

The “Female Gaze” in Contemporary Coming-of-Age Films

Creating a Cinematographic Guideline

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Abstract

The gaze the camera takes is an integral part in cinema and it keeps on shifting away from the early objectification of women in classical Hollywood cinema to an honest, respectful and emotional exploration of the female experience. This thesis aims to show how a “female gaze” is cinematographically implemented in the coming-of-age genre. For this, a historic context of gaze theory is provided in a literary review, which starts with the theory of the “male gaze” by Laura Mulvey and its critics like bell hooks with her “oppositional gaze” and Bracha L. Ettinger with her “matrixial gaze”. Next, thoughts on lesbian spectatorship and their relation to women on screen are shared. The literary part concludes with first attempts to define the “female gaze” by Joey Soloway and Iris Brey. For the practical analysis, the two filmmakers Céline Sciamma and Greta Gerwig were chosen in order to analyze their approach to a “female gaze”. Their directorial filmographies consisting of Sciamma’s “Water Lilies” (2007), “Tomboy” (2011), “Girlhood” (2014), “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” (2019) and “Petite Maman” (2021) as well as Gerwig’s “Lady Bird” (2017), “Little Women” (2019) and “Barbie” (2023) will be viewed. First, the films will be examined based on what type of looks are present and how they affect the portrayal of the female characters. In the following detailed analysis, significant scenes will be investigated based on their use of different cinematographic techniques. This thesis found that the “female gaze” in coming-of-age films prioritizes granting the women agency over their own image and narrative. Sciamma makes more use of practices that put emphasis on showing actions and emotions in real time to portray a tender and compassionate look at its protagonists, such as slow pacing. Gerwig’s films, typified by a bigger variety in shot design through showing different perspectives in framing and also frequently using montages, often display bolder, more rebellious women. Both highlight the strong portrayal of female subjectivity in their works.

Kurzfassung

Der Blick der Kamera ist ein integraler Bestandteil des Kinos und er verändert sich stetig, weg von der frühen Objektivierung von Frauen im klassischen Hollywood-Kino hin zu einer ehrlichen, respektvollen und emotionalen Auseinandersetzung mit der weiblichen Erfahrung. Diese Masterarbeit zeigt, wie ein „weiblicher Blick“ im Coming-of-Age-Genre filmisch umgesetzt wird. Dazu wird in einem literarischen Rückblick ein historischer Kontext der Blicktheorie dargestellt. Eingeleitet wird dies mit der Theorie des „männlichen Blicks“ von Laura Mulvey und deren Kritikerinnen wie bell hooks mit ihrem „oppositionellen Blick“ und Bracha L. Ettinger mit ihrem „matrixialen Blick“. Anschließend werden Überlegungen zum lesbischen Zuschauerverhalten und deren Beziehung zu Frauen auf der Leinwand vorgestellt. Der literarische Teil schließt mit ersten Definitionsversuchen des „weiblichen Blicks“ von Joey Soloway und Iris Brey. Für die praktische Analyse wurden die beiden Filmemacherinnen Céline Sciamma und Greta Gerwig ausgewählt, um ihren Zugang zum „weiblichen Blick“ zu analysieren. Ihre Regiefilmografien, bestehend aus Sciammas „Water Lilies“ (2007), „Tomboy“ (2011), „Girlhood“ (2014), „Porträt einer jungen Frau in Flammen“ (2019) und „Petite Maman“ (2021), sowie Gerwigs „Lady Bird“ (2017), „Little Women“ (2019) und „Barbie“ (2023), werden betrachtet. Zunächst werden die Filme daraufhin untersucht, welche Art von Blicken vorhanden sind und wie sich diese auf die Darstellung der weiblichen Charaktere auswirken. In der folgenden detaillierten Analyse werden signifikante Szenen hinsichtlich ihres Einsatzes verschiedener kinematografischer Techniken untersucht. Diese Masterarbeit fand heraus, dass der „weibliche Blick“ in Coming-of-Age-Filmen die Gewährung von Handlungsfreiheit für die Frauen gegenüber ihrem eigenen Bild und ihrer eigenen Erzählung priorisiert. Sciamma setzt häufiger auf Praktiken wie langsames Tempo, das den Schwerpunkt auf die Darstellung von Handlungen und Emotionen in Echtzeit legt, um einen zärtlichen und mitfühlenden Blick auf die Protagonistinnen zu zeichnen. Gerwigs Filme zeichnen sich durch eine größere Vielfalt in der Bildgestaltung durch verschiedene Perspektiven und Bildausschnitte sowie häufige Montagen aus. Dadurch zeigt sie oft mutigere, rebellischere Frauen. Beide heben die starke Darstellung weiblicher Subjektivität in den Vordergrund ihrer Werke.

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1 Introduction

A camera panning slowly over a woman's body or a close-up on the curves of a woman. These are typical examples of the male gaze. In 1975, Filmmaker and critic Laura Mulvey coined the concept of the "male gaze", which is related to scopophilia, a term Sigmund Freud explains as the pleasure in looking. The male gaze describes the theory that women exist in cinema to be objectified and sexualized "with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11) for the viewing pleasure of three heterosexual male spectators:

- the filmmakers
- the characters in the film
- the viewers of the film

To stray away from the patriarchal system that has infiltrated cinema since the beginnings and thus, the objectifying depictions of women on screen, film critics and academics have theorized various concepts of alternative gazes and looks that strive to shift and level out the power dynamics in film. The goal is to achieve equality and grant subjectivity to the underrepresented, such as women, queer people, gender non-conforming people or minorities through race or class. With the intend of giving these groups and individuals agency over their own stories in cinema and portray their identities truthfully on screen, a concept that has emerged over time and is on the forefront of many filmmaker's minds while creating cinema is the "female gaze".

Academics such as Joey Soloway and Iris Brey argue that the female gaze is not the simple reversion of the male gaze, namely, to put women behind the look to objectify and sexualize men. It is about depicting women not as objects, but subjects with their own life experiences equal to men. Lisa French (2021, p. 61) describes it as straying from the norm of cinema which "has been historically colonised by masculine modes of looking". Director of Photography Ashley Connor (as cited in Telfer, 2018, para. The female gaze is highly relational), who filmed the queer Coming-of-Age film "The Miseducation of Cameron Post", adds that "the

1 Introduction

'male' gaze seeks to devour and control, and the 'female' gaze is more a frame of mind, where approach to subject and material is more emotional and respectful". Freya Murray (2021, para. 3) specifies that "femininity through the female gaze is not about sex, submission or male pleasure, but about the feminine strength from within. In a world where strength is (as always) defined on male terms of physical prowess and endurance, the female gaze perceives strength in kindness and compassion". She further argues that "while the male gaze consumes women's bodies, the female gaze observes the thoughts and feelings experienced within that body. The female gaze redefines traditional aspects of femininity that has been reinforced by the male gaze" (Murray, 2021, para. 3).

This thesis will discuss the theories behind the two concepts of the male gaze and the female gaze and their roles in recent film history. The focus will then be put on what role the camera and cinematography play in the creation of a female gaze in film. In the course of this, a closer look will be taken on contemporary coming-of-age films. Coming-of-age as a genre can be defined as "a period of transition from 'childhood' to 'adulthood' which is characterized by the need to make decisions about the future – to do with family, friends, education, work, sexuality, etc." (Benyahia et al., 2006, p. 271). Due to these delicate topics which arise as part of growing up in every person's life, this genre was chosen to examine how the female experience of coming of age and growing from a girl to a woman is being looked at by the camera in film.

The aim of this paper is to answer the following research questions:

Q1: How do different approaches of the female gaze in film, with focus on the contemporary coming-of-age film, compare in terms of cinematography?

Q1a: Is it solely a question of gender or do other aspects such as class, ethnicity or sexuality of the portrayed female characters play a part in the variables of a female gaze?

Q2: What cinematic choices (framing, movement, angle of the camera, composition, lighting, etc.) do contemporary coming-of-age filmmakers who focus on creating the female gaze employ in their work to support their vision?

These questions and the motivation to dive into the female gaze in coming-of-age films arose after initial general research about women and the gaze in film. Since the 1970s, the male gaze theory has been discussed and judged by plenty film critics such as Ann. E. Kaplan (1983), Teresa de Lauretis (1984), bell hooks (1992) and Bracha L. Ettinger (1995) who initiated a wave of new concepts and forward-thinking in the gaze theory. Furthermore, Jackie Stacey (1994) for instance

conducted a survey on female spectatorship in her book “Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship” and Judith Mayne (1991) took a specific look at how lesbians watch film in her book “How do I look?: Queer film and video”. Since then, many academics have taken part in this conversation with different essays, articles, books and theses. Lorraina Gamman (1989), Susan Bowers (1990) and more recently Joey Soloway (2016) with her talk at the Toronto International Film Festival or Iris Brey (2020) with her book “Le Regard féminin: Une révolution à l'écran” are some of the people who have started to theorize about a female gaze in cinema that pushes the subjectification of women to the forefront and puts emphasis on feelings and compassion. Others have taken interest in a more detailed look at the gaze in specific film genres. Among these are for example Mary Ann Doane (1985) and Linda Williams (1998) who discourse about melodramas and its psychodynamic structures, Carol Clover (1992) who investigates the ‘final girl’ in horror, Lisa French (2021) who considers the influence of female filmmakers on the portrayal of women in documentary films and Karen Hollinger (1998) who examines the lesbian romance film. In her work, Hollinger issues for further inspection of “the definition of a lesbian film as well as its difference from and similarity to films that focus on other forms of female bonding, like women's friendships, mother-daughter relationships, and sisterhood” (Hollinger, 1998, p. 3). Following this suggestion, it is particularly appealing to pursue this prompt of further investigation into the framework of coming-of-age films because here the mentioned themes are especially relevant. This genre concentrates on the time of growing up, the changing bond to parents when one gets older, friendships and first romantic relationships. Despite the rich volume of research that has been accomplished in the theoretics of the concept of the gaze, a look at the practical side in relation to how filmmakers have been implementing the female gaze in their films through cinematography is needed to create a stylistic guide that highlights common camera techniques (similar to the list of shot design used in the male gaze as compiled by Menkes (2022)) that can inspire truthful and empathic female representation in future filmic work.

In order to answer the posed research questions, a literary research will firstly be conducted. The research will focus on discussions by film theorists with the subject of the male gaze, opposing gaze theories and the rise of the female gaze in addition to the influence these gazes and their variations have had on recent film history. Furthermore, the role of the female gaze in contemporary coming-of-age films and its impact on viewers will be explored. Following this, a literature review, which summarizes, compares and contrasts the different theories and findings will be composed in the first main chapter “From male gaze to female gaze”. After an overview of the history of the male gaze and a detailed look at its ascendancy over

the years with opinions of various critics plus updated reviews of the originator Laura Mulvey herself, a description of the main cinematographic techniques employed by the male gaze will be given in the subchapter “Shot design of the male gaze – the “Menkes List””. These filmic practices have been initially analysed and collected by the director Nina Menkes. One counterpart to the male gaze introduced in 1992 by bell hooks will be presented in the chapter “The oppositional gaze”. This gaze criticizes the predominantly white female representation in film and describes how black female spectators challenge the images on screen through an interrogating look. The next chapter “Lesbians and the gaze” talks about the “hetero-centrism” of Mulvey’s gaze theory and the look of lesbian viewers on the different kinds of lesbian films ranging from ambiguous to open portrayals of women loving women. Following, the chapter “Matrixial gaze” establishes a gaze by Bracha L. Ettinger that is rooted in psychoanalysis but contrasts the phallic gaze with its relation to the Matrix that symbolizes the womb. This theory strives to diminish domination and emphasizes the sharing of feelings, trauma and compassion. Ultimately, the focus will be put on the up-and-coming female gaze in the chapter “Definitions of a female gaze”. Here, film critics introduce their thought process behind what is and how to achieve a female gaze in cinema. Joey Soloway gives an understanding of their three part model that consist of “feeling seeing”, “the gazed gaze” and “returning the gaze”. Then, in “Brey’s Female Gaze Test”, Iris Brey has configured a checklist similar to the Bechdel test with which one can assess the application of a female gaze in movies.

For the analytical part of this thesis starting with the chapter “Methods - Analysis of contemporary coming-of-age films”, two filmmakers of contemporary coming-of-age films who actively work against the notion of the male gaze in their work have been chosen, namely the French film director and scriptwriter Céline Sciamma and the American film director, scriptwriter and actress Greta Gerwig. Their filmography will be analyzed in the following chapters “Filmography of Céline Sciamma” which contains the films “Water Lilies” (2007), “Tomboy” (2011), “Girlhood” (2014), “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” (2019) and “Petite Maman” (2021) and also the “Filmography of Greta Gerwig” which encompasses the movies “Lady Bird” (2017), “Little Women” (2019) and “Barbie” (2023). The initial and broad analysis will be based on what kind of gaze they implement in their bodies of work and how it affects their portrayal of women. In the next chapter “Detailed cinematographic analysis of significant scenes portraying a female gaze” the focus will be put on how Sciamma and Gerwig utilize different cinematographic techniques to influence the looks of the characters and the viewers, especially the impact that their framing, movement, angle of the camera, composition and lighting have on the depiction of the film’s female characters will be examined.

Lastly, the results of the analysis and this way, the two different kinds of approach to a female gaze by Céline Sciamma and Greta Gerwig will be compared in the “Discussion” chapter and opposed to the literary findings.

In the “Conclusion”, the resulting stylistic cinematic techniques understood to create a female gaze will be resumed and presented.

1.1 Key words

The following list is a compilation of key words and their definitions which are significant for this thesis:

scopophilia = pleasure drawn from looking at a person or an object (introduced by Sigmund Freud in his book “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” from 1905)

cisgender = identifying with the gender you were assigned at birth

transgender = not identifying with the gender you were assigned at birth

intersectionality = how multiple forms of oppression and privilege are linked and influence each other, including gender, race, sexuality, social class, disability or religion

agency = having the ability and power to take action, to act independently and choose what action to take

hegemonic = powerful and strong, able to control and dominate others

Bechdel test = a test to evaluate the representation of women in film; to pass the Bechdel test, a film must feature at least two women who have a conversation about anything other than a man/men

mise en scène = everything that is captured by the camera and can be seen in the image of a film; the arrangement of the compositional elements such as the actors, properties, scenery and lighting

2 Literature review - From male gaze to female gaze

The concept of the “male gaze” was first introduced and discussed in 1975 by filmmaker and critic Laura Mulvey in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, which was published in “Screen”, a British academic journal of film and television studies. Taking themes of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, the text discusses the power dynamics between how women and men are portrayed in classical Hollywood cinema as well as the role the audience and the camera play as spectators.

Mulvey describes the male gaze as the theory that women exist in cinema to be objectified and sexualized “with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11). The male gaze relates to scopophilia, a term Sigmund Freud explains as the pleasure in looking and identifies it as “taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 8). Gaining pleasure from viewing this objectification are three heterosexual male spectators: the characters in the film, the filmmakers with the camera and the viewers of the film, whose gaze is led by the camera (Mulvey, 1975) (Figure 1).

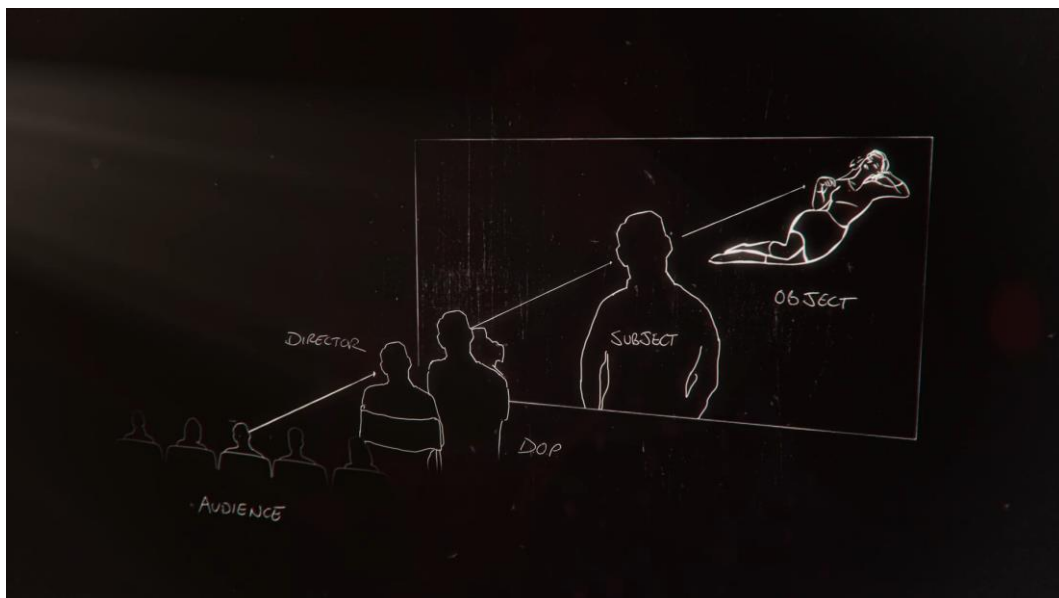


Figure 1: Visualization of the 3 heterosexual male spectators gazing at the female character (Menkes, 2022, TC: 00:22:44)

In a world dominated by patriarchy, the distinction has traditionally been defined as “active/male and passive/female” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11). Mulvey argues, that the woman becomes a source of anxiety for the man through phallocentrism, meaning the missing of a penis. This way, the woman “can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 7) and is “tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning (Mulvey, 1975, p. 7). Men on the other hand are the “bearer of the look” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 12), the male character in the film is the subject who furthers the plot and has agency. When a female character is shown on screen, the used camera techniques to portray a male gaze (*as listed in subchapter 2.1 Shot design of the male gaze – the “Menkes List”*) are meant to disrupt the course of the narrative and provide a moment of eroticism to provoke an emotion in the male protagonist along with the spectators and temporarily removing them from the established time and world on screen. This fetishistic scopophilia, where the focus is only on the aesthetically pleasing visual appearance of the woman, is a way of resolving the castration anxiety for men by turning the female body into a comforting image. Contrary to that, the second way is sadistic voyeurism, where “pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 14). This way of restoring the intimidating image of the lack of a phallus takes place in the timeline of the story and the space on screen (Mulvey, 1975).

The movie theatre provides an ideal environment for the spectators to live out their voyeuristic pleasure in watching by providing an isolated dim room that creates an abstract world. Every audience member is invited to gaze upon the world and the characters of the film. “The 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” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 9).

Cinema not only sates the desire to look but to relate. Mulvey compares this wish of the audience to Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage. Like the child sees an advanced version of themselves in the mirror, the male viewer recognizes himself in the male protagonist on the screen and imagines him “to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body. Recognition is thus overlaid with misrecognition: the image recognised is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego” (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 9–10). Through this narcissistic identification, the look of the male spectator merges with that of the male character, allowing the audience the

feeling of power over the woman on screen as if they were part of the narrative. To achieve this fusion, the existence of the camera must be unobtrusive so as not to alienate the spectator but to immerse the viewer into a world that seems real (Mulvey, 1975).

In her essay, Mulvey (1975, p. 8) writes that “it is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article”. She calls for a new feminist cinema that challenges the patriarchal ways of looking going forward by “leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 8).

E. Ann Kaplan (1983) examines Mulvey’s male gaze theory in her book “Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera” and brings up the question, whether the gaze is innately male by nature or has been historically and culturally defined as such. She argues that the second is the case and states that our society has always been defined by the contrast between “masculine” and “feminine” and the dominance and submissiveness that comes with voyeurism and fetishism, which are inherently male, as also pointed out by Mulvey. Kaplan claims that when a switch in the roles happens, such as when a male character in a film is put into the role of the erotic object, he gives up his power and “the woman then takes on the “masculine” role as bearer of the gaze and initiator of the action” (Kaplan, 1983, p. 29). The woman therefore “loses her traditionally feminine characteristics in so doing—not those of attractiveness, but rather of kindness, humaneness, motherliness. She is now often cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose position she has usurped” (Kaplan, 1983, p. 29). As a result of this, Kaplan comes to the conclusion that in Hollywood cinema “the gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the “masculine” position” (Kaplan, 1983, p. 30).

While psychoanalysis is a crucial part in Mulvey’s analysis of the male gaze and the portrayal of women, other scholars like Buscombe, Gledhill, Lovell and Williams (1975) question its use in the exploration of the spectators relation to the cinema, especially the role of female viewers and how they watch films. They voice that some models of psychoanalysis are not progressed enough and are still being discussed and understood and so should not be universally applied to further aspects like film theory (Buscombe et al., 1975). David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (1996, p. xvii) demand “problem-driven research and middle-level scholarship” which “asks questions that have both empirical and theoretical import” (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996, p. 27) and criticize the general use of psychoanalysis in film analysis

in their book „Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies” from 1996. They say “that psychodynamic theories often tend to be weak as film readings because they are too reductive. They tend to utilize a one-dimensional system of symbolic interpretation” (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996, p. 200). Thus, these theories seem to leave out other fragments of a film that might not fall under the used model of psychoanalysis but still would be relevant to analyze and are “advanced a priori, rather than in an open-minded spirit of testing how well they actually work” (Bordwell & Carroll, 1996, p. 199).

A vital point of criticism of Mulvey’s concept raised by many scholars is her assumption of the spectator being male and the coupled neglect of acknowledging the existence of female spectators and not theorizing how women view themselves in film. The editors of “New German Critique” held a debate in 1978 with feminist film critics Michelle Citron, Julia Lesage, Judith Mayne, B. Ruby Rich, and Anna Marie Taylor. Lesage (1978, p. 89) examines that “Mulvey’s article never positively articulated or defined women’s desire and women’s sexuality. Although women’s sexuality has been shaped under a dominant patriarchal culture, clearly women do not respond to women in film and the erotic element in film in quite the same way that men do, given that patriarchal film has the structure of male fantasy”. Taylor (1978, p. 88) argues that the Freudian theory applied by Mulvey “cannot satisfactorily count for the position of female spectators. We sense that women have some kind of different relationship with what they see, and particularly with women they see on the movie screen”. Rich (1978, p. 87) adds that “as a woman going into the movie theater, you are faced with a context that is coded wholly for your invisibility, and yet, obviously, you are sitting there and bringing along a certain coding from life outside the theatre”.

Over the years since Mulvey’s essay was first printed in 1975, she has responded to the critics of her male gaze theory in various articles and interviews. Her first reaction was the follow up paper “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)” in 1981. Here she addresses how she only used the male pronoun in her essay when referring to the spectator, which Helford (2006, p. 154) and Rich (Citron et al., 1978, p. 87) for instance highlighted leaves out any chance of women taking on this role, by accepting that “however ironically it had been intended originally, the male third person closed off avenues of inquiry that should be followed up” (Mulvey, 1989, p. 29). Furthermore, she does not desert psychoanalysis despite the many opposing judgements but does however accept that the role the female spectators take on while viewing a film can shift between the masculine and feminine position and is fluent (Mulvey, 1989). De Lauretis (1984, pp. 142–143) explains, “the two terms,

femininity and masculinity, do not refer so much to qualities or states of being inherent in a person, as to positions which she occupies in relation to desire. They are terms of identification. (...) The analogy that links identification-with-the-look to masculinity and identification-with-the-image to femininity breaks down precisely when we think of a spectator alternating between the two". Mary Ann Doane (1982, p. 80) theorizes female spectatorship "as the site of an oscillation between a feminine position and a masculine position, invoking the metaphor of the transvestite" and agrees with Mulvey (Mulvey, 1989, p. 37) as she says, the woman "shifts restlessly in its [her] borrowed transvestite clothes". Female spectators can therefore take on two views, "the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one's own object of desire, in assuming the image in the most radical way" (Doane, 1982, p. 87)

With the change from analog to digital technology, such as video and DVDs, Mulvey reasons in 2006 how this new era in cinema brings forth a new way of viewing images outside of the dark room of the movie theatre and introduces the possibility to stop, start, slow, rewind and repeat a film and its narrative whenever the spectator so pleases. "The smooth linearity and forward movement of the story become jagged and uneven, undermining the male protagonist's command over the action. The process of identification, usually kept in place by the relation between plot and character, suspense and transcendence, loses its hold over the spectator" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 165). This negates the in the male gaze theory described need for the female character to stop the flow of action with their erotic or abstract display. Mulvey introduces in this context the "possessive spectator" and the "pensive spectator" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 11). The audience can now decide for themselves when to linger on a frame or scene and for what purpose. The possessive spectator represents a "cinephilia that is more on the side of a fetishistic investment in the extraction of a fragment of cinema from its context" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 144) whereas the pensive spectator signifies "a cinephilia that extracts and then replaces a fragment with extra understanding back into its context" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 144).

Most recently, in 2019, Mulvey reflects on her extensive confrontation with Hollywood and its portrayal of women since 1975 for what she argues will be the final time. Here she states that her essay was a "single-issue manifesto" (Mulvey, 2019, p. 245) and was not necessarily written for an academic context. Mulvey acknowledges that she overlooked certain aspects in her theory regarding women and specifically lesbians as spectators. "I could have argued that women spectators, untroubled by castration anxiety, could find visual pleasure in a female, and so too a lesbian gaze when the performance of femininity is 'the content of the

film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look' " (Mulvey, 2019, p. 245). Mulvey also admits, that "looking back, it seems strange to me that I did not then think of studio-system Hollywood as an apartheid cinema, as I do now" (Mulvey, 2019, p. 243) but to speak on the issue of racism in Hollywood in combination with the look "would have demanded a much more historically informed and serious argument" (Mulvey, 2019, p. 243).

Linda Williams (2017) reflects on the after-life of Mulvey's male gaze theory and asserts that some American critics still employ this manifesto in their analyses of films today despite relevant nuances it is missing, like going "beyond heterosexuality, beyond psychoanalysis, and, of course, beyond the Hollywood cinema that had enabled Mulvey to create her axioms in the first place." (Williams, 2017, p. 465). Williams closes her thoughts by saying "Laura Mulvey epitomized the feminist lesson of an era in her 'Visual Pleasure' manifesto, but that era has passed" (Williams, 2017, p. 470). Laura Mulvey argues that over the years, her concept has taken on new forms because "'the male gaze' has become part of the widespread critique of mainstream film, for its day-to-day sexism, for the lack of women directors, for the lack of good female parts and so on. This is, to my mind, a long overdue development and I am extremely gratified that the phrase, alongside 'the female gaze', has now moved into current feminist debate" (Mulvey, 2019, p. 251).

2.1 Shot design of the male gaze – the "Menkes List"

The director Nina Menkes explains in her documentary "Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power" from 2022, which also features recent interviews with Laura Mulvey and Joey Soloway among others, how a male gaze is created using different camera techniques and how these cinematic choices create the objectification of women and accentuate the difference in power between female and male characters. In what has been dubbed the "Menkes List", Nina Menkes categorizes the following approaches in shot design (Menkes, 2022).

2.1.1 Subject / Object – POV

A POV or Point of View is used to demonstrate the contrast between the woman as the object and the man as the subject. This is achieved by placing the male character in the gazing role and the female character as the to-be-looked-at part either in the same frame or two different shots cut right after another or even back

and forth. The gaze of the man as well as the camera is pointed at the female body, while the woman is just there to be aesthetically pleasing and often does not even realize she is gazed upon. Through this POV, the audience also gets put in the observing role (Menkes, 2022).

2.1.2 Framing – Fragmented body parts

A female body is filmed not as a whole, but partially, only distinct parts such as the legs or the chest are shown in a close-up or detail shot. This way, the woman is not seen as a complete human or character anymore, her body gets abstracted in different objects to be looked at separately. This framing is often incorporated into the use of a POV (Menkes, 2022).

2.1.3 Camera Movement – Body Pans

Very specific to the cinematographic style of the male gaze is the movement of the camera over a woman's body in the form of pans or tilts. These movements are most of the time highlighted by the use of slow motion, which lets the audience's eyes remain on the female character for longer and disassociates her from time and the world around her. While a camera movement in slow motion is commonly applied for men in scenes of action to display their power and strength, women are filmed this way to portray a sensual or sexual image of their body (Menkes, 2022).

2.1.4 Lighting – 3D vs 2D

In terms of lighting, a male actor is visually put in a real space using 3D lighting, meaning not only light but by the absence of it, also shadow is intentionally placed onto the male character. This way, he is authentically placed into his environment, the audience is able to see unevenness or creases in his skin, letting him become human. To perpetuate a male gaze, a female actor will be lit by multiple soft light sources which cancels out any shadows and thus, creates a flat 2D lighting. This makes her skin appear very smooth without depth or detail, rendering her seemingly ageless. It further creates a disparity between her body and her surroundings, who are seemingly not existing in the same space (Menkes, 2022).

2.1.5 Narrative Position

All of these camera and shot techniques influence the narrative position of a character in a film. Isolating the female character from the environment of the scene and the frame by showing her without a recognizable background, in blurry focus and 2D lighting or detaching her from the real flow of time with slow motion

are ways in which the woman in film becomes less human and more of an abstract object, further straying away from having her own power and agency (Menkes, 2022).

2.2 The oppositional gaze

In her essay “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” from 1992, the American author and social critic bell hooks (*bell hooks required her name to be written in lowercase letters*) criticizes Mulvey for excluding black female spectators in her male gaze theory and takes fault with feminist theorists like her who “structure their discourse as though it speaks about “women” when in actuality it speaks only about white women” (hooks, 1992, p. 123). Manthia Diawara, a filmmaker from Mali in West Africa, calls this approach “colour-blind” (Diawara, 1988, p. 66).

Black women take on a different kind of gaze when they experience cinema. hooks proposes this gaze stems from the repression of “black peoples’ right to gaze” (hooks, 1992, p. 116) which “had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze” (hooks, 1992, p. 116) created “via an understanding and awareness of the politics of race and racism” (hooks, 1992, p. 123). The black female viewer rejects the male gaze and does not identify themselves with the to be looked-at woman who is white. This way, black female spectators generate a form of gazing “where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation” (hooks, 1992, p. 126). Through this critical look, black women “participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revision, interrogate, and invent on multiple levels” (hooks, 1992, p. 128). Annete Kuhn explains this precedent for investigating black representation in cinema in her book “The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality”:

“The acts of analysis, of deconstruction and of reading ‘against the grain’ offer an additional pleasure - the pleasure of resistance, of saying ‘no’: not to ‘unsophisticated’ enjoyment, by ourselves and others, of culturally dominant images, but to the structures of power which ask us to consume them uncritically and in highly circumscribed ways.” (Kuhn, 1985, p. 8)

Through implementing the oppositional gaze, viewing cinema through a critical lens and denying an identification with sexist images of white women in cinema, black women can start to dismantle the patriarchal notions set by Mulvey’s theory. hooks asserts:

“By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: ‘Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.’ Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.” (hooks, 1992, p. 116)

The black male spectator inhabits a different gaze to the black female viewer. His look interrogates matters of race and racism in film but does not deal with gender. In the comfort of the dark room of the theatre or in front of the tv screen, black men could “unleash the repressed gaze” (hooks, 1992, p. 118) which they could not in public because they would have been disciplined for it in real life. As a result of this, through cinema they were able to “enter an imaginative space of phallogentric power that mediated racial negation” (hooks, 1992, p. 118) and objectify women which had them feeling “as though they were rebelling against white supremacy by daring to look” (hooks, 1992, p. 118).

2.3 Lesbians and the gaze

Another critical aspect of Mulvey's theory, which Jeff Hearn and Antonio Melechi (1992, p. 230) call “hetero-centrism” is further pointed out by Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener in their book “Film theory: an introduction through the senses” from 2015 where they argue that Mulvey creates “a heterosexist argument by implicitly or inadvertently setting heterosexual identification as the norm. Her model leaves no room (...) for lesbian (or homosexual) identification” (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015, p. 110). Judith Mayne highlights the need for the theorization of the lesbian spectator and stresses the exploration of “the investment of lesbian filmmakers in the forming and creating of lesbian spectatorship” (Mayne, 1991, p. 136). Elizabeth Ellsworth implies that lesbian spectators read films “against the grain” (Ellsworth, 1990, p. 193) and actively choose to ignore heterosexual narratives. This way, they can still find pleasure in films employing a male gaze. The issue “with this strategy of reading against the grain is that (...) it does not create the conditions for another – and different – kind of visibility” (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 79), meaning that it does not create a new form of representation for women allowing the power dynamics of the male gaze to remain prevalent.

Karen Hollinger intensively discusses lesbian cinema and its gaze in her article “Theorizing Mainstream Female Spectatorship: The Case of the Popular Lesbian Film” from 1998. She theorizes what happens to the look when a film strays away

from “patriarchal, heterosexist norms” (Hollinger, 1998, p. 12) and puts two women into the subject position by pairing them:

“The subversive potential of the lesbian coupled subject position (...) resides ultimately in its evocation of the lesbian look and in the investment of this look in two desiring women, the coupled lesbian protagonists of the film, each of whom is simultaneously both subject and object of the look and consequently of female desire. The active desire of the coupled lesbian subject is presented through the lesbian look to the film's female spectator, who is thereby offered empowerment as an active desiring female subject. In other words, the lesbian look challenges the exclusive male prerogative to control the filmic gaze and reconfigures this gaze so that it reflects a new female relation to desire.” (Hollinger, 1998, p. 12)

Chris Straayer adds that in contrast to the male gaze, the “lesbian look (...) requires exchange. It looks for a returning look, not just a receiving look. It sets up two-directional sexual activity” (Straayer, 1990, para. FEMINIST FILM THEORY: GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND VIEWERSHIP).

Regarding the relationship between the female spectator and women on screen, especially in lesbian films, Jackie Stacey and Teresa de Lauretis have differing perspectives. Stacey claims that the passionate connection between the female characters on screen in films that deal with “a woman's obsession with another woman” (Stacey, 1987, p. 53) resembles the relation between the female viewer and the female stars of the film and in this manner, relates female spectatorship with a “homoerotic pleasure in which the boundary between self and ideal produces an endless source of fascination” (Stacey, 1994, p. 310) for the female spectator. She further elaborates by comparing this bond to “a fascination with an idealised other which could not be reduced to male desire or female identification within the available psychoanalytic dichotomies, but rather necessitated a rethinking of the specificities of forms of feminine attachment” (Stacey, 1994, pp. 64–65). De Lauretis condemns this generalization of describing the viewing pleasure of films about female bonding without necessarily a romantic intention and openly lesbian films similarly. She states that this causes a rejection of “the specific difference that constitutes lesbian subjectivity” (De Lauretis, 1994, p. 114) and entails “the sweeping of lesbian sexuality and desire under the rug of sisterhood, female friendship, and the now popular theme of the mother-daughter bond” (De Lauretis, 1994, p. 116). De Lauretis differentiates female spectatorship for these two types of movies between homoerotic desire in regard to the lesbian

film and narcissistic identification for cinema about female bonding. Hollinger points out another type of film that stands between these two, namely the “ambiguous lesbian film” (Hollinger, 1998, p. 6), in which suggestions of lesbianism are made but the sexuality of the female characters is never openly explained. This invites the viewer to speculate on the relationship of the female characters how they wish, interpreting them as anything between lovers or just friends. This type of film can have positive connotations on the lesbian spectator by showing a loving portrayal of a female bond and straying away from pornographic exploitations (Hollinger, 1998). However, the homosexual ambiguity can also render the homosexual viewer “doubtful of the validity and even of the reality of their desire” (Miller, 1991, p. 125). For heterosexual female viewers, these ambiguous lesbian films presents them “with a “safe” means of engaging with a lesbian fantasy scenario by offering them at the same time the possibility of denying this fantasy (Hollinger, 1998, p. 8).

2.4 Matrixial gaze

In a series of articles starting from 1992, Bracha L. Ettinger, an artist, psychoanalyst, writer and painter has coined the term “matrixial gaze” in an effort to suggest a gaze that challenges the phallogocentric theories of psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan or Sigmund Freud. “Matrixial” comes from the latin word “Matrix” which translates to womb. Ettinger takes the womb not biologically but as a symbol for a space of a shared experience and opposes it to the phallus, which for Lacan is the symbol of masculine power. The Matrix was chosen as a term “not just to exchange an organ (penis) and its image for another (womb), but to conceive of an alternative to the phallus in terms of structure, mechanism, functions, logic” (B. L. Ettinger, 1997, p. 423). In the phallic gaze, the woman is the intruder, the other, the one who induces castration anxiety with their absence of a phallus. With the womb, Ettinger states that one does not need to have one to be part of the theory of the Matrix, thus the lack is not relevant for the definition of a subject (B. L. Ettinger, 1997). In contrast to the phallic concept that is characterized by the lack, Ettinger’s theory is encompassed by the coexistence of the “I and non-I” (B. L. Ettinger, 2020, p. 142):

“The matrixial gaze emanates from within a stratum of subjectivity formed by what I call metamorphic processes of subjectivization beginning in the late prenatal stage and continuing throughout life. I have defined the matrixial borderspace as a psychic sphere of encounters of I(s) with non-I(s), where traces and imprints and waves

are exchanged and experienced by fragmented and assembled I and non-I in transsubjectivity” (B. L. Ettinger, 2020, pp. 249–250)

Through this “metramorphosis”, that Ettinger created by combining “metamorphosis” and “Matrix” which is a process of reciprocal change that is continuous, the distinct polarity between subject and object is fragmented. The concept of “trans-subjectivity”, where experiences are shared across borders, grants intersubjectivity which is impossible with Lacan’s phallic gaze. This understanding of the other can be related to cinema and spectatorship, which allows the theorization of the connection between filmmakers, films and the viewers. Rooted in maternal experiences and the prenatal stage, the Matrixial gaze “identifies means of passage for sensations and affections, desires, phantasms and traumas, feelings and ideas that do not cohere into the process of castration” (B. L. Ettinger, 2020, p. 250).

2.5 Definitions of a female gaze

At the end of Mulvey’s essay, in her summary, she makes first attempts to describe an approach to change the gaze. Her idea would be:

“To free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment. There is no doubt that this destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the ‘invisible guest’” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 18)

Lorraine Gamman discusses an early idea of a female gaze in 1989 in her book chapter “Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze”. She is sceptic about the use of psychoanalysis to initiate change and instead theorizes that:

“The collective dimension of female experience is articulated, together with ideas of female friendship and solidarity. Such a range of looks – often fragmented and contradictory – perhaps more importantly constitutes an overall female perspective. This shift warrants further examination for it suggests that mainstream genres can facilitate a dominant female gaze and a route whereby feminist meanings can be introduced in order to disturb the status quo” (Gamman, 1989, p. 12)

A way of achieving this disturbance is to not completely switch the power dynamics between female and male characters, but by having the women not accept the attempts of the men to take the upper hand. The female characters could do this by pointing out the sexism of the male gaze, joking about the male’s efforts to take

control and intentionally looking back. This way, they “maintain autonomy and independent initiative” (Gamman, 1989, p. 16). Gamman also argues that simply having female filmmakers and female protagonist in a film is not enough to classify a female gaze. The female characters need to step out of their typical roles of just being girlfriends, wives, mothers and daughters and take on roles that have control over the narrative and over themselves, ones “which show them ‘thinking’ and pursuing ‘knowledge’ without overdetermined reference to their physical competence or conventional ‘attractiveness’” (Gamman, 1989, p. 19).

Bolter and Grusin take on the idea of the “range of looks” (Gamman, 1989, p. 12) as mentioned by Gamman and relate it to a female gaze by suggesting the term “hypermediacy” which they describe as “the sum of all the unconventional, unusual, and in some sense deviant ways of looking. Hypermediacy is multiple and deviant in its suggestion of multiplicity - a multiplicity of viewing positions and a multiplicity of relationships to the object in view, including sexual objects” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 84). This “hypermediacy” is thus the counterpart to the linear perspective of the male gaze and can be a definition for a female gaze (Bolter & Grusin, 1999).

In her article “Medusa and the Female Gaze”, Susan Bowers explains the female gaze as an “antidote to the male gaze” (Bowers, 1990, p. 218) and crowns the Greek mythological figure Medusa as “the icon of the female gaze” (Bowers, 1990, p. 219). Medusas look is the epitome of female subjectivity. When one looks at her, she looks back at them in their eyes with a powerful gaze that renders the male gazer to stone and like that, crafts him into an object. This phenomenon perpetuates the idea that women who reject the objectification of men and recognize their own subjectivity by turning the male gaze around become a danger for men and instill in them a fear of the female gaze. The only solution the man saw in Medusas story was to destroy her female power by destroying her. Elizabeth Meese talks about female power in her book “Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism” and explains:

“The issue for women - writers, characters, and critics - is getting power, which is only attained by using it. What are the alternatives to marrying it, learning to live without it, or exploiting our powerlessness? To think of one's self alone, not in a specular relationship as the mirror to man's identity, is to enter the “dark continent” of woman; it is to begin a new process of self-definition, by attempting to refuse the role of Other to his Absolute One.” (Meese, 1986, p. 123)

Bowers claims that “contemporary women artists who embrace Medusa with full awareness of her dark power exhibit a fierce integrity and free expression of female eros” (Bowers, 1990, p. 234). This way, Medusa has become “an electrifying force representing the dynamic power of the female gaze” (Bowers, 1990, p. 235).

At the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival, Joey Soloway, an American director, writer and producer (*Soloway uses they/them pronouns*) share their thoughts on the concept of a female gaze in a keynote addressing filmmakers from all over the world. They first share some definitions of a female gaze that society tries to instill which Soloway turns down. For instance, the notion of just reversing the male gaze by “depicting the world and men from a feminine point of view presenting men as objects of female pleasure” (Soloway, 2016, 05:20) as well as putting women in the hero position that the male protagonist would normally inherit in typical male films like action movies. They argue that this is not enough to warrant the definition of a female and is still “a product of male projection and fantasy” (Soloway, 2016, 07:34).

In regard to what hooks criticized in a lot of feminist theorists, Soloway explains in advance that in their talk they will be concentrating on gender and will not put intersectionality at the forefront because they think that they still “have a lot to learn in terms of what [it] is my place to say as a white person” (Soloway, 2016, 09:03). Thus, some of their concepts might be accurate for women of color whereas some ideas might not be applicable.

Similarly to Mulvey’s male gaze theory with its three types of spectators, Soloway’s female gaze theory is also structured around three key points, namely “feeling seeing”, “the gazed gaze” and “returning the gaze” (Soloway, 2016).

2.5.1 “Feeling seeing”

According to Soloway, a female gaze can be achieved by “reclaiming the body using it as a tool on the set with the intention to communicate a feeling seeing” (Soloway, 2016, 21:03). Through a subjective camera one should try to inhabit a character’s emotional state instead of just looking at them. This is supposed to invite the audience to share the feelings they see on screen. Soloway actively puts this into practice with their cinematographer by advising them during the shoot to not just film but consciously be part of the action while holding the camera. They direct the camera operator just as they would the actors in order to make them feel what the characters might feel in the same moment and to ultimately translate this feeling onto to the viewers (Soloway, 2016).

2.5.2 “The gazed gaze”

Part two of a female gaze puts the audience into the role of the object by making the camera be the recipient of the gaze and thus “wrapping the gazed gaze” (Soloway, 2016, 21:32). This lets the viewer experience the emotions that arise by being looked upon. The “gazed gaze” does not just concern the camera but also the narrative by having the female character recognize their own subjectivity and power. Soloway relates this to “coming-of-age tales for women who talk about how they become what men see. It’s about what I’m doing to the world, my effect when I am seen” (Soloway, 2016, 21:38).

2.5.3 “Returning the gaze”

The third aspect of Soloway’s female gaze is “daring to say I see you seeing me” (Soloway, 2016, 23:03) and actively choosing to step out of the role of object into the position of subject. With this newfound subjectivity, one can start “returning the gaze” (Soloway, 2016, 22:57) by labeling the spectator as the object and thus, gazing at the gazer. This could be achieved by utilizing either of the previous two mentioned filmic techniques of this female gaze concept or literally having the character look at the camera and break the fourth wall for instance. However, Soloway argues that this “returning of the gaze” is rather a “socio-political justice-demanding way of art making” (Soloway, 2016, 23:58) and not just a cinematic choice. They take this action outside of the screen to relate it to filmmaking in general. People who have historically not been put in the subject position like women or gender non-conforming people have had to depend on cis men to be able to make their films a reality and finally portray their life experiences. They “have to behave to have access to their attention and their money and their privilege and that behavior stops us from gathering our own attention to ourselves” (Soloway, 2016, 29:19). So, for women to finally put this attention on themselves, make their voice heard and be the subject can be described as the female gaze.

Soloway emphasizes in their talk the political side of the female gaze:

“The female gaze is not a camera trick, it is a privilege generator. It’s storytelling to get you on somebody’s side. It says you will be on my side, my camera, my script, my words. (...) The female gaze is a conscious effort to create empathy as a political tool. It is a (...) wrestling away of the point of view, of changing the way the world feels for women when they move their bodies through the world” (Soloway, 2016, 28:11)

2.5.4 Brey's "The Female Gaze Test"

In 2020, Iris Brey, a French film critic, author and journalist, wrote a book called "Le regard féminin: une révolution à l'écran" which translates to "The Female Gaze: A Revolution on the Screen" in which she tries to define the female gaze. Reminiscent of the Bechdel test, which is used to highlight the quantitative representation of female characters, she establishes a test with which one can examine the qualitative representation of women (Brey, 2020). Brey explains the requirements that a movie must satisfy to employ a female gaze in 6 ways:

"In the narrative:

1. the main protagonist identifies as a woman;
2. the story is told from her point of view;
3. her story troubles the patriarchal order.

In the mise en scène:

1. thanks to the mise en scène the narrator can feel what the protagonist goes through;
2. the eroticization of the bodies can be interpreted as a choice and not as a reproduction of the 'patriarchal unconscious' (as in Mulvey, 1975);
3. the spectator's pleasure does not stem from being put in the place of a voyeur, it can be deployed outside of domination."

(Brey, 2020, para. Une esthétique du désir)

With her theory, Brey moves away from psychoanalysis and puts the focus on the female experience and how the body reacts to sharing in this feeling, similar to Soloway's "feeling seeing". Brey strays from defining the gaze through identification, which is the psychoanalytical approach, and shifts to feeling, which she categorizes as phenomenological (Brey, 2020). She stresses the conscious effort that has to be put into creating a female gaze and clarifies:

"The female gaze, therefore, is not a "portrait of a woman"; the question is not only to have a female character as the central character, but to be at her side. We do not watch her do it, we do it with her." (Brey, 2020, para. Le Female gaze)

An important aspect that Brey highlights in her book and Soloway agrees with in their talk is that the gender of the filmmakers does not influence the gaze of a film. If a movie is made by female filmmakers that does not automatically result a female

gaze and saying it would “is a way of essentializing the work of ‘women’” (Brey, 2020, para. Le Female gaze). Men can also intentionally choose to create a female gaze just as women or trans people can generate a male gaze through their filmmaking practices which Benson-Allott underlines by saying “women have proven just as capable of manufacturing sexist media as men” (Benson-Allott, 2017). Such cinematic techniques that can create a female gaze which Brey mentions are comparable to Soloway’s “returning the gaze”, specifically directly addressing the camera or using voice overs to speak to the audience. This puts the spectator into an active role while watching the film (Brey, 2020).

2.5.5 Criticisms of a female gaze

A central point of criticism of the female gaze is its name for the use of the term “female”. Soloway argues that the name female gaze was coined out of comfort to oppose the male gaze but is not a perfect match for her described concept. They state other terms like queer gaze, trans gaze, feminine gaze or feminist gaze could fit better (Soloway, 2016). In her writing process, Brey imagined about what she would name the gaze she discusses in her book. Options that she thought about were female gaze, feminist gaze, queer gaze or lesbian gaze since many movies she analyzed were made by lesbian filmmakers. In the end, she deliberately chose the female gaze because for one, she intentionally wants to oppose it to Laura Mulvey’s male gaze. Secondly, she claims that not all movies that feature a female experience are feminist. Lastly, and for her most importantly, she wants to shine a positive light on the term female because for so long anything relating to the female body or women’s experiences has been underrepresented (Brey, 2021).

Caetlin Benson-Allot discusses in her article “No Such Thing Not Yet: Questioning Television’s Female Gaze” from 2017 the blend between a female gaze and intersectionality. She claims that many filmic works that apply a female gaze focus their stories mainly on white women and lack portrayals of women of color both narratively and figuratively. Urging for more characters of color not just in supporting roles but as protagonists, Benson-Allot expresses that “being intersectional would mean a foregrounding of the insights of feminist women of color and a refusal to see gender without also seeing race (and, for that matter, ability, age, class, and religion, among other human differences)” (Benson-Allott, 2017, p. 69).

3 Methods - Analysis of contemporary coming-of-age films

The literature for this paper was gathered primarily through online research via search engines such as “Google Scholar” and “Google” but also in person as well at the library of the University of Applied Sciences in St. Pölten. The vast number of books, papers, articles, essays, studies and theses cited were acquired through databases and journals such as Google Books, Research Gate, Springer, SAGE journal, JSTOR, academia.edu and the Internet Archive for instance. To find the best fitting sources, the search was filtered with keywords such as “male gaze”, “female gaze”, “oppositional gaze”, “matrixial gaze”, “lesbian gaze”, “coming-of-age”, “film”, “cinema”, “movies”, “representation”, “Celine Sciamma”, “Greta Gerwig” along with the titles of the movies which will be analyzed in this chapter “Water Lilies”, “Tomboy”, “Girlhood”, “Portrait of a Lady on Fire”, “Petite Maman” together with “Lady Bird”, “Little Women” and “Barbie”.

After downloading the literary sources, they were then saved and categorized using the reference tool Zotero. With a word plugin for Zotero, the citations in the body of text of this work plus the reference list at the end of this paper were created. The selection of the literature cited in this paper was generated by concentrating on theories around the gaze in cinema. Starting with the male gaze by Mulvey coined in her famous essay from 1975 to copious academics, like bell hooks, Bracha L. Ettinger, Joey Soloway and Iris Brey who critique Mulvey’s theory and expand with their own takes on how the gaze has changed over the years or give an outlook on how it should be shifted.

Filmmakers are the ones who can actively work against the objectifying portrayal of women in contemporary and future cinema that have been prevalent for so long by shifting the patriarchal or phallic look into a “female gaze”. What is different in film than in the real world is “the possibility in the cinema of shifting the emphasis of the look. It is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 17).

The female gaze has previously been academically explored in genres such as horror, documentary, melodramas or romance films. For the purpose of this thesis, the genre coming-of-age was chosen to explore the most vulnerable part in many

people's lives, the shift from childhood to adulthood. This time of every person's life is characterized by many transformations, be it the own body changing and going through puberty, having to make academic decisions that will alter the course of one's life significantly or all kinds of relationship dynamics between someone and their parents, their friends, their lovers or generally people they encounter in their walk of life. Figuring out one's sexuality, the first love, the first job, the first heartbreak, those are common themes in coming-of-age movies. The female experience of this vulnerable period in a girl's life and its representation in cinema will be studied in this paper.

In order to find out if the theoretical definitions of a female gaze are already being implemented in filmmaking and how this portrayal presents itself in the camera work, two filmmakers of coming-of-age films were selected. The first choice fell on the French film director and scriptwriter Céline Sciamma. To contrast, the American film director, scriptwriter and actress Greta Gerwig was picked. Both women have established themselves to be consciously implementing their own understanding of a female gaze into their movies and thus working against the image of a male gaze.

The films that will be explored are "Water Lilies" (2007), "Tomboy" (2011), "Girlhood" (2014), "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" (2019) and "Petite Maman" (2021) by Céline Sciamma and "Lady Bird" (2017), "Little Women" (2019) and "Barbie" (2023) by Greta Gerwig. These are the movies which Sciamma and Gerwig both wrote the script for and also took on the directorial role.

In this first broad analysis, Sciamma's and Gerwig's directorial filmography will be evaluated to identify the differences and the characteristics of their individual takes on a female gaze. This section will concentrate on the different kinds of looks that are exchanged in the film between the characters, the viewers but also the camera. During the watching and observing of the films, the following categories and questions will be the center of attention:

- Who gazes at who and when? Who is the instigator of the gaze, which character, the viewer or even the camera?
- Whose story is told? Who dictates the actions in the film? Who makes important choices that further the narrative? How is conflict resolved?
- What are the motivations of the female characters? What character arc does the main female character go through?
- What relationships and friendships do the women have in the film? How do these relationships and friendships evolve over the course of the film? How does looking influence the course of these relationships?

- What are the important themes of the movie? Are there underlying messages conveyed through looks? Does the setting of the movie influence the looking relations?

The cinematography and the use of the camera regarding the portrayal of female characters in specific scenes will be the focus of a more thorough breakdown in the subsequent chapter “3.3 Detailed cinematographic analysis of significant scenes portraying a female gaze”.

3.1 Filmography of Céline Sciamma

Céline Sciamma is a director and screenwriter from France who is known for primarily working on coming-of-age dramas. In her films, she often features queer and especially lesbian storylines and characters which comes naturally to her since she is a lesbian herself. Emma Wilson wrote a portrait about Sciamma and describes her as:

“A director who has made children and adolescents, their vulnerable position in the family, and their autonomy and sensuality, central to her filmmaking. In her approach to female, non-binary, and queer identities she has focused in particular on the need for agency of children and adolescents, binding this imperative into her aesthetic choices and modes of filmmaking. She has been particularly attentive to issues of power and domination, showing how heteronormative families, and larger society, extend control and require submission and consent. She is extremely sensitive to the emotions, to ambivalence and conflicted affect, allowing intensity of feeling to be conveyed even in the sparest narratives. This recognition of complex investments, of confusion, hurt, and tenderness, combined with a clear political agenda, makes her work feel excoriating, energising, and true.” (Wilson, 2021, p. 2)

The start of Sciamma’s filmography was her debut film “Water Lilies” in 2007 with the original title “Naissance des pieuvres” that focuses its story on the first love between two girls in the world of synchronized swimming. Her second movie is called “Tomboy” from 2011 and is about just that, a girl who explores what it is like to live as a boy while also coming in contact with love for the first time. Three years later, the third feature film “Girlhood”, originally “Bande de filles”, came out. This movie diverges from Sciamma’s usual themes of depicting the lives of white girls

by its portrayal of a community of black female teenagers. The film also discusses issues of differences in social class. Sciamma's most successful and well-known work is her fourth movie "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" from 2019 for which she won the award for best screenplay at the Cannes film festival as well as the Queer Palm (*Festival de Cannes: Retrospective*, 2019). A tender love story blossoming from the looks between the two female protagonists is the premise of this period piece. Sciamma herself describes this movie as "a manifesto about the female gaze" (as cited in Esposito, 2021, para. 18). Her most recent film which she realized as a director is "Petite Maman" from 2021. The main topic here is the mother-daughter relationship of a young girl as she finds herself travelling back in time and befriending her mom as a child.

Other than the previously mentioned films, Céline Sciamma also writes and co-writes scripts for and with other directors in which she experiments with other genres such as in the recent horror comedy "Balconettes" from 2024, which she co-wrote with Noémie Merlant, who played the main role Marianne in "Portrait of a Lady on Fire".

3.1.1 Water Lilies (2007)

"Water Lilies" (original title "Naissance des pieuvres") was written and directed by Céline Sciamma and filmed by Crystel Fournier, a French camera woman in 2007.

The film tells the story of three 15-year-old girls as they navigate a world of first loves, first sexual experiences and friendship. The film opens with a short scene of young girls in a changing room of a swimming pool. The audience is invited to a space full of children of varying ages ranging from 6 years old to older teenagers as they are getting ready and practicing movements for their synchronized swimming competition. These images are cross-edited with the opening credits and a tracking shot of a young girl walking to find her seat in the audience of the competition. After an initial first performance by the youngest dancers, the girl in the audience seems bored and gets up to leave. Suddenly, the junior team is introduced through a vigorous soundtrack. The girl is stopped in her walk and starts to get intrigued by the display of synchronized movements that are shown in the water. She sits down again and can't seem to take her eyes off of the bodies moving rhythmically and legs and arms splashing through the water (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Marie is fascinated by the synchro swimmers (Sciamma, 2007, 00:03:54)

After a back and forth between the medium close-up of the girl and various medium long shots of the different body parts peeking out of the water from which neither the viewers in the film nor the spectators of the film can discern any individual, someone gets highlighted by being pushed out of the water and looking directly at the audience in the scene (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Floriane emerges out of the water (Sciamma, 2007, 00:03:58)

The young girl is immediately awestruck and starts to clap vigorously. Through the commentator of the performance, the main performer is introduced to everyone as

Floriane. Marie, the teenager in the audience, is captivated and taken by her elegant portrayal and self-confidence as the captain of the swimming team. After the end of the competition, while the last girls are filtering out of the changing room, one teenager, Anne, is left behind sitting on a bench wrapped in a towel. She starts to get undressed once everyone leaves the room when unexpectedly, the door opens and Francois, her crush, stands there and out of shock they both stare at each other for a couple seconds. The boy looks at the naked body of the girl, which the audience also sees completely in a long shot and then abruptly leaves. One of the next scenes shows Marie at home in her bathtub with the camera focusing on her legs moving out of the water, invoking a similar image to the ones from the performance, signifying her longing to be part of the team.

Over the course of the film, Marie starts a careful friendship with Floriane. The girl is charmed by the synchronized swimmer and her art form and pleads for an invitation to the training facilities. Granting this wish only through the negotiation of a favor, Floriane invites Marie and this way the viewer into her world. Marie learns that Floriane seems to be the most experienced girl in her circle, not just in the dance performance but also in love. For this, she is shut out from the other swimmers because they judge her for her supposed sexual maturity and openness, since it seems she is seducing the trainer. A scene that shows this is in the changing room again. Floriane starts peeling a banana and takes a bite. Another girl can be seen watching her. She comments and questions if she is not embarrassed to openly eat a banana like that and deems it suggestive for boys to see. Floriane challenges her by looking her straight into the eyes and taking another bite. The girl gets flustered and immediately walks off.

Redeeming her favor, Floriane takes Marie to her meetups with Francois, to wait for her outside as an alibi. While the two girls' friendship grows closer, the best friends Marie and Anne drift apart. One day, Floriane admits to Marie that she has never had sex before and all of the stories are just rumors. She has, however, experienced harassment from men before to which Marie denies having had similar experiences and Floriane deems her lucky. This conversation highlights the contrasting worlds the two live in. Anxious to lose her virginity to a man, Floriane asks Marie to be her first, which Marie initially declines. After another invitation to spend the night at Francois', Marie can't take her suppressed feelings anymore and accepts Floriane's plea. What follows is a tender but visibly difficult experience for Floriane as the camera and Marie's gaze stay on her face while she pleasures her for the first time. Meanwhile, Anne and Francois share a similar uncomfortable situation. They have sex for the first time but do not kiss, which is clear to the viewer because the image stays on Ann's face during the act. The next time they

see each other, Anne confesses this to Marie and admits to never having been kissed before. Marie immediately gives her a peck on the lips. Later, Anne refuses to have sex with the boy for a second time by rejecting his kiss and spitting in his mouth instead, showing off her newfound agency, not letting him manhandle her again. The story concludes at a party similar to an early scene where Floriane and Marie spoke for the first time. Overtime, Marie finds her own voice after countless careful, admiring, sometimes jealous but always longing glances, ultimately resulting in her giving into her feelings and kissing Floriane passionately. Floriane takes part but seems unbothered by it, washing off her mouth after and going back to the party and thus, her established life. To conclude, Marie and Anne jump into the swimming pool where they were first introduced, floating in the water reminiscing about their recent experiences while Floriane dances at the party, at ease, not realizing how she changed the lives of the other two girls.

Most actions in the movie are dictated by Floriane who decides to let Marie watch and take part in the swimming team. Her best friend Anne finds herself and also her confidence over her own body through the film, leading up to a scene in which she redeems her prior run in with the boy by now confidently taking her stand naked in the locker room, while no one watches, not even the audience of the film can glimpse, for she has her back turned to the camera. While Floriane finds her first true friend in Marie, her free spirit remains in the end and she seems the least impacted by the narrative, continuing to live and dance like she has in the beginning.

3.1.2 Tomboy (2011)

Tomboy was also written and directed by Céline Sciamma and filmed by Crystel Fournier.

The film revolves around the 10-year-old girl Laure who is exploring her gender identity and sexuality at a very young age after just moving into a new environment with her parents and her little sister. The film opens with a scene of a carefree young child with short hair and its father being cheerful while driving around a road framed with trees. This immediately portrays a very intimate and strong bond between the two. A similar powerful relationship is depicted early on between the two sisters who play around and tease each other. After a day out, the mother commands the two children to take a bath together. When it is time to leave the tub, the mother calls the young child for the first time by name and introduces her to the audience as Laure. As the kid steps out of the tub, the viewers can see that it is in fact physically a girl and not a boy as one might have assumed by the scenes prior.

While strolling through the neighborhood, Laure meets Lisa sitting on some stairs outside. They connect and Lisa asks for Laure's name. With a delayed response Laure comes up with the name Mickaël and thus begins her experience living as a boy. The two become fast friends and Laura gets further introduced to a group of other boys from the neighborhood. Together they play catch in the woods and have football scrimmages. During these outings, Laure watches the other boys and seems to feel envious of their male privileges, such as taking off their shirts and peeing standing up. She tries to fit in by also partaking in these experiences, for instance, after a first reserved gaze at the playing boys she joins them. During the game, she grows bolder and starts taking off her shirt and starts to fit in. To go to the bathroom, however, she runs into the woods away from all the possibly judging looks of the other kids. She gets found however by a boy who watches her from behind a few bushes and almost blows her cover. Still holding up her illusion, Laura gets invited to go swimming, which poses a problem. She decides to solve this by cutting up her bathing suit into shorts and crafting a fake penis out of clay. While trying it on in front of her mirror, the audience gets a glimpse into how comfortable this makes her feel through a close-up on her smiling face as she gazes upon her newfound body part (Figure 4). The swimming trip goes over without issues and strengthens her body positivity and her friendships with the other children.



Figure 4: Laure looks at her newfound body part (Sciamma, 2011, 00:45:12)

Lisa and Mickaël grow closer and develop a feeling of first love which climaxes into a first kiss in the woods initiated by Lisa. She obstructs Mickaël's view by putting her hand over his eyes while she pecks his lips (Figure 5). Afterwards, the camera captures a similar smile starting to form in a close-up once again.



Figure 5: The first kiss between Laure and Lisa (Sciamma, 2011, 00:48:00)

Whilst living this double life, it becomes clear that her mother would not accept her being this boy, seeing as when she one time comes home with makeup on her face after a day out with Lisa, the mom comments on how well it fits her.

Everything seems to go well until one day Lisa comes to her apartment looking for Mickaël only to find his sister alone who then realizes the ruse. Promising to take her with them on their outings from now on, Jeanne, the sister, promises not to tell and their siblinghood grows stronger because of it. Her sister encourages her to live like a boy and even helps her cut her hair. This bond becomes Mickaël's downfall after he defends his sister from another boy by fighting in the woods. While Lisa and the sister watch in awe of Mickaël's strength and resilience, the outcome of the fight ultimately leads to the discovery of her pretending.

What follows is the mother scolding her for imagining to be a boy and forcing her to wear a dress to go apologize to the other boy. She also has to confront Lisa, who takes one look at Laure and storms off into the distance without a word. The camera stays on Laure's face for a moment showing her deep embarrassment and unease until she also runs out of the apartment.

The camera finds her in the woods alone. She starts taking off her dress. With this movement, the camera also moves and tilts upwards to the sky while the ambient sound of the wind blowing through the leaves gets louder and more pronounced. The image wanders around the tree crowns, down the trunks and finally comes back to Laure leaving not just the scene but also her dress on a branch behind.

This freedom does not last very long as she is picked up by the boys who intend to find out the truth. At first, Lisa defends her and begs them to let Laure go. Folding under the peer pressure after a voice says, "You kissed him, if it's a girl, that's disgusting, isn't it?". Hesitantly agreeing to take a look she opens Laure's shorts and gazes upon reality. During this distressing act, the camera stays close on their faces and shows a teary-eyed Laure and a shocked Lisa, who once again leaves.

After some time, presumably some weeks later, the film concludes with Laure tentatively going outside the apartment for the first time after seeing Lisa hesitantly approach the house from afar. Reminiscent of their first encounter, Lisa asks again for her name. This time, the child answers "My name is Laure." The last frame is a close-up of her looking at Lisa and starting to smile, realizing Lisa does not reduce her to her gender but likes her for who she is as a person, possibly also having realized something about her identity.

Throughout the movie, the mirror is a recurring theme. Laure inspects her body multiple times in the privacy of their bathroom or her bedroom mirror, gazing upon her pre-pubescent body that resembles that of the boys very closely still, wishing to halt time. The experience of living as a boy has strengthened her self-confidence, brought her closer to her sister and given her a true companion.

3.1.3 Girlhood (2014)

The director and writer of *Girlhood* (original title "Bande de filles") is Céline Sciamma and the director of photography is Crystel Fournier.

The film depicts the life of 16-year-old Marieme, an African French teenager who lives close to Paris in a poor district. At the beginning, the community surrounding Marieme is introduced through an American football game that is being played by young women. This immediately shows the audience that the story is about strong women who play for themselves. After walking home as a group, the girls start to split up individually until only Marieme is left. On her way, she encounters Ismaël, a friend of her brother. Through shy glances the viewers are let in on their flirtation.

At home, Marieme lives with her younger sister and older brother. Her mother is rarely home because she works very late most of the time. As a result of this, the brother is the head of the household. Marieme's life in school will soon come to an end because she is failing with bad grades and her mother is forcing her to learn a trade instead. On her way out of the school she meets a gang of girls. They ask her if she wants to join them. After refusing at first, a group of boys including Ismaël comes along. Seeing this chance of getting closer to him, Marieme eventually

decides to join the gang. Their first outing together is in the center of the city in a clothing store. A saleswoman starts to get suspicious about Marieme and follows her through the store. Upon seeing this, the other three girls confront the clerk and intimidate her. Through this action, the girls become closer and from then on keep hanging out and start to become their own family. Their lives are marked by dancing in hotel rooms, drinking alcohol, doing drugs, stealing and cornering other people to get money. Through this girlhood, Marieme is being encouraged to let go of the handles that her brother holds over her and defy his word by starting to act on her feelings for Ismaël. The two young lovers kiss for the first time on a lonely staircase. At the moment their lips touch the light goes out and only starts back again once they depart from each other. This is a sign for their forbidden connection, showing them that it should be hidden and left in the dark.

One day, the leader of the girl gang called Lady fights another person from a rival group and loses. She is left on the ground at the scene of the combat without a shirt and bruises all over. Her, as well as her family's pride has taken a massive hit so she gets punished by her father by him cutting off her hair. This leads to her being insecure and not leaving her house because she does not want to be seen in this state. To prove herself and revenge her friend, Marieme decides to arrange another meeting with their rivals. After an initial stare down, Marieme charges at her opponent, wrestles her to the ground and humiliates her by also taking off her shirt and cutting off her bra as well. She leaves the girl to lie in her anguish and be judged by the eyes of the onlookers and audience of the fight but not of the camera which moves with Marieme as she runs over to her friends to celebrate. Hearing of this victory, her brother for the first time in a long time, talks to her like a normal person and offers to play a video game with her, which he normally always does by himself.

Continuing her secret relationship to Ismaël, Marieme, while he is sleeping in his bed, comes into his dark room and demands of him to take off his clothes. He obliges and also turns around when she asks him to. As he lies naked in his bed, Marieme pulls down the duvet over his bottom and strokes his body (Figure 6). The camera follows this movement over his curves in a close-up reminiscent of frames of fragmented body parts used by the male gaze. Standing up, the camera shows the back as she undresses herself still looking at him.

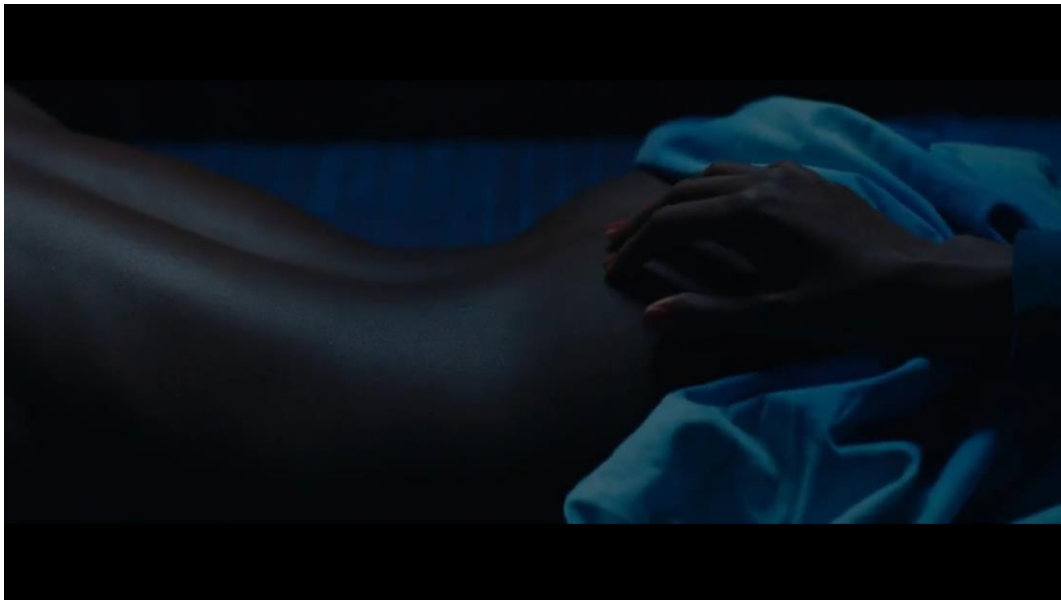


Figure 6: Marieme stroking Ismaël's body (Sciamma, 2014, 01:06:09)

The next day, her brother seems to have found out about her secret and calls her into his room again, though this time not to play. Suspecting what is to come, Marieme pushes her little sister out of the apartment to spare her off having to see and hear the oncoming abuse.

After this night, Marieme decides to escape her painful life with her family and accept an offer from a local drug dealer to work for him. In order to sell the substances, Marieme wears dresses, a blonde wig and goes to parties to fulfill her duty. Outside of this, she starts binding her chest and wears loose fitting clothing. When Ismaël sees this the next time they get intimate, they start to fight. To him demanding an answer why she would do this she does not give one, instead regarding him with a deep and sorrowful gaze. As he leaves, the camera pans down to reveal the bindings to the audience as well.

Later at a party Mariame shares an intimate moment with a girl from her gang. Her boss interferes and makes advances to kiss her which she turns down. Furious, the man yells at her as Mariame runs off camera back to Ismaël to inform him that her work as a drug dealer is over. The both of them, once again sitting in the dark on his bed, talk about their future. Ismaël desires a traditional life consisting of marriage and children. Mariame firmly says that she does not want this kind of life and leaves him sitting alone in the dark.

At the end of the movie, Mariame ponders where she wants to go now. She stands at the entrance to her family's apartment building and debates if she should ring

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the bell. She does but when she hears the buzz of the door, she changes her mind and walks away while crying softly. The last shot of the movie is a close-up on her side profile as she looks up with determination and walks out of the frame to the left (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Marieme looking determined (Sciamma, 2014, 01:50:16)

Over the course of the movie, Marieme makes important decisions and implements herself as a subject that has control over her own life. For instance, in one scene her mother arranged for her to get the same job as her and start the next day. Once Marieme hears about this from her mom's colleague, she asks for a handshake from this woman who has already left the frame. Reaching out her hand and subsequently pulling her back into the scope of the camera with her, she firmly states that she will not follow this order.

The blossoming friendship and deep connection between the girls is depicted through a long dance scene to Rihanna's "Shine bright like a diamond" in a blue hued hotel room (Figure 8). While at first, Marieme is unsure and reserved, she sees the girls enjoying themselves and chooses to join in. The camera captures them enjoying each other's company, laughing, spinning each other around and just forgetting about their challenging lives and the world outside of these 4 walls, outside of their girlhood.



Figure 8: The gang of girls dancing in a hotel room (Sciamma, 2014, 00:32:58)

3.1.4 Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019)

“Portrait of a Lady on Fire” with the original title “Portrait de la jeune fille en feu” is a historical drama written and directed by Céline Sciamma and the cinematography is by Claire Mathon. The film is set in the late 18th century and the forbidden love story of two young woman named Marianne and Héloïse.

The tale starts with various close-ups on young female painters who all gaze at one subject, their teacher Marianne who is sitting still in the center of the room to be looked at. The question of one girl prompts the camera to push in onto a painting depicting a landscape with a young lady on fire. This starts a flashback and throws the viewers and Marianne onto a boat with older men. This will be one of the only times that male characters are part of this film. Upon her arrival on the island, she meets the housemaid Sophie who shows her to her room, guiding the viewers and Marianne only with the light of a candle up the stairs. The painter settles into her room, drying off her easel which previously fell into the ocean and also herself as she sits in front of the fireplace completely naked centered in the frame of a long shot. She was commissioned to paint the portrait of a young woman named Héloïse who is supposed to marry a man in Milan. Stashed away she finds an unfinished portrait of a girl with a green dress which is only missing its head because as she finds out on the next day from the mother, Héloïse does not want to have her portrait painted because she does not want to get married. Thus, she never let the male painter see her face long enough to paint it. Marianne is now

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tasked to create the painting without Héloïse knowing just by spending time with her, looking at her and then drawing in secret.

As she is prepping the easel, Marianne gets an invitation to take a walk with Héloïse. Following her down the stairs and out into the landscape of a gloomy fall day, Marianne and the camera are held in suspense to the appearance of Héloïse since she is wearing a hooded cloak and does not regard the camera. She walks away from it when suddenly the hood falls from her head revealing her light blonde hair. Unexpectedly, she takes off and starts running towards a cliff. This causes Marianne to think the worst and go after her. The camera quickly and shakily trails Héloïse to the edge as she suddenly stops and turns around (Figure 9) facing Marianne and the audience for the first time, mesmerizing Marianne instantly (Figure 10).



Figure 9: Héloïse's first look at Marianne (Sciamma, 2019, 00:20:00)



Figure 10: Marianne's first look at Héloïse (Sciamma, 2019, 00:20:04)

They continue their walk down the cliffs without talking but stealing glances at each other continuously. Marianne looks with the intention of memorizing Héloïse's features like her ears and nose in order to start her painting and draw her accurately later at night solely from memory.

Their next days are spent together taking walks on the beach and talking. Their conversations grow deeper and so do their feelings and the spark they felt from their first meeting develops into a flame. Héloïse has not seen much from the world other than the island and the convent she has been living in prior. There she has found her love for music which she tells Marianne about. The two share a tender moment as Marianne plays her a lively tune on the Cembalo.

On their supposed last day together on the beach, Héloïse decides to go swimming for the first time, not knowing if she actually can. Marianne watches on as Héloïse walks into the waves, shedding her clothes in the meantime and suddenly, with a strong wave, diving under. The suspense is not long as she comes back immediately after still unsure if she can swim to which Marianne replies she can at least float. This elicits their first shared laughter.

As Marianne finishes the portrait, she admits to Héloïse the true reason for her being there and shows her the painting. Héloïse criticizes the painting and asks if that is how she sees her, claiming it lifeless and without feeling which Marianne denies. Wanting her to stay longer despite this betrayal, Héloïse offers to pose for

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Marianne. When Héloïse looks at Marianne for the first time as the object of her painting, Marianne is flustered but starts the process once more.

The mother leaves the island and so the two women and the maid are left alone. They spent their days painting, cooking and eating as well as playing card games and reading stories. One of which is the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Sophie also has a secret which she shares with the two, she is pregnant and does not want to be. Because of this, they go to a bonfire to meet with a medicinal woman and arrange an appointment for an abortion. As Héloïse's dress catches fire, this image burns into Marianne's brain and will later inspire the initial painting of the movie. The next day, the two young women cannot hold their feelings in any longer so in a hidden cavern at the beach they kiss for the first time. To meet each others lips, they have to take down their shawls covering their mouths that they always wear on their walks. This indicates a visual consent on each part and the start of their love story.

Marianne and Héloïse accompany the maid to her abortion which takes place in a bed. Coincidentally, a baby is also lying on the bed. During the process, the camera is focused on Sophie in a medium close-up, forcing the viewer to experience it with her. The baby pushes into the frame and holds her hand as Marianne and Héloïse watch from the side (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Sophie's abortion (Sciamma, 2019, 01:27:15)

The love of the two women deepens and climaxes in an unconventional love scene that starts with a close-up of a finger pushing into a skin fold that is indiscernible

to the audience. Only through a pan of the camera away from this action is it revealed as an armpit, defying expectations some viewers might have had.

The painting is finished by the last paint stroke from Héloïse who joined in on the painting this time. Just as their romantic and sexual relationship is the most intense and passionate, Héloïse's mother comes back and approves of the new painting terminating Marianne's reason to stay on the island. Not being courageously enough to live their love truthfully and open, Héloïse does not stand up to her mother and gives in to marry the man. After one last hug between the two women charged with emotion, Marianne runs down the stairs. At the last step she dares to look back and sees an image of Héloïse standing there in a wedding dress. As the door closes the image of the bride-to-be darkens until it is gone only having left a small drawing in a book for Héloïse to remember her by.

The two young women are in the same place one more time many years later at a concert of an orchestra. However, only Marianne sees Héloïse who is sitting in one of the balconies and gazing reminiscently at the musicians. As she remembers their love story, the camera pushes in on her face for almost the whole duration of the song from a long shot to a close-up, showing the various emotions that they went through in their time together (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Last look at Héloïse (Sciamma, 2019, 01:58:03)

3.1.5 **Petite Maman (2021)**

“Petite Maman” is a fantasy drama film written and directed by Céline Sciamma and shot by Claire Mathon. The film depicts different mother-daughter relationships as well as the bond to one’s grandmother.

The movie opens in a caring facility for old people. Nelly, an eight-year-old girl, walks into each room and says goodbye to each old woman who sits in her room until she lands in a room without an inhabitant and an empty bed, only her mother is packing up boxes and gazing thoughtfully out of the window. After picking everything up and loading their car, they drive away. On their way the camera stays on Nelly's mother as the child feeds her snacks from behind the seat. The two of them meet the father at the mother's old childhood home afterwards.

Nelly ventures out alone into the woods behind the house, looking for a hut that her mom had when she was younger. She gathers fallen acorns and brings some back to the house. When it's bedtime, the mother tucks her child into the bed and admits to having been afraid of the dark as a child, claiming there was a big panther at the end of her bed. She gets under the sheets with Nelly and tries to show her, both of them looking at the end of the bed but the girl does not see it. Later on, after a while of sleeping alone, Nelly goes downstairs to drink something and sees her mother lying on the couch, awake. This time, she joins her mother. Confessing to being sad at the moment because of her grandmother's passing, Nelly regrets not having said a proper goodbye like she did to all the people at the care taking house.

In the next morning, Nelly wakes up alone on the couch. At breakfast she finds out that her mom left because being at the house was too hard on her. The child is dejected but her father tries to cheer her up by exploring the place. They find various trinkets such as an old game of pedal which the kid tries out outside. This leads her back into the woods. In a long shot, the girl can make out another person behind the trees. She too has been discovered when this other young girl who is carrying a big branch, calls her over and leads her to a little hut made out of branches. A rain suddenly starts to pour and stream down, drenching the girls, they seek shelter in the house and go to dry off.

Weirdly, the new girl knows her way around the house. In their conversation at the kitchen table, the viewer can recognize the resemblance of the two girls as they sit opposite each other. When Nelly finds out that this is the girls grandma's house, she tells her that her own grandmother died just recently.

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While walking around the house, Nelly sees an open door and finds a woman lying on a bed. Realizing who this is, she gets scared and runs off, back into the woods and finds her way to the original house again. Her grandmother's house looks exactly like the house of the other little girl so she locates the same room but does not find the woman in the bed.

The next day she walks back out into the woods and meets up with the girl anew. They start building and expanding the hut. During this project, they get to know each other better and decide to go back to the other girl's house to play a game. While sitting at the table, through the sound of a creaking door Nelly looks off to the side of the camera and sees what is possibly her grandmother still alive and much younger. From here she finds out that the other girl needs to have an operation in three days to prevent the same illness that fell upon her mother. This conversation gets abruptly stopped by a match cut through which the other girl vanishes and leaves Nelly alone. However, cutting to a long shot we can see that she is with her father again. She asks him about her mother's operation that she had as a child but he does not want to reveal information about it.

On the next day she visits the girl once more but this time spends more time with her grandmother solving crossword puzzles. The camera stays close on the two of them as they enjoy each other's company. Later on, Marion asks if she can come to Nelly's place next time which the girl refuses by saying she should come to the cabin instead. Another match cut and Nelly is alone again on the bed. Her father joins her on the bed and invites her to help him shave his beard, which is something Nelly has always wanted to do. Sitting on the side of the sink, Nelly watches and gazes at her father as he removes the remains of his beard. The audience can only see this through the mirror. Once he is done, he introduces himself to his daughter and greets her which she reciprocates.

In another reunion, Nelly finally admits her secret and confesses to Marion that she is her daughter. Marion does not seem shocked, she instead asks very casually if she comes from the future. Nelly negates this and replies that she comes from the path behind. This time she invites her to her house where she reveals more information about when her grandmother died and how old her mom is at the moment. Meanwhile, the father comes back to the house and tells Nelly that they will leave the house now, he is finished with packing up everything. Stepping into the foreground of this long shot, young Marion reveals herself to the father. The father seems slightly perplexed and looks back and forth between the two girls recognizing their striking resemblance and ultimately allows them one last day together. These last moments are spent baking pancakes and celebrating Marion's

birthday together with her grandmother. At their last sleepover, Nelly discovers dancing shadows at the end of the bed, reminding her of her mother's story.

Ultimately, the two girls break out of the established world of the film by taking a boat and paddling out onto a lake. In the middle of the water, there is a pyramid made out of stone which they climb, looking out into the distance. After their last adventure together, Marion packs her suitcase and then they have to say goodbye. Knowing they will never see each other again, their last hug is bittersweet. Going back into the house, Nelly finds her grown mother again after not seeing her for all of those days, sitting on the floor. The girl joins her on the ground. Together they gaze through the room, taking everything in for the last time. The mother apologizes for not having been there the last few days. Finally, Nelly calls her mother by her name, like she did to the girl, to which she replies with her daughter's name: Nelly.

3.2 Filmography of Greta Gerwig

Greta Gerwig is a director, screenwriter, producer and actress from the United States of America. She started her cinematic career acting in independent films of the American "mumblecore" movement, which are movies that only have a small budget and are characterized by a shaky, handheld camera and spontaneous dialogue and loose story. She got her big break through with her role in one of her first mainstream films "Frances Ha" from 2012, for which she was also nominated for a Golden Globe (Strecker, 2013).

Gerwig wrote, directed and produced her first feature film "Lady Bird" in 2017. It is a semi-autobiographical work about a rebellious female teenager who is living her last year of high school and has to deal with a problematic relationship to her mother as well as a difficult financial situation. The next film Greta Gerwig directed is "Little Women" from 2019. This is a period drama based on the 1868 novel by Louisa May Alcott. It talks about the lives and relationships of four sisters in the 19th century. Gerwig's newest film and simultaneously biggest success is "Barbie" from 2023 which she directed and co-wrote with Noah Baumbach and made her the first female director ever to gross over 1 billion dollars in theatres with one film (McClintock, 2023). The movie is centered around the same-named doll by Mattel and is the first live-action Barbie film. The plot revolves all kinds of Barbie and Ken dolls who inhabit a fictional "Barbieland" until one day the "stereotypical" Barbie decides to travel beyond her known community and explore the real world. What

follows is an existential crisis and a journey of self-acceptance. Katteryn Hilario Valdez explains Gerwig's approach in filmmaking:

"She focuses on the personal outlook of what it's like to be a woman in a patriarchal world and critiques the female stereotypes. By using simple dialogue, adding female characters with goals and strong opinions, and by creating female characters with their own emotional and physical obstacles, Gerwig creates an incredible and realistic narrative. She uses the complexity of real relationships to create a conversation of the hardships and the struggles of the different aspects of a community that doesn't feel heard, and she does so carefully."
(Hilario Valdez, 2024, para. 4)

With all three of her directorial films receiving nominations for an Academy Award for Best Picture, Greta Gerwig made history (Graessle, 2024).

3.2.1 Lady Bird (2017)

Lady Bird is a drama written and directed by Greta Gerwig, filmed by Sam Levy. The film's main focus is a daughter's relationship to her mother, friendships, first loves and first sexual experiences as well as religion.

The movie opens with a mother-daughter duo on a long road. In the car, the two, while first harmoniously crying to an audiobook, quickly change their moods as their conversation turns into an argument about the young girl's future and prospects. The rebellious teenager who wants to be called "Lady Bird" instead of her real name Christine, takes drastic measures to get her will and put her point across. To end the frustrating dialogue and be able to stop listening to her mom lecturing her she just opens the car door and jumps out. This results in her starting her last school year with a broken arm. The school week opens with a montage granting the viewers an inside look into the different classes of the catholic high school, showing the students as they navigate school life in various ways, some closer to faith and some not quite subscribing to it.

Lady Bird and her best friend Julie traverse through their hometown and watch the houses of rich people admiring their lives and wishing to be part of it. Lady Bird strives to go to college at the East Coast but will need to apply for financial aid to realize this dream. The mother of the teenager is an overworked healthcare worker and her father recently laid off. Trying to get more credits for better chances at college, Lady Bird and Julie audition for their school theatre program. At the casting they get introduced to a boy named Danny on stage. They are fascinated and

mesmerized by his singing. Lady Bird especially looks at Julie and then gazes back at Danny, feeling an immediate urge to connect with him. At a school dance the two start to get to know each other. They embrace, sway to the music and as the night ends, Danny kisses her. Lady Bird cannot contain her excitement and jumps for joy on her way home. Their relationship is on a fast track as their feelings grow quickly. This pinnacles into a moment they share star gazing in a park. While lying on the grass and directing their eyes to the sky, they dare to say "I love you" for the first time. Even though their emotions seem to run deep, they are still hesitant and respectful about their physical bond only going as far as kissing and not exploring each other's bodies like other high schoolers would try to. Danny invites Lady Bird one day to meet his grandmother and it turns out she owns one of the Villas that were admired in the beginning. This gives Lady Bird a glimpse into her dream life that could be.

After their first successful theatre performance, the students celebrate and go to a diner. Since Lady Bird can't stand to queue at the women's toilet, she goes to the men's unafraid. As she opens the door to one of the stalls, she catches Danny kissing another boy from the theatre group. This ends her first relationship abruptly, leaving her sobbing on the floor.

At her first job, Lady Bird encounters another boy who catches her interest. He's a singer. Lady Bird starts to distance herself from her best friend Julie in order to befriend a popular girl by acting cool and nonchalant. Through her she gets introduced to an edgy group of teenagers, one of which is her new crush, Kyle.

One day Danny comes to Lady Bird's workplace and pleads her desperately to not tell anyone that he's gay. He feels ashamed and deeply scared of his religious family. As he falls into her arms crying, she empathizes, promises to never tell a soul and assuring him he will be okay while maintaining eye contact.

At a house party, the singer Kyle and Lady Bird meet again. They are drawn to each other leading them to start making out passionately, during which they both confess to be virgins. Lady Bird starts to think about having her first time but does not act on it that night. At a school assembly that strongly advises against abortion Lady Bird challenges the lecturer, dares to speak out in front of the whole school and gets suspended for a rude comment. This makes her mother furious, feeling like her daughter does not appreciate the life she granted her, they fight and both throw insults at each other's faces, that they later wish they could take back.

The next time she meets up with Kyle she decides she is ready for her first time. Taking the lead, she is left unsatisfied and confused by the quick and disappointing

experience. Afterwards, Kyle tells her without looking in her eyes, that he has actually slept with other people and lied to her, breaking her trust and making her feel used by the boy. She cannot seem to let go of him however, as she still plans to go to prom with him. In the car ride Lady Bird realizes that Kyle and his friends are from another world and have different desires than her. She leaves them and stops by Julie's apartment, who did not have anyone to go to the dance with. The two best friends reconnect and decide to be each other's Prom date. They have a great time dancing, singing and taking photos. Later, they catch each other up on their lives and realize they have different plans after school since Julie will not go to college after graduation. Lady Bird celebrates the end of school at a family gathering, where her mom finds out that she has actually applied to an East Coast school and plans on leaving. This pushes a wedge even further into their already chipped mother-daughter relationship.

After getting accepted to her dream college, her mother gives her the silent treatment, even at the airport drop off she does not regard her daughter with a look to say goodbye. She just drives off but soon changes her mind and turns around again, though not catching her daughter anymore.

Living on her own is not as spectacular and easy as Lady Bird thought. Running into trouble and loneliness she finds short solace walking into a church which encourages her to call her mother. In this phone call she confesses to missing her hometown Sacramento and enjoying driving around the familiar neighborhoods. A montage of her in the car while watching how the road turns is match cut to the same image of her mom highlighting their similarities despite their obstacles. The movie concludes with Lady Bird saying "I love you, thank you" to her mom.

3.2.2 Little Women (2019)

Little Women is a period drama written and directed by Greta Gerwig, filmed by Yorick Le Saux and based on the 1868 book by Louisa May Alcott. The story is told through time jumps of a gap spanning 7 years and deals with sisterhood, love, friendship, grief and hardship.

The film opens with a young woman, Jo, who is trying to get her short story published. She proposes her work to an editor who cuts most of it away to make it even shorter but still agrees to publish it. He gives her advice for her next book, to conclude her story with a woman either getting married or dying, that is what sells best.

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Next, the audience is introduced to her other sisters, Amy is a painter currently living in Europe with their Aunt Marsh, Meg is a wife and mother of two girls with a husband who does not earn very much and Beth, who is ill with scarlet fever which is worsening every day.

The film flashes back to a party 7 years ago at which Jo meets Laurie for the first time. The two of them connect instantly with ease, having their awkwardness in common they start dancing wild and freely outside. The camera follows them as they spin around the house, forgetting their surroundings and living in the moment until they get interrupted by Jo's sister Meg. Laurie then offers to give them a ride home.

Later, Jo meets a professor who critiques her writing. After hearing his very blunt feedback of him just saying her work is bad, Jo goes off on him and storms out angrily, claiming she does not want his opinion or ever want to talk to him again.

Another flashback shows the sisters on Christmas morning preparing breakfast. Their mom, upon joining them, urges them to donate the prepared food to a single mother living in the woods with her starving children. The women make their way and surprise the family with nourishment filling the little kids' eyes with wonder and astonishment at the gifts they bring. They immediately tuck into the food, never having seen anything like this. When they arrive back home, the four women receive a surprise themselves by their neighbor Mr. Laurence, Laurie's grandfather, who gifted them his food after seeing them venturing into the woods.

Still in the flashback, their Aunt March is often read to by Jo, who hopes that she can one day come accompany her in her travels to Europe. Amy gets jealous after Jo, Meg and Laurie attend the theater. As Revenge, Amy finds Jo's writing that she's currently working on and decides to burn it in the fire pit. After coming home, Jo cannot find her unfinished novel and learns what has happened to it. Furious, she starts to ignore Amy and proceeds to the lake alone with Laurie to skate on the ice. Having been promised to be able to join, Amy follows them onto the ice but gets unlucky and crashes into the freezing cold water. Laurie and Jo manage to save her which lets feelings of guilt and forgiveness arise in Jo.

In the past, Beth gets invited to the neighbor's house and is allowed to play on his grand piano. The camera moves away from Beth as she plays, traveling out of the room and panning to the right just as Mr. Laurence comes down the stairs upon hearing the music. He sits down on the steps to really appreciate what he is hearing, not daring to interrupt the girl in her play, emotional and teary eyed just by the sound of the piano being played again.

In the present, Amy wants to give up her painting because she thinks she isn't good enough. While arguing with Laurie about whether or not she will marry the wealthy Fred, she states that women in their time cannot earn money themselves and thus, have to rely and be dependent on a man in financial business. This is why she thinks about marrying Fred even though she does not love him, for her it is a business decision which she makes clear by an assertive walk towards Laurie and the camera, finishing her statement in a close-up looking away once she hears Fred outside. A while later Laurie once again urges her not to marry him and this time asking her to take him instead. Despite having been in love with Laurie since they met, Amy turns him down not wanting to be the second option after Jo. This gets revealed later on, in an emotional flashback between Jo and Laurie where he confesses his love but she does not believe in nor want love.

Adding to the rivalry between Amy and Jo, it is Amy who gets selected by their Aunt to go to Europe. This way, with fate and being unlucky, they take each other's biggest dreams.

While Beth could recover in the past, her sickness in the present is prevalent and cannot be stopped which ultimately leads to her untimely death. Sharing their grief and the news that she rejected Fred, Amy and Laurie find to each other, fall in love and get married. Simultaneously, Jo, deciding she is ready for marriage, wants to settle for Laurie but after finding out about the marriage, she starts writing a novel again. The editor remains indifferent to the story about her and her sister's lives until his daughters get a hold of the pages and demand more of this tale depicting genuine female experiences. Back at the negotiating table like in the beginning, Jo is firmer in her demands this time, not letting the man making a fool out of her. Only agreeing to their deal if she makes the woman getting married at the end of the story, the editor and the writer come to a conclusion, which honors his wish but lets her keep ownership of the copyright to her book. As concurred, she finishes her novel rekindling with the professor she met at the beginning and accepting his proposal. The film ends with Jo looking over the printing and binding of her book "Little Women", gazing upon her written words as they are getting ready to be delivered to interested readers (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Jo watches her book being produced (Gerwig, 2019, 02:09:43)

3.2.3 Barbie (2023)

Barbie is a fantasy comedy film directed by Greta Gerwig and co-written by Greta Gerwig with Noah Baumbach, the Cinematographer is Rodrigo Prieto. The movie follows the world-famous Barbie doll, now as a human, as she discovers herself, her community, the real world and patriarchy.

The film opens to a vast desert landscape inhabited by only young girls who play with baby dolls. A narrator sets the scene and introduces the conflict that young girls do not just want to play and pretend to be mothers, they want to have fun in different ways. One morning, a little girl wakes to the image of a gigantic woman standing still so tall she is blocking the sun. The figure invading the space is shot from a low angle which even further demonstrates her enormity. She is perfectly dressed and introduced by the name Barbie. As the young girls gaze upon the woman, she takes off her sunglasses and winks at the first girl. This starts a revolution of the girls destroying their porcelain dolls.

Next, the viewer is shown a montage of various perfectly styled women who stand in a white abstract space. Through the voiceover, we find out that these are all different kinds of Barbies with different jobs and careers, everything a young girl can aspire and achieve to be, at least in “Barbieland” according to the narrator.

Diving into Barbieland, the audience gets introduced to “Stereotypical Barbie” who wakes up in her all-pink dollhouse waving at every other Barbie neighbor, just seeming to have a perpetual good mood whilst also being perfectly styled. Every

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major job here is taken by a woman like the presidency, the supreme court, pilots and even astronauts.

At the beach we meet Ken and his alternates, the other Kens and Allan. The men seem to play only a minor role as they do not have jobs and exist to just be an acquaintance to a Barbie. Everything seems to be perfect for the women in Barbieland. One gets healed instantly and every day is a party with synchronized choreography and pop music. Stereotypical Barbie is the main focus of attention for the Kens, all of them striving to be recognized by her.

Every day is the best day ever, every night is girls night, that is the motto. However, at the dance party the dream world cracks for the first time as Stereotypical Barbie gets an existential thought about this notion of infinity and how it could all end through death. Suddenly the music halts and everyone stares at her in disbelief for a long moment, the camera also staying on her close-up. Correcting herself by saying she is just dying to dance, the music resumes and the world is dreamlike again.

Barbie's next morning routine is not as perfect as usual and at the beach, after stepping out of her shoes, suddenly her feet go flat which is untypical for a Barbie who normally stand on their tiptoes. The other Barbies inspect her feet and recommend her to go to "Weird Barbie" who might have a solution. She has supposedly been in contact with the real world before and taken substantial consequences from it, sacrificing her perfection. Once there, she is informed about a theory, that one girl who is playing with her in the real world is pushing her feelings and humanity onto Barbie, forcing her to feel them too. To resolve this, she has to venture into the real world.

Ken does not want to feel left out and smuggles himself onto Barbie's car so they have to set off together. A montage of different vehicles designed like 2D theatre stands spits them out at the beach with rollerblades. Now they are in the real world. Barbie is immediately confronted with the judging looks of others at her body and clothes as they drive through Venice Beach. This evokes emotions in her that she has never felt before, like self-consciousness and unease. She even gets groped by a man who she punches back but gets immediately arrested for, the man walks free however.

While Barbie thinks about how to solve her issue, Ken runs off and ends up in the business part of the city where he finds men in all kinds of jobs and careers. This blows his mind and makes him start to think as well. Barbie takes a moment to think and concentrates on finding the child that has been playing with her. In her

head she sees images of a mother and daughter first playing but later discarding a Barbie doll.

Sitting at a bus station next to an older woman, Barbie turns to her and tells her she is beautiful to which the stranger replies "I know". A bit later, Barbie finds the girl from her vision, Sasha, at a school. The teenager confronts her with all of the feminist issues that Barbie has brought up over the years, like unrealistic beauty standards. This overwhelms her and is the start of her existential crisis. As Barbie sits at the school and learns new human emotions, like crying she gets abducted by agents of "Mattel" who are tasked with getting Barbie back into her box. Ken, in the meantime, after having learned of the patriarchy and enjoying men being the center of attention, went back to Barbieland.

While running away from Mattel, Barbie ends up in a kitchen with an older woman. Here she meets Ruth, who shows her the way out. Sasha and her mother Gloria are right outside the building as Barbie sprints out and looks at them. Once she locks eyes with Gloria, she immediately feels a familiar connection, realizing that she is the person connected to her, not the girl. After a few moments of looking at each other, Barbie joins them and takes them to Barbieland, once again taking on the journey is with fake vehicles that reminisce of traditional stage design.

During Barbie's absence, Ken changed Barbieland and introduced patriarchy. Now, the men live in the Barbie dreamhouses which now have the redundant name "Mojo Dojo Casa House". Urging to finally feel recognized and valued, Ken is trying to create Kenland by brainwashing the Barbies, forcing them into submissive roles as servants for the Kens. He also plans to take over the government.

Stereotypical Barbie does not feel pretty anymore and is overwhelmed by all the new different emotions she is feeling, like anxiety. She does not know how to deal with it, which furthers her existential crisis. This moment gets cut through with a voiceover that breaks the fourth wall, noting that directors cannot make this point in their movie when they cast Margot Robbie as Barbie. To try and motivate the Barbies again, Gloria gives a motivational speech, letting out her anger about the contradictory expectations that are put on women in the real world. This leads Barbie to an epiphany, they need to restore the other Barbies, taking them out of their submissive manipulated mindsets. Alongside this, they start to put the Kens against each other by pretending to be their girlfriends. What follows is a scene at the beach where each Ken serenades his girlfriend individually by playing her a song on the guitar. At the height of their song, the Barbies stop watching the Kens, instead looking at their phones or switching to different Kens, making all of them jealous and insecure. This leads to a big fight between the Kens which is depicted

through a humorous musical number as they batte each other with sports equipment.

In the meantime, the Barbies watch this chaos from afar and take over the constitution once more. The men have given up, which leads Ken to an existential crisis, debating if he can exist without Barbie. He tells her he was created for her, “I only exist within the arms of your gaze” to which Barbie replies, “Maybe it’s Barbie... and it’s Ken”, implying they are two individuals, subjects, not linked to each other. Still, Barbie isn't sure in which world she belongs. Ruth, who reveals herself as the original creator of the Barbie dolls, takes her by the hand and leads her into another abstract space. Through a montage of home videos, she shows her honest female experiences of the real world from around the globe. Inspired by these images, Barbie makes use of her agency and transforms herself into a human by firmly concentrating on her inner feelings.

3.3 Detailed cinematographic analysis of significant scenes portraying a female gaze

To figure out, how Céline Sciamma and Greta Gerwig implement camera techniques in order to achieve a look that can be felt as a female gaze, essential scenes for the narrative and the gaze will be selected. These scenes will be thoroughly observed in terms of the applied cinematographic practices and interpreted what feelings and emotions they portray and evoke in the audience as well as how they help to capture the different relationship dynamics between the characters in the film.

Questions that will be asked while watching the movies are:

- What exactly does the camera do in regard to framing, movement, angle of the camera, composition?
- Where do these techniques lead the eyes of the viewers?
- How do these cinematographic choices support the female characters in telling their stories and portraying their emotions, treating them as subjects?
- How does the lighting underline the camera work?
- In what way does the editing dictate a look?
- Does the sound also have an influence on how the female characters are portrayed?

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The following cinematographic techniques will be differentiated:

Camera:

- camera angles: high, low, eye level, slant
- camera movements: tracking, pans, tilts, steady-cam, hand held
- types of shot / framing: extreme close-up, close-up, medium shot, long shot, extreme long shot
- focus / depth of field: blurry, sharp, rack focus
- zoom
- composition: foreground, middle ground, background, rule of thirds, golden ratio
- lighting / creation of mood and atmosphere: daylight, artificial light, practical lighting, ambient light, motivated light, hard light, soft light, key light, fill light, backlight, high key, low key, bounce
- 180 degree rule, shot/reverse shot
- lines: horizontal lines, vertical lines, diagonal lines
- mise en scène: setting, lighting, costuming and acting
- color
- actor movement, blocking

Editing:

- cut, fade, dissolve, jump cut, match cut
- pacing, rhythm, montage, continuity, crosscutting (parallel editing)
- trope (common convention), motif (repeated, can be sound, camera technique, rhetorical)

Sound:

- dialogue, direct, indirect, subtext, voiceover (=imposed on the scene), tone, inflection
- music, score, background music, source music
- sound effects, ambient, foley, special effects, diegetic, contrapuntal sound

3.3.1 Swim practice scene - “Water Lilies” (Sciamma, 2007)

A significant scene of the movie *Water Lilies* is the first time Marie is invited to watch the synchronized swimming practice. Floriane not just lets her into the establishment of the swimming pool, she takes her into the locker room and

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ultimately into the swimming pool, letting her dive into her world and observe from within.

The scene starts at timecode 00:18:01 with a medium shot of the group of girls in the water going through their rehearsed movements. The camera stays on their faces for a while panning to the left and back to Floriane who is in the middle giving out the verbal commands. When the eyes of the girls drift to the left of the camera, Floriane follows their gazes and starts swimming towards the camera which moves with her through the water. Cutting to a long shot of the pool with Marie standing in the left third of the frame having her back turned to the camera, Floriane's head appears from the water. While Marie bends down to her, Floriane invites her and this way also the audience to get into the water, claiming that she will see better (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Floriane invites Marie to watch (Sciamma, 2017, 00:18:39)

The next image is a close-up on Marie's feet timidly stepping down the ladder off the pool which slowly reveals her face as she goes further into the water, submerging herself in Floriane's world. Meanwhile, the girls have started to train which we can see in the next image similar to the first frame also from above the water. Then, Marie decides to take an even closer look and dive under. She opens her eyes in a close-up (Figure 15). With a wide-eyed gaze she watches as the camera cuts to a pov medium long shot of the bodies of the girls but this time underwater, showing off their synchronized leg movements which seem abstract without their heads (Figure 16).



Figure 15: Marie dove underwater to gaze (Sciamma, 2007, 00:19:12)

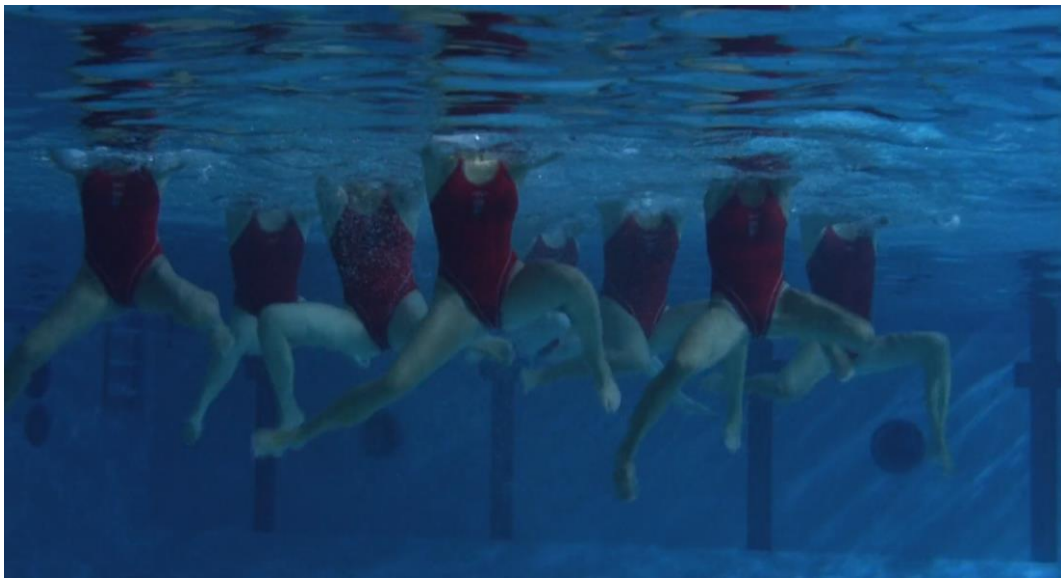


Figure 16: The gazed upon abstract bodies of the synchro swim girls underwater (Sciamma, 2007, 00:19:20)

Even though they do dive under while they perform, they are so concentrated that they do not take note of Marie in the water as she starts to swim towards them through her fascination. Various medium long and medium shots of the performers underwater are obstructed by Marie swimming in front of the camera lens from right to left while she observes the action and the dance. Through various cuts, the camera gets closer to the bodies of the girls but never picks out one individually. The scene ends with a long shot of all of the girls fully submerged in the water now

freely swimming around, not synchronizing anymore, while Marie is nowhere to be seen. During the whole scene there is no soundtrack, just the ambient sound of water moving and dampened underwater noises.

3.3.2 Football scene – “Tomboy” (Sciamma, 2011)

A telling scene of the gender envy Laure feels in *Tomboy* is the first time she sees the neighborhood boys playing football.

Beginning at 00:20:56, the scene opens with an extreme long shot of a football field with a couple of boys currently playing a game. The film cuts to a medium long shot of Laure and Lisa standing next to each other watching from the sidelines. Multiple long shots of the kids following the ball (Figure 17) are cut back and forth with a close-up on Laure's face. After an image of a boy taking of his shirt, we cut back to her looking longingly from afar, not daring to interfere or participate but internally wishing to (Figure 18).



Figure 17: Boys playing football (Sciamma, 2011, 00:21:47)



Figure 18: Laure looking at the boys and wanting to play too (Sciamma, 2011, 00:21:29)

After a boy shoots and misses, we once again see Laura and Lisa in a medium long shot having a conversation. Laure claims she does not want to play and likes to just watch. Lisa says she does too but that the others also do not want her to play. Once again, the action is edited rather rapidly, showing boys spitting on the ground and running around in different shots and ultimately scoring a goal. As the boys celebrate on the field, they start looking at Laure and she starts to smile at them, partaking in their joy. One more time we cut to the frame of the two onlookers as now Lisa watches Laure watching the boys. She lets her gaze wander from Laure's head to her toes and back up again and consequently says "You're not like the others" but does not elaborate further, seemingly in her own thought process (Figure 19).



Figure 19: Lisa gazes over Laure's body (Sciamma, 2011, 00:22:14)

Still in the same shot, Laure's smile fades as she keeps on looking at the players. Another image of a shirtless boy who looks directly with skepticism at Laure as he goes by (Figure 20), later spitting on the ground again.



Figure 20: One of the boys returns the gaze (Sciamma, 2011, 00:22:25)

The young girl can't seem to take her eyes off of this display of boyhood that she seems to desire, which the viewer sees in her persistent glances. The scene now ends on the first close-up of Lisa still looking at the presumed Mickaël, letting her eyes wander up and down one more time.

3.3.3 Job quitting scene – Girlhood (Sciamma, 2014)

A meaningful scene in *Girlhood* takes place at the end of the movie at a party in the apartment building of Marieme's boss. It shows Marieme finally taking control of her life and not letting him dictate her around any longer.

Starting at 01:40:20, the camera follows Marieme up the stairs to a dimly lit rooftop at night. In a medium long she is facing the camera shot while it is moving back, revealing her surroundings while she looks around. Once we cut to a close-up of some party guests laughing, to then go back to the tracking shot which stops on a close-up of Marieme as she turns. She notices two men in a long shot looking and talking about her. Cutting back to the teenager in a medium close-up she gazes solemnly on to the ground (Figure 21).



Figure 21: Marieme gazes on the ground (Sciamma, 2014, 01:41:27)

This image is cross cut with close-ups of faces having a good time, highlighting her displacement in this world, which she also realizes in this moment. Stepping into the frame and taking her out of the thoughts in her mind is Monica, a girl from her gang. She takes her hand and they start walking towards the camera which moves with them, capturing their tentative stolen glances at each other. The camera stays on them for a while as they embrace and start to sway to the music, inviting the audience to feel this experience in real time. The low key lighting of the whole scene is very dark with only a bit of orange key and blue back light on the characters.

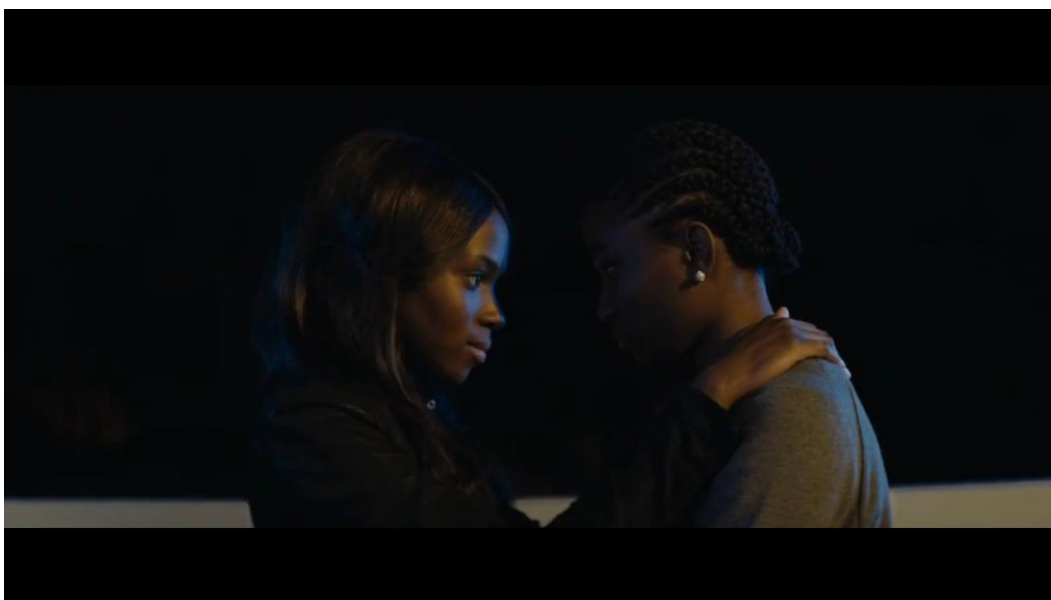


Figure 22: Marieme and Monica dance (Sciamma, 2014, 01:42:03)

Suddenly, a jump cut to a slightly closer shot of them facing each other breaks the moment only to seconds later be completely interrupted by Marieme's boss entering the frame from the right. He puts his head on her shoulder and holds her waist, claiming her and shooing the other girl away, who swiftly leaves the frame.

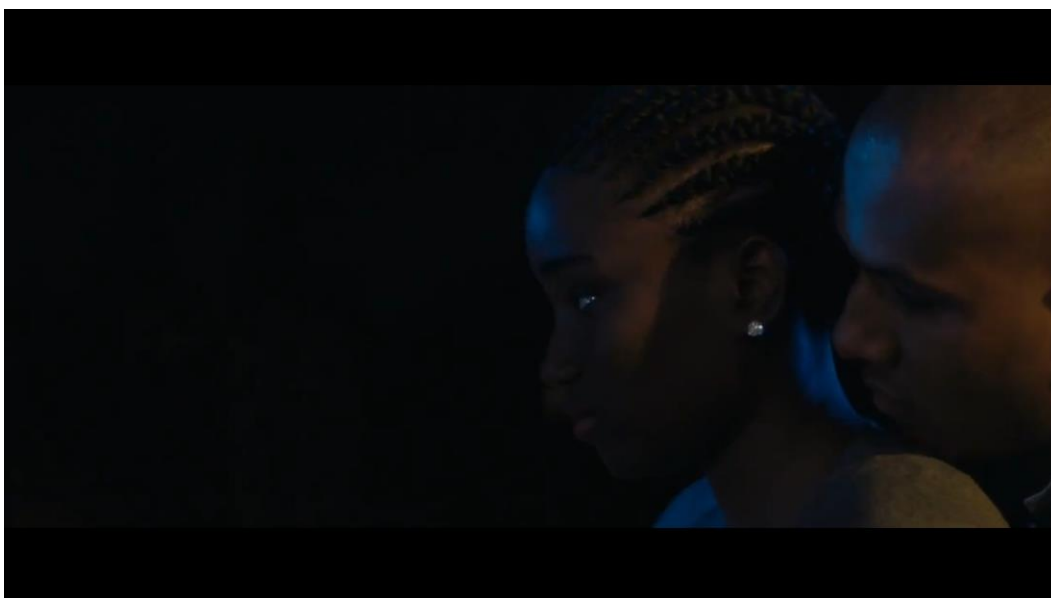


Figure 23: Marieme's boss enters the frame (Sciamma, 2014, 01:43:05)

Marieme turns around and stands stiff, which does not bode well with the man. He tells her to relax to which she pushes him out of frame. The boss comes back more

forceful and tries to kiss her, which she immediately denies and pushes him again. This angers him and he shouts she needs to do what he tells her to. Showing resilience and no fear, she slaps him in the face which renders him furious. The situation escalates until the men who previously gossiped about her arrive to break them up. It is then that the first cut since that previous jump cut happens, everything up until here occurred in real time in a medium shot. We now see him still yelling at her in a medium long shot, after which the film cuts back to her in the same shot as when the dance took place, but now she is looking frightened and intimidated. The scene ends with her running off to the left, having realized that this environment is dangerous for her and actively choosing to leave.

3.3.4 Who am I looking at? Scene – Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Sciamma, 2019)

A memorable scene in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* happens while Marianne paints the portrait for the second time and Héloïse poses for her.

Starting at 01:03:39 on the easel, we see the already finished painted face of Héloïse. Then a cut to Marianne critically looking at her work, obviously not satisfied that she cannot capture Héloïse's smile (Figure 24). A medium shot of Héloïse (Figure 25) sitting stiffly in a green dress opposite of the work station arguing that anger always comes to the forefront, to which Marianne replies in a medium close-up "Definitely with you".



Figure 24: Close-up on Marianne at her easel (Sciamma, 2019, 01:03:53)



Figure 25: Medium shot of Héloïse sitting (Sciamma, 2019, 01:03:54)

Back at Héloïse we see her swallow, look down hurt by the words and put her on her face. Mariannes recognizes this movement and comments on it. She further lists other quirks she does remembering them from watching Héloïse all day to paint. During this explanation, the image cuts back and forth in a shot reverse shot as Héloïse listens and gets visibly annoyed until Marianne ends with admitting she would not want to be in Héloïse's shoes. The woman replies claiming that they are though and invites her to join her. The camera stays on Héloïse in a medium long shot as she has to ask a second time. Only then Marianne starts to move and enters the frame hesitantly from the right side to stand next to Héloïse, who calls the painter to come even closer and turn her eyes to the easel. With the words "When you look at me, who am I looking at?" from Héloïse, the camera pushes in as she then starts to list things she noticed about Marianne. She looks back in shock, never having considered that she is also being looked at while painting. Enticed, she gazes at Héloïse and glances between her eyes and her lips. The other woman doing so too (Figure 26).



Figure 26: Héloïse and Marianne gaze at each other (Sciamma, 2019, 01:05:50)

Not being able to stand this tension for long, Marianne retreats and walks out of frame back to where she came from. At the same time, the camera comes even closer to Héloïse, ending in a close-up on her as she follows Marianne with her eyes (Figure 27). The scene closes with a jarring cut back to a long shot of Marianne back at her easel, feeling distraught, trying to find back into her painting (Figure 28).

During this conversation, the camera visibly switches the roles of the two women. Whereas first Héloïse is captured as a whole, sitting there to be looked at thoroughly by Marianne, in the end, Marianne is the one being filmed from head to toe. This shows the painter in an unfamiliar and vulnerable position, having given up the role of subject who dictates the look, to being the object of someone else's gaze for the first time.



Figure 27: Héloïse now in the close-up (Sciamma, 2019, 01:06:15)



Figure 28: Marianne now in a long shot (Sciamma, 2019, 01:06:18)

3.3.5 Bed time scene - Petite Maman (Sciamma, 2021)

A haunting scene from *Petite Maman* is when Nelly wakes up in the middle of the night to grab herself something to drink and finds her mother restless on the couch.

The scene starts at 00:14:07 with a close-up on the side profile of the little girl Nelly, as she grabs and drinks a glass of water. After finishing her drink, the girl

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looks to her left. Cutting to a long shot of the empty dark kitchen only lit by the moonlight coming in from the window, we switch to a medium tracking shot of the girl walking as she discovers her mother resting on the couch (Figure 29). Displayed in a long shot, Nelly immediately and without hesitation goes over, places the glass on the floor next to the couch and joins her mom under the duvet on the couch in a slightly angled from above close-up.



Figure 29: Nelly approaches her mom on the couch (Sciamma, 2021, 00:14:46)

Lying there for a few moments not facing each other, Nelly initiates conversation by turning around and looking at her mother (Figure 30).



Figure 30: Nelly and her mother looking at each other (Sciamma, 2021, 00:15:36)

She admits that she is sad about the passing of her grandmother, especially because she did not say a proper goodbye like she would have wanted to if she knew that her grandmother would leave forever. Her mother claims that to her it sounded like a good goodbye to which the girl expresses that it was not good enough for a last goodbye. Both of them come to the conclusion that you can never say the right goodbye because you do not know when it is going to be the last one.

Raising up, a movement that the camera follows after having stayed the same for the whole duration of the conversation, Nelly also gets up leaving them in a medium close-up sitting on the couch. The mom asks how Nelly would have liked to said goodbye her grandmother. Nellie goes in for a strong and intense hug and just says "Goodbye" (Figure 31).



Figure 31: The mother comforting Nelly (Sciamma, 2021, 00:16:07)

Even though it sounds like all of the greetings that she does in the caretaking home, this one seems to carry a lot more meaning with it. The film lets this genuine moment play out for a bit before cutting to a long shot of the couch with a time jump. Now by day, the sofa is only inhabited by the little girl, the mother nowhere to be seen (Figure 32).



Figure 32: Nelly on the sofa alone (Sciamma, 2021, 00:16:13)

This was the last time the girl will see her mother as an adult until the end of the film, which gives the repeated goodbye for her passed grandmother another meaning, as it is now also addressed to her mother unbeknownst to Nelly.

3.3.6 Dressing room scene - Lady Bird (Gerwig, 2017)

A telling scene in Lady Bird is when the mother and daughter go prom dress shopping and the mom critiques the dresses and consequentially, also Lady Bird and her body.

Starting at 01:06:30 with a medium long shot showing Lady Bird's mother holding a few dresses and leaning against the door of the dressing room stalls. She starts talking through one of the doors as the film cuts to a medium shot of her. She watches as Lady Bird comes out in a new blue strapless dress. As soon as her daughter walks out, the mother, called Marion, gazes up and down her body with a judgmental frown, having to look out of the frame since the girl went closer to the mirror (Figure 33).



Figure 33: Lady Bird's mom looking judgementally (Gerwig, 2017, 01:06:50)

As we cut back to the first shot, the audience sees the dress for the first time fully from the back and partially from the front through the mirror. The viewer can now build their own opinion. Jumping perspectives to a more medium shot as Lady Bird admits to having broken up with Kyle, she fumbles around with the dress, coming to the conclusion that it is too tight, so she goes to change. Back at the closer look at the mom, she makes a comment on how the girl should not have eaten that

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much then. Claiming her mom will give her an eating disorder and then subsequently quietly wishing for one, the mom is left to look perplex. The next dress is introduced in the long shot again. This time, the viewer immediately sees the change in body language and facial expression on Lady Bird who appears to really like the dress, immediately expressing “I love it” to which the mom replies, “Is it too pink?” after another look up and down (Figure 34).



Figure 34: Lady Bird lover her dress (Gerwig, 2017, 01:07:28)

Lady Bird turns around upset and walks back into the fitting room without a word. Only when the door is closed does she utter her disappointment over her mom not having anything nice to say. Cutting to the medium shot of the mother, Lady Bird voices “I wish that you liked me” to which the mom answer with a defeated look “Of course I love you”. The girl comes out again with a somber look and we see her in a medium shot as she asks “But do you like me?”. Marion takes a long pause in the reverse shot, clearly at a loss for words to then ultimately state “I want you to be the very best version of yourself that you can be”.

Her daughter doubts with a crushed look, struggling to look her mother in the eyes, “What if this is the best version?”. Her mom replies nonverbally with a questioning look and a tilt of the head leading to Lady Bird going back into the room. Marion gets closer to the door, but ultimately does not respond.

In this scene, the changing room acts as a visual barrier, encapsulating Lady Bird and shielding her from her mothers and the viewers judging looks. The camera is not let into this small world, making it her safe space to come out of when she feels

ready. When she is outside, she gets looked at from all angles, her mother and the camera from behind and the side. The mirror in front of her gives an additional glimpse at her body. This scene highlights the stiff mother-daughter relationship with a stiff and simple framing only consisting of three perspectives.

3.3.7 From Laurie to Friedrich scene - Little Women (Gerwig, 2019)

A noticeable scene in *Little Women* is the switch from a flashback to the present, after Laurie brings home the girls from a party.

The scene starts at 17:44 with a medium wide to long shot as Laurie leaves the estate of the Marches walking away from the camera. He turns around, taking another look at the big house, which is highlighted by an extreme long shot of the villa in the dark at night, only the windows letting out an orange glow. A close-up on the top centered window reveals the person inside. It is Jo going through her writing notes (Figure 35).



Figure 35: Jo in the past (Gerwig, 2019, p. 00:17:54)

A cut back to Laurie has him looking up and starting to smile, revealing his developing feelings for the girl. The next shot is a similar image of a window in the dark, only a dim yellow light emanating from the glass (Figure 37). The viewer can see Jo once again, as she sits down at her desk, starting to write.



Figure 36: Laurie looks at Jo's window (Gerwig, 2019, p. 00:17:58)



Figure 37: Jo in the present (Gerwig, 2019, p. 00:18:04)

Jumping back, the framing now holds the whole apartment building and parts of the city, uncovering that we leaped into the present to Jo's current living space. The audience gets invited into her room, now watching her in a medium long shot from behind, writing still. The camera then goes to a close-up of her concentrated face, following a detailed shot on her hands as they put words to the paper. With a cut, Jo now sits on the floor in a medium shot showing her side profile and her

hands which are starting to cramp from all the writing. Shaken out of her trance through a knock, Jo looks to the camera and gets up. Opening her front door and this way also opening the frame to the viewer since the camera is behind the door, she bends down as the image moves as well to find books on the floor. Jo runs outside into the hallway, the camera still goes with her and looks down the staircase for her, but it seems she just missed the mysterious guest. In a close-up she opens the letter attached to the gift which prompts a cut to the professor Friedrich in a medium long shot addressing Jo directly by staring into the lens of the camera. He pleads to be able to critique her writing and this way, being allowed into her fictional world and real world. A medium shot of Jo smiling while carefully reading his note leads to assume that he will be granted his wish. The scene concludes with him speaking to the camera and saying "Yours, Friedrich".

3.3.1 Becoming human scene - Barbie (Gerwig, 2023)

A striking scene in Barbie is at the end of the film, after exploring and questioning her own identity, Barbie decides to become human and crosses over into the real world forever.

Starting at 01:40:07, we see "Stereotypical Barbie" in a medium shot facing the camera as she questions her existence and asks how her story should end. Looking at Gloria and Sasha for a brief moment, she claims that she does not think she has an ending. Suddenly, a voice is heard saying that this was always the point. As we cut to a long shot showing all of the people in Barbieland, the Barbies, Kens and people from Mattel look around searching for the voice. The crowd parts to reveal Ruth walking towards the camera, towards Barbie. As she stops, we cut back to the medium shot of Barbie who approaches Ruth after she recognizes her from her previous scene in the Mattel headquarters. The camera pulls out as Barbie walks towards it. Once she stands in front of Ruth, we cut back to the woman as she reveals her full name as Ruth Handler, the inventor of Barbie. The next frames are long and medium shots of the crowd gasping and looking in awe. Ruth jokes that they shouldn't be surprised that it is her and that she does not look like Barbie because according to her, no one looks like Barbie except Barbie. As we face her again, the blonde replies that she does not actually feel like Barbie anymore. Cutting back to Ruth, she stretches her hand out and invites Barbie to come with her. She takes up the offer and walks with her away from the camera. Once again images of the bystanders are shown as they start to wave sentimentally. Between them Gloria and Sasha as well as Ken who says thank you to Barbie. Leaving Barbieland and its colorful but mainly pink setting with an extreme long shot overlooking all of the residents of Barbieland, this shot is

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dissolved into an extreme long shot of Barbie and Ruth in an unfamiliar primarily white space as they walk towards the camera stopping at a medium shot (Figure 38).



Figure 38: Dissolve from Barbieland to the white room (Gerwig, 2023, p. 01:41:41)

The two women discuss Barbie's feelings about her identity. While Barbie is unsure of herself, Ruth tries to strengthen her confidence by showing her how she helped to save Barbieland and reconnect a mother daughter bond. Barbie says that maybe she is not Barbie anymore. Following this, she herself looks surprised while Ruth gazes at her in slight disbelief. They both realize the weight of the statement as the camera cuts from the medium shot to an extreme long shot showing the vast nothingness of this space that is only dominated by a few hues of colored light. After a moment, the camera meets them back in a close-up shot/reverse shot. In this dialogue, Ruth makes sure Barbie understands what it means to be human. That it does not mean that every day will be a great day forever and always. Humans have flaws and humans have an ending.

With a powerful statement, "I want to be a part of the people that make meaning, not the thing that is made", Barbie verbalizes her dream and asks her creator for permission to become human. Ruth says she does not need her permission because she cannot control her. In order to show Barbie the real human experience and prepare her for what she is about to go into, Ruth stretches out her hands. A close-up of her empty hands as Barbie's hands come into the frame, grasping for Ruth is cut to a close-up of Barbie's face as she closes her eyes, then

a cut once more to the immense void of the space as Ruth commands, “Now feel” (Figure 39).



Figure 39: Ruth and Barbie hold hands (Gerwig, 2023, p. 01:44:45)

The viewer can see Barbie start to control her feelings in an extreme close-up on Barbie's mouth as she inhales, another extreme close-up on a heart necklace that she wears, through the camera slightly pushing in from a medium close-up and lastly an extreme close-up of Barbie's right eye opening as a tear streams down. This image is dissolved into a series of home videos showing women in all ages and forms, some mothers, some children, some alone, some with other people, all of them experiencing joy, sadness, laughter, some are celebrating, playing, studying, getting married or just swimming. All these frames are dissolved over pictures of leaves rustling in the wind. This montage is underlined by the theme song of the movie, titled “What was I made for” by Billie Eilish. As the song comes to a close so does the montage which dissolves back to Ruth and Barbie's hands. When Ruth lets go, her hands leave the frame. This is followed by one last cut to Barbie's face. She stands there with open eyes after having seen all of these different emotional female experiences (Figure 40). Through a cut to the familiar extreme long shot, we see that this time Ruth is gone. The scene ends with a fade to white and a dissolve to signify the transition into the real human world, which Barbie now is a part of.



Figure 40: Barbie decides to become human (Gerwig, 2023, p. 01:46:03)

4 Discussion

The start of this thesis was the question on how the female gaze has established itself in contemporary coming-of-age films. Centering around the depiction of a transition from childhood to adulthood, molded by exploration, curiosity, first times, love, friendship, relationships, hardship and many more experiences and challenges, the coming-of-age genre is especially interesting for young people to see themselves represented on screen and feel understood. With this type of movie comes a responsibility for modern filmmakers to show honest and genuine portrayals of women in their films that stray away from the harmful and objectifying images that have dictated cinema for so long. An observation of camera techniques that are used to achieve this was also an aim of this paper.

Academics like bell hooks with her “oppositional gaze” that challenges black female representation as well as Bracha L. Ettinger that counters the phallic gaze are pioneers in the gaze theory. Contemporary film critics like Joey Soloway and Iris Brey are the ones who are at the forefront of the movement now, trying to implement a counterpart to the destructive “male gaze” with their ideas of a “female gaze”. Distinguished through its conscious and active role of the camera, the female gaze focuses on evoking feelings, allowing compassion and giving agency to every kind of character, despite their gender, sexuality, race or class.

The French director and writer Céline Sciamma and the American, director, writer, producer and actress Greta Gerwig were selected in order to compare their different approaches of a female gaze. Both of them specialize in the coming-of-age genre, having all of their directorial work be defined by it.

Céline Sciammas films portray themes like queer and lesbian relationships, female friendships, sisterhood, girlhood, mother-daughter relationships as well as gender identity. Her work primarily features white female characters, with exceptions being the movie “Girlhood” that focuses on black teenagers and “Tomboy” that deals with gender exploration. Sciamma has worked with two different cinematographers over the years, Claire Mathon and Crystel Fournier, both camera women.

What shines through Sciammas work is that she thinks about the gaze in her filmmaking from the start. No look seems accidental, always carrying meaning and desire. This is especially prevalent in “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” which practically celebrates the look which is already given by the narrative of the painter having to watch her subject, constantly gazing upon different parts of the body to recreate it

just right. Through the clever use of framing, she lets the definitions of subject and object fuse, blending together into a dual subjectification of her characters by “returning the gaze”. The two lovers are, up until the end, shown through a feeling lens, culminating in the last frame of Héloïse as she relives their whole emotional journey with her expressions in one continuous shot. “Petite Maman” invites the viewer to see the world through kids’ eyes again. Having the camera on eyelevel with the little girl, the kid dictates the frame, while the adults have to kneel or crouch to take part in the story. The hard work that often lies underneath the surface is shown in “Water Lilies” as Marie first watches the stunning performance of synchronized swimming above water, as intended. Then, however, she takes a closer look, allowing the viewer to come with her and explore the chaotic leg movements necessary to create the art above. In “Girlhood” the female teenagers recognize their own subjectivity. They make difficult decisions, like Marieme escaping from her abusive household, fleeing into an unknown future that can only have a better prospect. Through the subjective camera in “Tomboy”, the yearning glances that Laure casts on the neighborhood boys, wishing to be just like them, are shared by the audience in a feeling of empathy with the curiosity of the young child.

The individual films of Greta Gerwig could not be more different from each other, exploring different eras, timelines and settings. The main themes in her films are sisterhood, mother-daughter relationships, friendship, love, academic aspirations, the patriarchy and religion. So far, she has not made any movies who especially focus on the lives of people with color or other minorities different to gender. Her main focus is critiquing patriarchal notions and female stereotypes. This is most prevalent in her newest film *Barbie*, in which the narrative revolves around two kinds of dominating forces. While the real world in the movie is just like our real world, mostly commanded by men; her fantasy world “Barbieland” is the extreme opposite, showing a community completely lead by women. An unusualness to see and the ultimate form of “returning the gaze”. “*Little women*” stands out through its multiplicity of different female characters with their own aspirations on various walks of life, tied together by one aspect, being family. Jo being the “returner of the gaze” and the one who dictates the action the most for having written the book that gets told through her own narrative and debating her rights at the end of the film, she can be clarified the instigator of the gaze. In the same named movie, *Lady Bird*, while not feeling seen the way she wants to by her peers or parents, evokes a strong “feeling seeing” in the viewers. She is bold, not shying away from public humility or physical pain, she is a force, challenging the audience to see with her.

4 Discussion

A cinematic approach well established in Sciamma's work is the slow pacing. She lets the images speak for themselves, giving the viewer time to gaze upon the characters and their surroundings in real time. Examples of this are the first sexual experience between Marie and Floriane in "Water Lilies", the abortion scene in "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" or the gender reveal scene in "Tomboy". The camera stays on the face of her protagonists even or especially in uncomfortable situations, forcing the audience to partake in the same feeling.

Gerwig is not letting the camera linger so long on one frame, she shows more perspectives in a scene. Her movies are more fast paced, incorporating montages which she used plenty of in "Barbie" like the scenes where the characters travel between the two worlds through various vehicles. Sometimes, Gerwig even uses cuts to disrupt an action like in "Lady Bird" when the teenager gets her cast off. This scene consists of 3 frames and only has a duration of 3 seconds.

Both directors are quite conventional with their framing and camera movement, relying heavily on medium shots, long shots or close-ups, rarely tilting the camera in strange ways. They also share similarities in their use of camera movement, mostly having the camera be still and focused on the characters, only sometimes pushing in or tracking their subjects.

The two women have an understanding on how to portray scenes of physical intimacy, allowing their female characters to explore their sexual identities without exploiting them. Never panning over the conventional fragmented female body parts. Sciamma tricks her viewers in "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" with an extreme close-up of a finger in a skin fold, which could be interpreted different ways at first. By panning up to the kissing faces of the two women, one can recognize it for what it is, an armpit. The French director also finds interesting ways to portray first kisses, like in "Tomboy" where Lisa covers Laure's eyes, obstructing her view to strengthen her own courage. Furthermore, in "Portrait of a Lady on Fire", where mutual consent is visibly given by the two women removing shawls from their mouths before going in for their first kiss.

What both directors have in common is their shared interest in portraying genuine female characters and stressing female subjectivity in their works. Put through Brey's "The Female Gaze Test", both of them pass with flying colors, fulfilling all of the 6 conditions in all movies, except Sciamma in "Tomboy" slightly defies number one in the narrative: "the main protagonist identifies as a woman" (Brey, 2020) for obvious and intentional reasons.

5 Conclusion

The gaze theory is an essential thought process behind modern feminist filmmaking and the “female gaze”. The discussions started in 1975 with Laura Mulvey’s essay around the “male gaze” in which she categorizes and subsequently denounces the objectification of women in classical Hollywood cinema, that happens through the depiction of fragmented body parts and female characters without agency.

As a response to Mulvey’s concept, contrasting theories have emerged over time. Examples of this are bell hooks “oppositional gaze” from 1992 about the critical look black female spectators have on the representation of black female characters and Bracha L. Ettinger’s “matrixial gaze”, also originating in 1992, that argues against a phallic gaze in favor of a look that focuses on shared experiences.

The “female gaze”, even though the name might suggest otherwise, is not a direct reaction to Mulvey. It cannot be achieved through the reversal of the “male gaze” and the objectification of men. It is its own concept, focusing on female subjectivity and agency. Characterized by a camera that empathizes with the protagonists, never depicting women as objects but letting them dictate and control their own image and narrative. Via a subjective insight, the audience is invited to feel as they are seeing and share the emotions of the women on screen. Challenging the audience in its spectatorship, the “female gaze” can also turn the look onto the viewers, making them the receiver of the gaze and showing them what it is like to be looked at, sometimes even breaking the fourth wall.

The title “female gaze” is still being reviewed for its dichotomy to the “male gaze” and the perpetuation of the gender binary by academics, some suggesting a renaming to potentially the “feminine gaze”, “feminist gaze”, “queer gaze” or “trans gaze”. However, due to its prominence, it is still predominantly used to describe the concept of female subjectivity in film.

Céline Sciamma and Greta Gerwig are two prime examples of modern filmmakers implementing a “female gaze”. With their truthful representations of female characters in their films, focusing on topics that are relevant to women all over, like friendship, sisterhood, girlhood, mother-daughter relationships, queer and lesbian relationships, the two directors and writers have made a name for themselves in the coming-of-age genre. Through her use of slow pacing that puts emphasis on showing actions and emotions in real time, Sciamma’s films portray a tender and

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compassionate look at its protagonists. Gerwig's films, typified by more variety in shot design through showing different perspectives in framing as well as frequently using montages, often display bolder, more rebellious women. Aspiring or established filmmakers who want to imitate a similar look to Sciamma and Gerwig, should first check if their film or idea passes the 6 requirements of Brey's "The Female Gaze Test", this gives a good overview of the qualitative female representation in one's work.

The more filmmakers, no matter their gender, consciously follow the notion of the "female gaze" and actively work against exploitative portrayals of women in film, the better and more authentic female, lesbian and queer representation in cinema will become.

Interesting to explore in future research would be to take a concentrated look at the "female gaze" in regards to the representation of women of color. Additionally, quantitative research on the influence and impact the "female gaze" has on women of different sexual identities are worth pursuing.

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