MODERNITY: spectatorship, power, & knowledge
Your gaze hits the side of my face.
GLANCE
V
GAZE
GAZE:

The context in which ‘looking practices’ are engaged.

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noun: a look

verb: the act of looking
Contexts that influence our ‘looking practices’:

- the medium through which we see the image
- architectural context
- cultural context
- national context
- institutional context

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The interplay of human senses, the context of the image, the relationship to other viewers, and more contribute to how we practice looking.
SPECTATOR:
One who looks or watches.
The term spectatorship provides a more textured understanding of looking, where the practice is enacted in an interactive, multimodal, and relational field.

Understanding spectatorship also contains the concept of the gaze, which has been used in specific ways by visual theorists to emphasize the embeddedness of the gaze of the individual viewer in a social and contextual field of looks, objects, and other sensory information.
THE SUBJECT IN MODERNITY
MODERNITY:
Is associated with the belief that industrialization, human technological intervention in nature, mass democracy, and the introduction of a market economy are the hallmarks of social progress
Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?

Jackson Pollock

"Number 19, No. 2" and "Standing Woman" (below). The former is a 20-foot painting done in 1950 and the other a 33-foot masterpiece from 1951. Both are in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Goff of Los Angeles and are considered by many to be among the greatest works of American art.

Pollock was identified with New York's postwar avant-garde and with its social and cultural scene. He was one of the founders of the New York School, a group of artists who, through their innovative use of abstraction, influenced a generation of younger artists. Pollock's work was characterized by a fluid, gestural style that was infused with personal and spiritual meaning.
René Descartes helped to usher in modernity with his philosophy that stated that the world becomes known when we accurately represent it in *thought*, not when we “know” it through the senses and not when we imagine it in our mind’s eye.
Rene Descartes established that, as long as we can doubt the evidence of our senses, our memory, our imagination, and our language, we at least have the potential for good sound knowledge.

Two things follow from this, which are central for the development of modernity and, thus, for our understanding of modernism.
1. a general distrust of the senses (hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting and smelling) provokes an emphasis on thoughts and judgments and an over reliance on principles of reason.
2. the same distrust provokes the development of technological means of improvement—prosthetic appliances of all kinds, from eye glasses and hearing aids in the 18th century, to prosthetic limbs and a fully fledged virtual reality by the beginning of the 21st century.
Representation held an important place in the Cartesian understanding of the human subject. The Cartesian human subject thus is constituted in part through an activity of thinking that involves spectatorship.
The challenges of modernity (such as the move to post-colonialism and the problems of industrialization) brought about competing views on human subjectivity.
Michel Foucault argued that the human subject is constituted in modernity not through liberal human ideals but through the *discourse* of institutional life of the period.
DISCOURSE:
A term that refers to the bodies of knowledge that make up social spheres such as law, economics, and sexuality.
Foucault saw the subject as an entity produced within and through the *discourses* and institutional practices of the enlightenment.
Jacques Lacan argued that the liberal human subject never really existed as such, but as an ideal, against which emerges a subject who is radically split at the very time it comes into being.
SPECTATORSHIP
GAZE & SPECTATORSHIP:

The concepts of gaze and spectatorship remain important cornerstones of visual studies because they provide a set of terms and methods through which to consider some aspects of looking practices that the concept of the *viewer* does not really allow us to consider in depth.
(a) the roles of the unconscious and desire in viewing practices;
(b) the role of looking in the formation of the human subject as such.
(c) the ways that looking is always a relational activity and not simply a mental activity engaged in by someone who forms internal mental representations that stand for a passive image object “out there.”
Theories of the gaze and spectatorship are theories of address, rather than theories of reception, in which methods are used to understand how actual viewers respond to a cultural text.

The gaze is not an individual’s act of looking; rather, it situates the viewer in a field of meaning production (organized around looking practices) that involves recognition of oneself as a member of that world of meaning.
DISCOURSE & POWER
Foucault’s understanding of discourse, by which he meant a group of statements that provides a means for talking about (and a way of representing knowledge about) a particular topic at a particular historical moment, grounds a modern understanding of a bureaucratic institution.
Foucault’s expansion on Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the panopticon is about how we participate in practices of self-regulation in response to systems of surveillance, whether they are in place or simply part of a larger inspecting social gaze.
THE GAZE &
THE OTHER
The gaze helps to establish relationships of power. The object of the gaze is less powerful than the gazer (which can be an institution or an individual). Photography is a manifestation of the gaze, where the object being photographed is made into the “other” at the hands of the photographer.
THE GAZE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS
Lacan’s concept of the gaze does not make the subject knowable to itself or to others.
Lacan emphasized that the gaze is a property of the object and not the subject who looks; it’s a process in which the object functions to make the subject look, making the subject appear to himself or herself as lacking.
GENDER & THE GAZE
Women are also objectified by the gaze (in art and in advertising). John Berger wrote that in this history of images, “men act, women appear.” Women are the objects of the male gaze, and their returning looks are more often downcast, indirect, or otherwise coded as passive.

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In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female...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

— Laura Mulvey
Theoretical discussions emphasize how the camera lens is a surrogate of the male gaze.

Laura Mulvey takes this argument further, claiming that Hollywood cinema offers women as objects of the male gaze, geared toward male viewing pleasure, which she read within certain psychoanalytic paradigms including scopophilia (the love of looking) and voyeurism.
CHANGING CONCEPTS OF THE GAZE
Scholarship on spectatorship and the gaze in the 1980s and 1990s began to radically modify many of the early concepts of power and the gaze in ways that are similar to these kinds of representations.
Film scholars have rethought questions of spectatorship in relationship to history and mass culture, to reception studies and studies of the audience, to issues of race and spectatorship that question the emphasis on the gender binary of the original model and the resistance of black viewers, to new formulations about how different kinds of viewers can occupy the male gaze, and to the concepts of transgressive female looking and lesbian spectatorship.
These changing views of scholarship, and the idea of what kinds of images were important objects of intellectual inquiry, have been paralleled by trends in image-making across the fields of art, media, and advertising that reflect new concepts of gender and aesthetic conventions.

Images are central to the experience of modernity and provide a complex field in which power relations are exercised and looks are exchanged.