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Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism, Past and Present

- The history of feminism is typically divided into four periods, or ‘waves’:
 - 1st wave
 - 2nd wave
 - 3rd wave
 - 4th wave



Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 1st wave

- 1st wave feminism began, arguably in the late-18th century, and officially began with the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the first convention on women's rights.
 - The 1st wave focused on including women into the sphere of rights associated with liberal and Enlightenment ideals about liberty, citizenship, etc.
 - In particular, 1st wave feminism focused on women's suffrage—the right to vote.



Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 1st wave

- But it also fought for women's rights across the legal-social sphere including:
 - The right to own property and control income;
 - The right to guardianship of children;
 - The right to divorce;
 - The right to participate in public institutions, such as higher education.



Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 1st wave

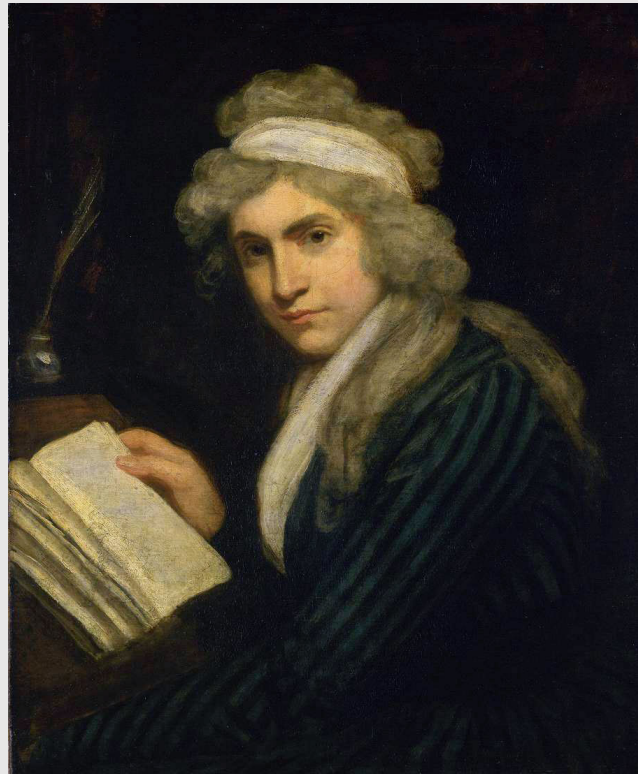
- Women in Canada gained full suffrage in 1918.
- In the U.S., full suffrage wasn't granted to women until the passing of the 19th amendment to the constitution in 1920.



Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 1st wave

- Notable early feminists include (among many others):
 - Mary Wollstonecraft
 - Judith Sargent Murray
 - Sojourner Truth
 - Susan B. Anthony
 - Margaret Sanger



Mary Wollstonecraft

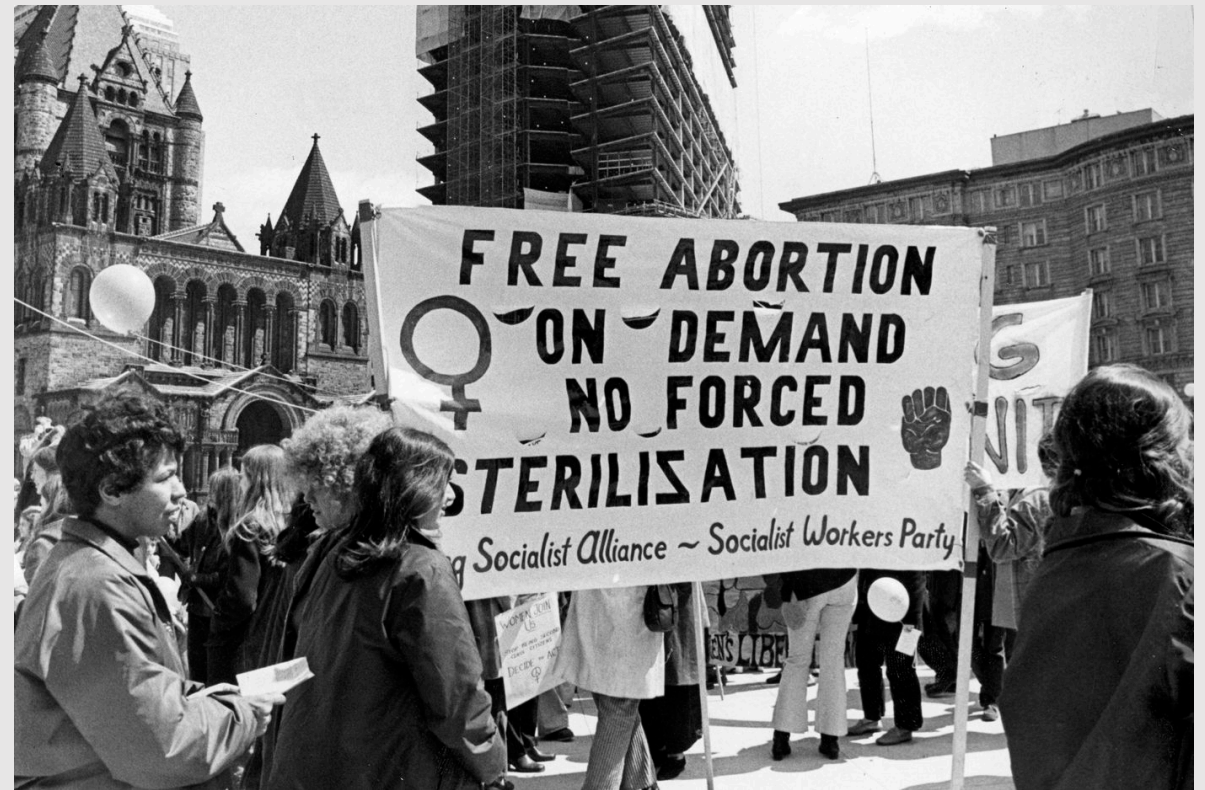


Sojourner Truth

Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 2nd Wave

- 2nd wave feminism focused on, not just the legal inequalities women faced, but the inequalities wrought by societies shaped by the patriarchy.
- I.e., the way in which much of the social and cultural fabric of society was saturated by male domination and sexism.



Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 2nd Wave

- It aimed to transform the cultural forms of male-dominated society, and fought for:
 - inclusion and equality in the workplace;
 - reproductive rights;
 - better understanding of the relation between sexuality and (what they understood as) the sexes;
 - better understanding of the social/cultural forces of sexism in society at large;
 - support for victims of sexual and domestic violence.



Simone de Beauvoir

Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 3rd and 4th wave

- 3rd and 4th wave feminism are much less distinct in terms of their aims, ideas, and contributions--the latter focusing more on the emerging venues of the internet and specifically social media.
- Both focus on the concepts of **intersectionality** and **gender**.



Kimberlé Crenshaw, inventor of the term 'intersectionality'.

Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: Intersectionality

- Beginning in the 1980s-'90s, 3rd wave (and later 4th wave) feminism focuses on the ways in which **intersectionality** contribute to differences in women's experience of oppression, exclusion, sexuality, sexism, and privilege.
- In much of 1st and 2nd wave feminism, the experience of white, upper-class, hetero, cis-gendered women was tacitly assumed to relate universally to the experience of women. The voices of other women were less often heard, and in some cases actively suppressed.



Audre Lorde

Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: Intersectionality

- As a result, other dimension of one's identity such race, sexual orientation, gender identification, and class were often under-considered or ignored.
- It is the layers of oppression or privilege that women face—based on their position with respect to these intersections—that shape the experience of women and of womanhood. Feminism cannot be properly understood outside of these relations, since all women do not face the same conditions,. The concepts of womanhood and figures of women change based on these relations.



Audre Lorde

Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 3rd and 4th wave

- Feminist thinkers also began think **mark a distinction between sex and gender**, one that would have widespread consequences for our understanding of sexism and its historicity.
- Additionally, understanding ‘womanhood’ through the lens of gender, brought about broad changes in the conceptualization of sexism and feminism.



Protestor at the 2017 Women's March in Washington DC after the election of Donald Trump

Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: Gender is not Sex

- **Gender** is a normative category, a product of enforced social roles and statuses,
 - which in heteronormative, patriarchal societies is systematically associated with binary sexual difference. (~~Man~~ > ~~Male~~, ~~Woman~~ > ~~Female~~)
- **Sex** is a biological category which, according to 3rd and 4th wave theorists, like Judith Butler, has no intrinsic social meaning.
 - This deviates from many of the most famous 2nd wave feminist critiques of the patriarchy, who saw men and women as, in some sense, intrinsically different because of their sex, though inherently equal.



Judith Butler

Short History and Context of Feminism

Feminism: 3rd and 4th wave

- According to gender and queer theorists, gender disparities are a product of social activity: they can be made and unmade. They are historical and relative to the norms of a society, not relative to biology.
- Thus, 3rd and 4th wave feminism attempt to better understand its own aims in light of racial, class, and LGBTQ2+ inequities.

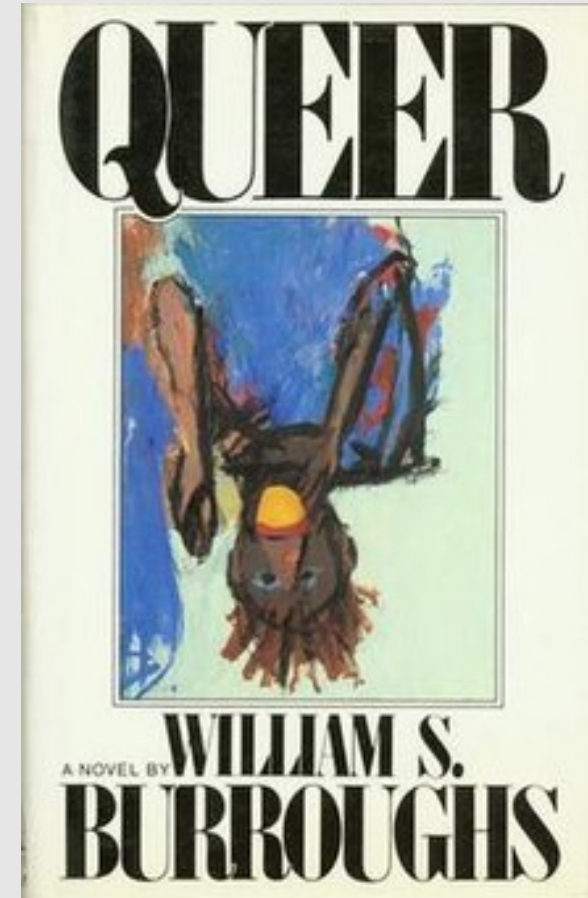


Protestors at the 2017 Women's March in Washington DC after the election of Donald Trump

Short History and Context of Queer Theory

Feminism: Queer Theory

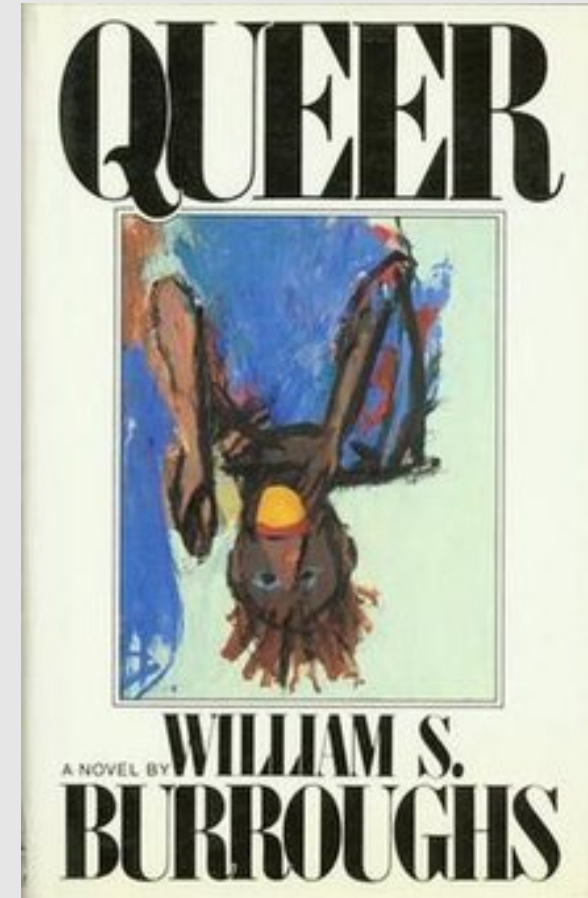
- Queer theory has its origins in the 1970s but is named as a distinct field of inquiry in the 1990s.
- It grew out of this broader concern of feminism, women's studies, and gay and lesbian studies about gender identities and sexual orientations that did not conform with heteronormative framing of sexuality and gender.



Short History and Context of Queer Theory

Feminism: Queer Theory

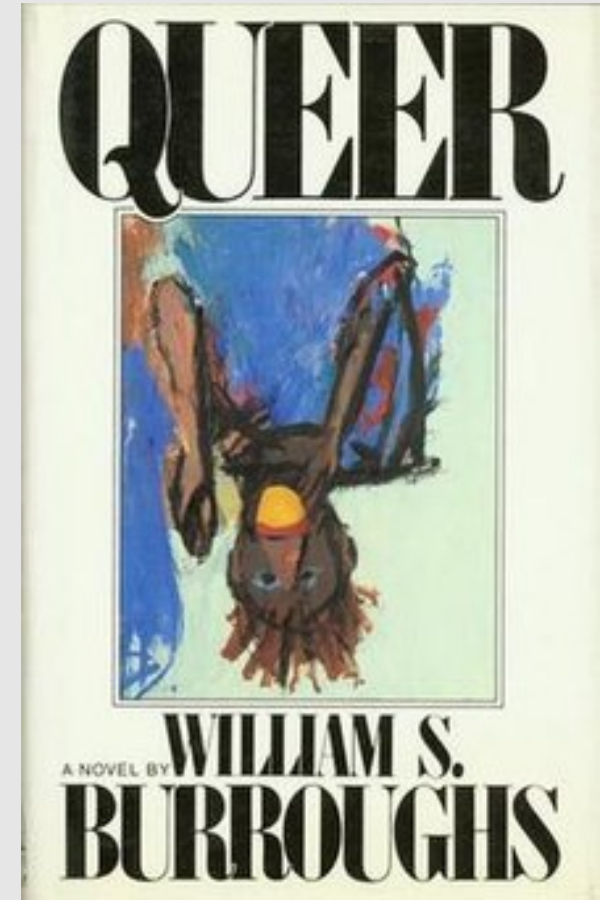
- It was scholars of sexuality in the '70s, who began to understand sexuality and gender as deeply historical in nature, rather than natural.
 - These scholars were also heavily influenced by philosopher Michel Foucault's unfinished four-volume magnum opus, *The History of Sexuality*.
- Similar trends, about the social/historical construction of racialization, occurred simultaneously in critical discourse about race, which were increasingly combined with feminist perspectives.



Short History and Context of Theory

Feminism: Queer Theory

- Much of the work of **queer theory aims to undermine stable notions of sexual and gender identity**,
 - seeing markers of identity as fields of power relations enacted in the societies within which they arise, for specific, though often unconscious, political ends.
- In this sense, **the existence and maintenance of heteronormative attitudes is also the enforcement of a system of power relations within society**
 - It delineates populations and distributes certain values, implicit rights (privileges) and prohibitions across that population, and establishes hierarchies of value based on normative attitudes and statuses.
- Queer theory sees itself as being in the business of resisting and transgressing those norms; the work of queer theory and activism is a **work of deconstructing and resisting the reproduction of heteronormative, binary sexual and gender hegemony**.



Mulvey's Life and Work

Laura Mulvey (1940- present)

- Mulvey is a British film theorist and filmmaker.
- Her critical work focuses on feminism and psychoanalysis in analyzing film.
- She is known as one of the most prominent 2nd wave feminist theorists, esp. in the Anglophone world and in the discipline of film studies.



Mulvey's Life and Work

Laura Mulvey (1940- present)

- She was educated at Oxford University and is Professor of film studies at Birkbeck, University of London.
- She is known for, among other things, pioneering the concept of the 'male gaze' in feminist theory, along with thinkers like John Berger, influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of the 'gaze' (*le regard*).



Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Key Concepts

- Phallogentrism
- Castration
- Male gaze
 - Scopophilia
 - Narcissicism
- Spectacle vs. Narrative
- Voyeuristic vs. Fetishistic scopophilia
- Active vs. Passive
- Ideal Ego and Ego Ideal



Still from Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Concepts from Psychoanalysis

- Phallogentrism
- Castration
- The Primal Scene
- The Mirror Stage



Still from Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Concepts from Psychoanalysis

- **Phallocentrism**
 - Phallocentrism, in psychoanalysis, is the idea that psycho-sexual development is centered around the 'phallus' (understood as the psychological or symbolic projection or allegorization of activity stemming from the spontaneous interpretation of the penis as a source of power, vitality, virility, strength or authority.)
 - This can also refer, consequently, to the sexual or gender asymmetries of patriarchal societies, within which the norms, institutions, and conceptual frameworks of a culture are oriented, predominately or exclusively, around men, masculinity, or the experience of men—to the exclusion of women, or non-conforming groups. Thus, it is also used as a term of critique of patriarchy or male hegemony, much as the term 'Euro-centrism' is of European cultural hegemony.

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Concepts from Psychoanalysis

- **Castration**
 - In Freudian psychoanalysis, the castration complex is the literal or symbolic fear of castration of the phallus, where the latter is considered a source of power, etc..
 - In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this phenomenon is re-interpreted as the fear of loss of symbolic power and authority, understood in terms of the structure of 'signification'—the inculcation of the individual into the linguistic and normative sphere of codified socialization—what Lacan calls 'the law of the father.' In Lacan's view, the phallus is a symbolic avatar of normative authority. The experience of male emasculation removes this authority. Women (at least in patriarchal societies)—who according to Freud auto-interpret themselves unconsciously in the 'phallic stage' of development as castrated, i.e., having lost their phallus—are psycho-socially barred from occupying phallic authority (and thus barred from the symbolic order in Lacan's sense). In this sense, women represent absence or lack in patriarchal societies.

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Concepts from Psychoanalysis

- The Primal Scene (*Urszene*)
 - The construal by the infant of sex between parents as a scene of violence which the child cannot understand—either as a witness or in fantasy—in which the child is distressed and sexually excited at the same time. This is thought to affect the psychosexual and psychosocial development of the child.



René Magritte, *The Lovers*, 1928

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Concepts from Psychoanalysis

- The Mirror Stage
 - The stage by which the infant begins to identify themselves as a separate individual (e.g. from the mother), by coming to understand their ability to manipulate and control their own bodies. According to Lacan, the mirror-stage is crucial for ego-formation, but it is also the site of a constitutive misrecognition, which idealizes the ego (Ideal Ego) and organizes the libido around striving toward an ideal model of the self (Ego Ideal). This process expressed through the allegory of looking in the mirror (and may also be literally observed in infants looking at mirrors), which allows us to recognize ourselves, but only by way of forming an image.



Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“The paradox of phallogentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated women to give order and meaning to its world. An idea of woman stands as linchpin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence, it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies. Recent writing in Screen about psychoanalysis and the cinema has not sufficiently brought out the importance of the representation of the female form in a symbolic order in which, in the last resort, it speaks castration and nothing else.” (Mulvey, 14).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“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, not maker, of meaning.” (Mulvey, 15).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“[This analysis] faces us with the ultimate challenge: how to fight the unconscious structured like a language (formed critically at the moment of arrival of language) while still caught within the language of the patriarchy? ”
(Mulvey, 15).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“The magic of the Hollywood style at its best [...] arose [...] from its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure. Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order. [...] It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article. The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked.” (Mulvey, 16).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. [...] In this analysis scopophilia is essentially *active*. ” (Mulvey, my emph., 16).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“[T]he extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer.” (Mulvey, 17).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“Sections A and B have set out **two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking** in the conventional cinematic situation.

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...

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

[Continued from previous slide:]

...Thus, in film terms,

one implies a **separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen** (active scopophilia),

the other demands **identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like.**

The first is a function of the sexual instincts, the second of ego libido. This dichotomy was crucial for Freud." (Mulvey, 18).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“Sexual instincts and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire. Desire, born with language, allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the imaginary, but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallises this paradox.”
(Mulvey, 18-19).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.” (Mulvey, 19).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“Mainstream film neatly combines **spectacle** and **narrative**. (Note, however, how in the musical song-and-dance numbers interrupt the flow of the diegesis.) The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.” (Mulvey, 19).

- Note: that the passive and the active resonate with what we've already seen about concepts of mimesis and beauty in Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Benjamin:
 - Plato: rebukes mimesis as mere appearance, semblance, or image (i.e. as 'spectacle').
 - Aristotle: affirms the power of mimesis through play, or action (e.g. in tragedy).
 - Kant: tells us that the Beautiful is composed only of form through either shape or play. (Kant, 110)
 - Benjamin: There are two poles of mimesis that determine the history of the artwork: semblance and play.
 - Mulvey: Passive > Woman > Spectacle; Active > Man > Narrative

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium...” (Mulvey, 19).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“An active/passive heterosexual division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure. According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychological structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen. ” (Mulvey, 20).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. 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. 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.” (Mulvey, 20).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“The female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure.” (Mulvey, 21).

Reading Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

“Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified.

The [male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety](#):

[1] preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the film noir);

[2] or else 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...” (Mulvey, 21).

- Note: [1] Mulvey associates with ‘voyeuristic scopophilia’, which is in turn associated with sadism; [2] with ‘fetishistic scopophilia.’ For Mulvey, each stems from a reaction to castration anxiety, through the figure of woman as ‘castrated’.