teenagers have chosen to be portrayed differently in their high-school yearbooks - the focus of their eyes has shifted from a straightforward, open look to a sideways glance resembling glamour poses in fashion magazines (cited in Barry 1997, 268).

The amount of gaze can also be related to status or dominance: higher status people tend to look more whilst they are talking but less when they are listening (Argyle 1975, 162). Joshua Meyrowitz notes that ‘a person of high status often has the right to look at a lower status person for a long time, even stare him or her up and down, while the lower status person is expected to avert his or her eyes' (Meyrowitz 1985, 67).

In conventional narrative films, actors only very rarely gaze directly at the camera lens (though in comedies this 'rule' is sometimes broken). Paul Messaris notes a common assumption that a direct gaze at the camera lens by a depicted person may remind viewers of their position as spectators, but that where such shots are subjective point-of-view shots within a narrative this effect is negated (Messaris 1994, 151). Direct addresses to camera are much more common in the world of television than in the world of film. However, in television only certain people are conventionally allowed to address the camera directly, such as newsreaders, programme presenters and those making party political broadcasts or charitable appeals.
In studying social interaction, Michael Watson (1970) found cultural variability in the intensity of gaze. He distinguished between three forms of gaze:

- **sharp**: focusing on the other person's eyes;
- **clear**: focusing about the other person's head and face;
- **peripheral**: having the other person within the field of vision, but not focusing on his head or face. (cited in Argyle 1988, 59)

Of the groups studied, Watson showed that the sharpest gaze was found amongst Arabs, followed by Latin Americans and southern Europeans; the most peripheral gaze was that of the northern Europeans, followed by Indians and Pakistanis and then Asians.

**Angle of view**

Directness of gaze is closely related to the issue of the camera's angle of view. In an experiment reported in *The Psychology of the TV Image*, Jon Baggaley found that a person talking for one minute on law and order was considered 'less reliable and expert' when addressing the camera directly than when seen in profile. He comments:

> Intuition may suggest that the direct to camera shot should connote directness of approach and its attendant qualities of authority and reliability; the present data, however, suggest otherwise. If a general rule for such effects is to be argued from this evidence it should perhaps be as follows: that a full face shot suggests less expertise than a profile shot since in popular broadcasting those who address the camera directly are typically the reporters and link men, who transmit the news rather than initiate it. The expert on the other hand is more often seen either in interview or in discussion, and thus in profile. Unless the speaker may be assumed an expert on some other basis - which... the conventional TV reporter is not - the probability is that he is expert and reliable in what he says will therefore be weighed as greater if he is seen in profile than if he addresses the camera directly. (Baggaley 1980, 28-30)

Baggaley added that another reason why profile views on television led to speakers being rated as more expert might be that where an autocue is being used, the full-face angle might make this more obvious, whereas 'in the profile condition signs of autocue usage conveyed by a performer's eyes are less apparent' (*ibid.*, 67). Even if an autocue is not being used, the 'unusual intensity' of the speaker's eye-contact with the viewer may tend to diminish the speaker's credibility (*ibid.*, 30). One experiment suggested that 'the greater visibility of a performer's eyes may increase his perceived tension' (*ibid.*, 68). This might not apply, however, in the case of a skilled actor who could treat the camera to 'the repertoire of temporary looks and glances that he would use in normal "unscripted" social interaction', varying eye-contact discreetly even when reading from an autocue (*ibid.*).

Gaze can signify persuasive intent (Argyle 1975, 161). Perhaps it is relevant here that another televisual context in which direct address is often used is in advertisements, the persuasive purposes of which typically lead adult viewers to be cautious and sceptical, although in face-to-face interaction 'those with higher levels of gaze are seen as credible and trustworthy, and are indeed more persuasive' (*ibid.*).
Peter Warr and Christopher Knapper found that significant differences in viewers' perceptions were generated by front-view photographs compared to side-view photographs, although neither view generated more favourable or more extreme impressions (Warr & Knapper 1968, 307).

An empirical study of a commercial suggested that direct views were more conducive to identification than side views (Galan 1986, cited in Messaris 1997, 47). Following a major research review, Cappella argues that human beings probably have an inherent disposition to empathise in reaction to the facial expression of emotion by others (Capella 1993, cited in Messaris, 47), and Messaris suggests that a direct gaze is likely to enhance the likelihood of both empathy and identification.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen have also discussed the issue of the adoption of either a frontal angle or an oblique angle in scenes which already have a linear orientation. Where there are straight lines in a scene (such as in the outside or inside edges of a building or people standing in a line) the image-producer has the option of choosing a frontal angle in which such lines are parallel to the picture plane or of shifting the horizontal angle of the depiction to a more oblique point of view. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that the horizontal angle adopted represents ‘whether or not the image-producer (and hence, willy-nilly, the viewer) is "involved" with the represented participants or not’ (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, 143), with the frontal angle representing involvement and an oblique angle representing detachment. They do not, however, cite empirical studies in support of this argument. John Tagg argues that frontality is a key technique of 'documentary rhetoric' in photography, offering up what it depicts for evaluation (Tagg 1988, 189). He shows that historically the frontal portrait has been associated with the working class, and that frontality is a 'code of social inferiority' (Tagg 1988, 37).

The function of vertical angles is widely noted: high angles (looking down on a depicted person from above) are interpreted as making that person look small and insignificant, and low angles (looking up at them from below) are said to make them look powerful and superior. Kress and van Leeuwen modify this standpoint slightly, arguing that a high angle depicts a relationship in which the producer of the image and the viewer have symbolic power over the person or thing represented, whilst a low angle depicts a relationship in which the depicted person has power over the image-producer and the viewer (ibid., 146). Empirical studies have supported the idea that low angles can make those who are depicted in this way appear more powerful, provided that they are already recognised as having some authority rather than as having equal status with the viewer (Mandell & Shaw 1973; Kraft 1987; McCain, Chilberg & Wakshlag 1977; Tiemens 1970; all cited in Messaris 1997, 34-5; Messaris 1994, 158). Messaris notes that a low angle combined with a frontal view and a direct gaze at the viewer may be interpreted as overbearing, intimidating or menacing, and that when the intention is to use low angles to suggest noble or heroic qualities, side views are more common (Messaris 1997, 38).

In rear views we see the back of a depicted person. As Paul Messaris comments, ‘in our real-world interactions with others, this view from the back can imply turning away or exclusion’ (Messaris 1997, 24). In travel advertisements where there are rear views of
people this tends to be either in longshots of landscapes or in midshots or close-ups of semi-naked bodies in seascapes (Messaris 1997, 24-7). In the landscapes, Messaris suggests that there may be echoes of a painterly tradition in which this signifies turning away from the everyday world in order to marvel at the spectacle of nature. In the seascapes, exposed flesh clearly invites sexual curiosity. However, in both, there is an implicit invitation to ‘wish you were here’.

Regarding viewpoint, Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that we should ask ourselves, “Who could see this scene in this way?” “Where would one have to be to see this scene this way, and what sort of person would one have to be to occupy that space?” (ibid., 149).

Michael Watson (1970) found cultural variability in how directly people face each other in social interaction. Of the groups he studied, he showed that those adopting the nearest to a frontal axis of orientation were southern Europeans, followed by Latin Americans and then Arabs; those who adopted the most oblique stance were Indians and Pakistanis, followed by northern Europeans and Asians (cited in Argyle 1988, 59).

**Apparent proximity**

Apparent physical distance also suggests certain relationships between a person depicted in a text and the viewer.

In relation to camerawork, there are three main kinds of shot-size: *long-shots, medium shots* and *close-ups*.

- **Long shot (LS)**: showing all or most of a fairly large subject (for example, a person) and usually much of the surroundings:
  - *Extreme Long Shot (ELS)*: the camera is at its furthest distance from the subject, emphasising the background;
  - *Medium Long Shot (MLS)*: in the case of a standing actor, the lower frame line cuts off feet and ankles.
- **Medium shots or Mid-Shots (MS)**: the subject or actor and the setting occupy roughly equal areas in the frame. In the case of the standing actor, the lower frame passes through the waist; there is space for hand gestures to be seen.
  - *Medium Close Shot (MCS)*: The setting can still be seen; the lower frame line passes through the chest of the actor.
- **Close-up (CU)** shots show a character's face in great detail so that it fills the screen:
  - *Medium Close-Up (MCU)*: head and shoulders;
  - *Big Close-Up (BCU)*: forehead to chin.

In an influential book, *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), Edward T Hall illustrated how physical distances between people in face-to-face interaction reflected degrees of formality. He referred to four specific ranges:

- **Intimate**: up to 18 inches;
- **Personal**: 18 inches to 4 feet;
• **Social:** 4 to 12 feet;  
• **Public:** 12 to 25 feet.

In an earlier book, *The Silent Language* (1959), Hall had drawn attention to a marked degree of cultural variability in the formality of such modes of face-to-face interaction and to the way in which differences in cultural norms of appropriate distances could lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. His observation that Arabs stand closer together than Americans was confirmed by Michael Watson (1970), who found that amongst the groups studied, those who chose to stand closest together were Arabs, followed by Indians and Pakistanis, and then southern Europeans, whilst those who stood furthest apart were northern Europeans, followed by Asians and then Latin Americans (cited in Argyle 1988, 59).

In camerawork these 'modes of address' are reflected in shot sizes - close-ups signifying intimate or personal modes, medium shots a social mode and long shots an impersonal mode (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, 130-35; see also Tuchman 1978, 116-20). Close-ups focus attention on a person's feelings or reactions. In interviews, the use of BCUs may emphasise the interviewee's tension and suggest lying or guilt. BCUs are rarely used for important public figures; MCUs are preferred, the camera providing a sense of distance. In western cultures the space within about 24 inches (60 cm) is generally felt to be private space, and BCUs may be felt to be invasive.

Charles Lewis reports that there has been a shift from the mids-1980s onwards in the way in which American teenagers have chosen to be portrayed in their high-school yearbooks - from a traditional full-face close-up to a three-quarter or full-body pose (cited in Barry 1997, 268).

Empirical studies have shown that tighter close-ups lead to increases in both attention and involvement (Lombard 1995; Reeves, Lombard & Melwani 1992; both cited in Messaris 1997, 29). Zooming in to a tight close-up can also enhance the perceived importance of a person on television (Donsbach, Brosius & Mettenklott 1993, cited in Messaris 1997, 29).

**The eye of the camera**

Looking at someone using a camera (or looking at images thus produced) is clearly different from looking at the same person directly. Indeed, the camera frequently enables us to look at people whom we would never otherwise see at all. In a very literal sense, the camera turns the depicted person into an object, distancing viewer and viewed.

We are all familiar with anecdotes about the fears of primal tribes that 'taking' a photograph of them may also take away their souls, but most of us have probably felt on some occasions that we don't want 'our picture' taken. In controlling the image, the photographer (albeit temporarily) has power over those in front of the lens, a power which may also be lent to viewers of the image. In this sense, the camera can represent a 'controlling gaze'.

In her classic book, *On Photography* Susan Sontag referred to several aspects of 'photographic seeing' which are relevant in the current context (Sontag 1979, 89):
'To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed' (ibid., 4);
'Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention... The act of photographing is more than passive observing. Like sexual voyeurism, it is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging what is going on to keep on happening' (ibid., 11-12);
'The camera doesn't rape, or even possess, though it may presume, intrude, trespass, distort, exploit, and, at the farthest reach of metaphor, assassinate - all activities that, unlike the sexual push and shove, can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment' (ibid., 13).

The functions of photography can be seen in the context of Michel Foucault's analysis of the rise of surveillance in modern society. Photography promotes 'the normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them' (Foucault 1977, 25). Photography was used in the second half of the nineteenth century to identify prisoners, mental patients and racial types (Tagg 1988). However, looking need not necessarily be equated with controlling (Lutz & Collins 1994, 365).

Both film and television, of course, involve audio-visual 'motion pictures' - which sets them apart from still photography - but it is important to bear in mind key differences between these two media. John Ellis argues that 'gazing is the constitutive activity of cinema. Broadcast TV demands a rather different kind of looking: that of the glance' (Ellis 1982, 50). Whilst there is a danger of such viewpoints reflecting a certain élitism about 'art film' versus 'popular television' it is clear that the conditions of viewing in the cinema are significantly different from the conditions of viewing in the home. For instance, in the cinema one watches a narrative which is beyond one's own control, in dreamlike darkness, in the company of strangers and typically also with a close friend or two, having paid for the privilege; it is hardly surprising that in the context of the nuclear family, with companions one might not necessarily always choose as co-viewers and with channels which can easily be changed, viewing is often more casual - indeed, many televizual genres are designed for such casual viewing. Ellis argues that the conditions are such that 'the voyeuristic mode' cannot be as intense for the television viewer as for the cinema spectator (ibid., 138).

Film theorists argue that in order to 'suspend one's disbelief' and to become drawn into a conventional narrative when watching a film one must first 'identify with' the camera itself as if it were one's own eyes and thus accept the viewpoint offered (this is, for instance, an assumption made by Mulvey 1975). Whilst one has little option but to accept the locational viewpoint of the film-maker, to suggest that one is obliged to accept the preferred reading involves treating viewers as uniformly passive, making no allowance for 'negotiation' on their part. There are many modes of engagement with film, as with other media.

The film theorist Christian Metz made an analogy between the cinema screen and a mirror (Metz 1975), arguing that through identifying with the gaze of the camera, the cinema spectator re-enacts what the psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan called 'the mirror stage', a stage at which looking into the mirror allows the infant to see itself for the first
time as other - a significant step in ego formation. Extending this observation to still photography, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins observe that 'mirror and camera are tools of self-reflection and surveillance. Each creates a double of the self, a second figure who can be examined more closely than the original - a double that can also be alienated from the self - taken away, as a photograph can be, to another place' (Lutz & Collins 1994, 376).

In relation to film and television narrative, camera treatment is called ‘subjective’ when the viewer is treated as a participant, as when:

- the camera is addressed directly; or
- when the camera imitates the viewpoint or movement of a character (a ‘point-of-view’ shot); here we are shown not only what a character sees, but how he or she sees it.; or
- the arms or legs of an off-frame participant are shown in the lower part of the frame as if they were those of the viewer (one parody of this technique involved putting spectacles in front of the lens!).

An empirical study has shown that a subjective version of a television commercial received higher scores and better evaluations on measures of viewers’ involvement (Galan 1986, cited in Messaris 1997, 32), supporting the notion that subjective camera treatment can help to make the viewer feel more involved in the situation depicted.

**The social codes of looking**

Looking is socially regulated: there are social codes of looking (including taboos on certain kinds of looking). It can be instructive to reflect on what these codes are in particular cultural contexts (they tend to retreat to transparency when the cultural context is one's own). 'Children are instructed to "look at me", not to stare at strangers, and not to look at certain parts of the body... People have to look in order to be polite, but not to look at the wrong people or in the wrong place, e.g. at deformed people' (Argyle 1975, 158). In Luo in Kenya one should not look at one's mother-in-law; in Nigeria one should not look at a high-status person; amongst some South American Indians during conversation one should not look at the other person; in Japan one should look at the neck, not the face; and so on (Argyle 1983, 95).

The duration of the gaze is also culturally variable: in 'contact cultures' such as those of the Arabs, Latin Americans and southern Europeans, people look more than the British or white Americans, while black Americans look less (ibid., 158). In contact cultures too little gaze is seen as insincere, dishonest or impolite whilst in non-contact cultures too much gaze ('staring') is seen as threatening, disrespectful and insulting (Argyle 1983, 95; Argyle 1975, 165). Within the bounds of the cultural conventions, people who avoid one's gaze may be seen as nervous, tense, evasive and lacking in confidence whilst people who look a lot may tend to be seen as friendly and self-confident (Argyle 1983, 93).

Goffman (1969)... describes the sustained 'hate stare' as exhibited by bigoted white Americans to blacks. The directed eye contact violates a code of looking, where eye contact is frequently broken but returned to, and leads to depersonalization of
the victim because an aggressor deliberately breaks the rules which the victim adheres to. (Danny Saunders in O'Sullivan et al. 1994, 205)

Noting Pratt's (1992) exploration of 'the colonial gaze', Schroeder comments that 'explorers gaze upon newly discovered land as colonial resources', and adds that John Urry (1990) refers to 'the tourist gaze', which reflects status differences, emphasizing that it is historically variable (Schroeder 1998, 208).

Codes of looking are particularly important in relation to gender. One woman reported to a male friend: ‘One of the things I really envy about men is the right to look’. She pointed out that in public places, ‘men could look freely at women, but women could only glance back surreptitiously’ (Dyer 1992a, 265). Brain Pranger (1990) reports on his investigation of 'the gay gaze':

Gay men are able to subtly communicate their shared worldview by a special gaze that seems to be unique to them... Most gay men develop a canny ability to instantly discern from the returned look of another man whether or not he is gay. The gay gaze is not only lingering, but also a visual probing... Almost everyone I interviewed said that they could tell who was gay by the presence or absence of this look. (in Higgins 1993, 235-6)

**John Berger's *Ways of Seeing***

In *Ways of Seeing*, a highly influential book based on a BBC television series, John Berger observed that ‘according to usage and conventions which are at last being questioned but have by no means been overcome - men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at’ (Berger 1972, 45, 47). Berger argues that in European art from the Renaissance onwards women were depicted as being ‘aware of being seen by a [male] spectator’ (*ibid.*, 49),

Berger adds that at least from the seventeenth century, paintings of female nudes reflected the woman’s submission to ‘the owner of both woman and painting’ (*ibid.*, 52). He noted that ‘almost all post-Renaissance European sexual imagery is frontal - either literally or metaphorically - because the sexual protagonist is the spectator-owner looking at it’ (*ibid.*, 56). He advanced the idea that the realistic, ‘highly tactile’ depiction of things in oil paintings and later in colour photography (in particular where they were portrayed as ‘within touching distance’), represented a desire to possess the things (or the lifestyle) depicted (*ibid.*, 83ff). This also applied to women depicted in this way (*ibid.*, 92).

Writing in 1972, Berger insisted that women were still ‘depicted in a different way to men - because the "ideal" spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him’ (*ibid.*, 64). In 1996 Jib Fowles still felt able to insist that ‘in advertising males gaze, and females are gazed at’ (Fowles 1996, 204). And Paul Messaris notes that female models in ads addressed to women ‘treat the lens as a substitute for the eye of an imaginary male onlooker,’ adding that ‘it could be argued that when women look at these ads, they are actually seeing themselves as a man might see them’ (Messaris 1997, 41). Such ads ‘appear to imply a male point of view, even though the intended viewer is often a woman. So the women who look at these ads are being invited to
identify both with the person being viewed and with an implicit, opposite-sex viewer’ (*ibid.*, 44).

We may note that within this dominant representational tradition the spectator is typically assumed not simply to be male but also to be heterosexual, over the age of puberty and often also *white*.

**Laura Mulvey on film spectatorship**

Whilst these notes are concerned more generally with ‘the gaze’ in the mass media, the term originates in film theory and a brief discussion of its use in film theory is appropriate here.

As Jonathan Schroeder notes, 'Film has been called an instrument of the male gaze, producing representations of women, the good life, and sexual fantasy from a male point of view' (Schroeder 1998, 208). The concept derives from a seminal article called ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ by Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist. It was published in 1975 and is one of the most widely cited and anthologized (though certainly not one of the most accessible) articles in the whole of contemporary film theory.

Laura Mulvey did not undertake empirical studies of actual filmgoers, but declared her intention to make ‘political use’ of Freudian psychoanalytic theory (in a version influenced by Jacques Lacan) in a study of cinematic *spectatorship*. Such psychoanalytically-inspired studies of 'spectatorship' focus on how 'subject positions' are constructed by media texts rather than investigating the viewing practices of individuals in specific social contexts. Mulvey notes that Freud had referred to (infantile) *scopophilia* - the pleasure involved in looking at other people’s bodies as (particularly, erotic) objects. In the darkness of the cinema auditorium it is notable that one may look without being seen either by those on screen by other members of the audience. Mulvey argues that various features of cinema viewing conditions facilitate for the viewer both the voyeuristic process of *objectification* of female characters and also the narcissistic process of *identification* with an ‘ideal ego’ seen on the screen. She declares that in patriarchal society ‘pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female’ (Mulvey 1992, 27). This is reflected in the dominant forms of cinema. Conventional narrative films in the ‘classical’ Hollywood tradition not only typically focus on a male protagonist in the narrative but also assume a male spectator. ‘As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto 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’ (*ibid.*, 28). Traditional films present men as active, controlling subjects and treat women as passive objects of desire for men in both the story and in the audience, and do not allow women to be desiring sexual subjects in their own right. Such films objectify women in relation to ‘the controlling male gaze’ (*ibid.*, 33), presenting ‘woman as image’ (or ‘spectacle’) and man as ‘bearer of the look’ (*ibid.*, 27). Men do the looking; women are there to be *looked at*. The cinematic codes of popular films ‘are obsessively subordinated to the neurotic needs of the male ego’ (*ibid.*, 33). It was Mulvey who coined the term 'the male gaze'.
Mulvey distinguishes between two modes of looking for the film spectator: *voyeuristic* and *fetishistic*, which she presents in Freudian terms as responses to male ‘castration anxiety’. *Voyeuristic* looking involves a controlling gaze and Mulvey argues that this has has associations with sadism: ‘pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt - asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness’ (Mulvey 1992, 29). *Fetishistic* looking, in contrast, involves ‘the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. This builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The erotic instinct is focused on the look alone’. Fetishistic looking, she suggests, leads to overvaluation of the female image and to the cult of the female movie star. Mulvey argues that the film spectator oscillates between these two forms of looking (*ibid.*; see also Neale 1992, 283ff; Ellis 1982, 45ff; Macdonald 1995, 26ff; Lapsley & Westlake 1988, 77-9).

This article generated considerable controversy amongst film theorists. Many objected to the fixity of the alignment of passivity with femininity and activity with masculinity and to a failure to account for the female spectator. A key objection underlying many critical responses has been that Mulvey's argument in this paper was (or seemed to be) *essentialist*: that is, it tended to treat both spectatorship and maleness as homogeneous essences - as if there were only one kind of spectator (male) and one kind of masculinity (heterosexual). E Ann Kaplan (1983) asked ‘Is the gaze male?’. Both Kaplan and Kaja Silverman (1980) argued that the gaze could be adopted by both male and female subjects: the male is not always the controlling subject nor is the female always the passive object. We can ‘read against the grain’. Teresa de Lauretis (1984) argued that the female spectator does not simply adopt a masculine reading position but is always involved in a ‘double-identification’ with both the passive and active subject positions. Jackie Stacey asks: ‘Do women necessarily take up a feminine and men a masculine spectator position?’ (Stacey 1992, 245). Indeed, are there only unitary ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ reading positions? What of gay spectators? Steve Neale (1983) identifies the gaze of mainstream cinema in the Hollywood tradition as not only male but also *heterosexual*. He observes a voyeuristic and fetishistic gaze directed by some male characters at other male characters within the text (Stacey notes the erotic exchange of looks between women within certain texts). A useful account of 'queer viewing' is given by Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman (1995). Neale argues that ‘in a heterosexual and patriarchal society the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated, its erotic component repressed’ (Neale 1992, 281). Both Neale and Richard Dyer (1982) also challenged the idea that the male is never sexually objectified in mainstream cinema and argued that the male is not always the looker in control of the gaze. It is widely noted that since the 1980s there has been an increasing display and sexualisation of the male body in mainstream cinema and television and in advertising (Moore 1987, Evans & Gamman 1995, Mort 1996, Edwards 1997).

Gender is not the only important factor in determining what Jane Gaines calls 'looking relations' - *race* and *class* are also key factors (Lutz & Collins 1994, 365; Gaines 1988; de Lauretis 1987; Tagg 1988; Traube 1992). Ethnicity was found to be a key factor in differentiating amongst different groups of women viewers in a study of *Women Viewing*
Violence (Schlesinger et al. 1992). Michel Foucault, who linked knowledge with power, related the 'inspecting gaze' to power rather than to gender in his discussion of surveillance (Foucault 1977).

**Categorizing facial expressions**

Rather than ‘reinventing the wheel’ it is useful for those undertaking their own research to refer to existing categories where appropriate, although clearly the system adopted needs to relate to the specific purposes of the study, and the lists offered here are of course time-bound and domain-specific. Indeed, the dates and genres of these studies make their frameworks and their findings potentially fruitful for comparisons with current material in the same genre or in other genres.

Marjorie Ferguson (1980) identified four types of facial expression in the cover photos of British women’s magazines:

1. **Chocolate Box**: half or full-smile, lips together or slightly parted, teeth barely visible, full or three-quarter face to camera. *Projected mood*: blandly pleasing, warm bath warmth, where uniformity of features in their smooth perfection is devoid of uniqueness or of individuality.
2. **Invitational**: emphasis on the eyes, mouth shut or with only a hint of a smile, head to one side or looking back to camera. *Projected mood*: suggestive of mischief or mystery, the hint of contact potential rather than sexual promise, the cover equivalent of advertising’s soft sell.
3. **Super-smiler**: full face, wide open toothy smile, head thrust forward or chin thrown back, hair often wind-blown. *Projected mood*: aggressive, ‘look-at-me’ demanding, the hard sell, ‘big come-on’ approach.
4. **Romantic or Sexual**: a fourth and more general classification devised to include male and female ‘two-somes’; or the dreamy, heavy-lidded, unsmiling big-heads, or the overtly sensual or sexual. *Projected moods*: possible ‘available’ and definitely ‘available’.

In a study of advertisements in women’s magazines, Trevor Millum offers these categories of female expressions:

1. **Soft/introverted**: eyes often shut or half-closed, the mouth slightly open/pouting, rarely smiling; an inward-looking trance-like reverie, removed from earthly things.
2. **Cool/level**: indifferent, self-sufficient, arrogant, slightly insolent, haughty, aloof, confident, reserved; wide eyes, full lips straight or slightly parted, and obtrusive hair, often blonde. The eyes usually look the reader in the eye, as perhaps the woman regards herself in the mirror.
3. **Seductive**: similar to the cool/level look in many respects - the eyes are less wide, perhaps shaded, the expression is less reserved but still self-sufficient and confident; milder versions may include a slight smile.
4. **Narcissistic**: similarities to the cool/level and soft/introverted looks, rather closer to the latter: a satisfied smile, closed or half-closed eyes, self-enclosed, oblivious, content - ‘activity directed inward’.
5. Carefree: nymphlike, active, healthy, gay, vibrant, outdoor girl; long unrestrained outward-flowing hair, more outward-going than the above, often smiling or grinning.

6. Kittenlike: coy, naïve (perhaps in a deliberate, studied way), a friendlier and more girlish version of the cool/level look, sometimes almost twee.

7. Maternal: motherly, matronly, mature, wise, experienced and kind, carrying a sort of authority; shorter hair, slight smile and gentle eyes - mouth may sometimes be stern, but eyes twinkle.

8. Practical: concentrating, engaged on the business in hand, mouth closed, eyes object-directed, sometimes a slight frown; hair often short or tied back.

9. Comic: deliberately ridiculous, exaggerated, acting the fool, pulling faces for the benefit of a real or imaginary audience, sometimes close to a sort of archness.

10. Catalogue: a neutral look as of a dummy, artificial, waxlike; features may be in any position, but most likely to be with eyes open wide and a smile, but the look remains vacant and empty; personality has been removed. (Millum 1975, 97-8)

Millum comments on how the male facial expressions depicted in the women’s ads he studied related to his typification of female expressions:

There are fairly direct parallels with the above - the carefree, practical, seductive, comic and catalogue. The other two male expressions selected as types - the thoughtful and the self-reliant - have similarities to the female introverted and cool, though the thoughtful is far less introverted and the self-reliant more smug than aloof or reserved, but there are no counterparts to the narcissistic or kittenlike. (For the latter a type boyish might be postulated, but it remains potential). (ibid., 98)

Paul Messaris notes differences in facial expression between models in high-fashion magazines and those in ads for less expensive products:

Models who display moderately priced clothing usually smile and strike ingratiating poses. But high-fashion models are generally unsmiling and sometimes openly contemptuous. So pronounced is this contrast that it is tempting to formulate it in a simple rule: the higher the fashion, the more sullen the expression. The supercilious expressions on the models’ faces serve to increase the desirability of what they’re selling by evoking status anxiety in the viewer. (Messaris 1997, 38-40)

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