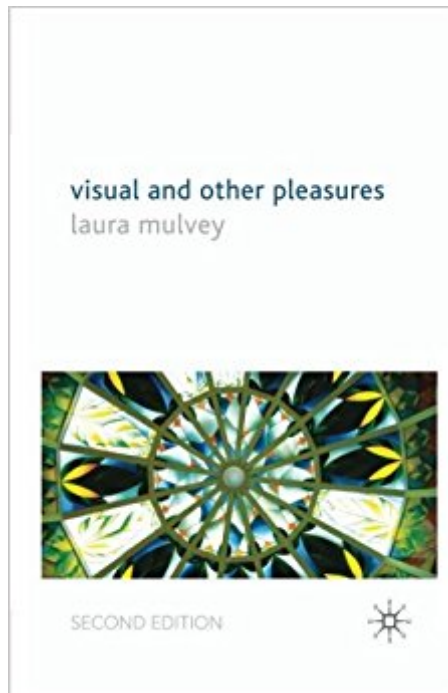




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Visual And Other Pleasures (Language, Discourse, Society)



Synopsis

A new edition of Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking collection of essays, originally published in 1989. In an extensive introduction to this second edition, Mulvey looks back at the historical and personal contexts for her famous article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, and reassesses her theories in the light of new technologies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Laura Mulvey did not invent feminist film criticism, but her short piece "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is a seminal essay, cited more often than almost any other single article on the movies. Mulvey brought psychoanalysis, the experience of pleasure, and the idea of the male gaze into the mainstream of feminist film criticism. *Visual and Other Pleasures* reprints her famous analysis along with other important essays on film melodrama, avant-garde cinema, the Oedipus myth, and directors Douglas Sirk, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Jean-Luc Godard. Unlike many academic critics, Mulvey writes with refreshing clarity. Arguments that in other hands might seem dense and thorny are both comprehensible and enlightening here. --Raphael Shargel --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

'The continuing importance of Mulvey's work is confirmed in this edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures* with its new introduction and final chapter. They provide an account of a personal and

political history of feminism and feminist theory of film and visual culture for which her contribution has been determining.' - Stephen Heath, Professor of English and French Literature and Culture, Jesus College, University of Cambridge, UK 'A lucid and poignant look back at the British film culture of the 1970s and '80s Hollywood and the avant-garde, feminism and psychoanalysis from the present of digital and electronic new spectatorships.' - Teresa de Lauretis, Professor of the History of Consciousness, University of California, Santa Cruz, USA 'Laura Mulvey's Visual and Other Pleasures set a new agenda for all the humanities. Mulvey's new edition is a crucial and fascinating revision and will be read avidly by scholars and students alike.' - Maggie Humm, author of The Dictionary of Feminist Theory, Feminism and Film and Modernist Women and Visual Cultures 'These essays have remained remarkably fresh, not least because they betray a deep love of cinema, even at their most critical. At the same time, they document an important juncture in our history with cinema, as that cinema itself - the cinema of the twentieth century - is being reborn as history.' Miriam Hansen, Ferdinand Schevill Distinguished Service Professor in the Humanities, University of Chicago, USA

The book is an excellent source for an art history major interested in incorporating visuals.
Excellent source to use! Sweet!

Much of the work done over the past 25 years in feminist film theory has been in response to Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which is included in this collection. Many essays, here, expand, refine or modify Mulvey's original polemic, while others introduce new topics in the visual arts. Though "Visual Pleasure" is certainly not the last word in feminist film criticism, it is among the first. As so much work in the field is in response to this single essay, it is a must-read for anyone embarking on feminist film criticism. Though Mulvey's argumentation is weak, the ideas presented, here, gave birth to a fruitful avenue of critical pursuit.

This collection includes Laura Mulvey's bafflingly influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', an article which represents a high water mark in the barking lunacy of psychoanalytically inclined film theory. For Mulvey, 'patriarchy' and 'phallogentrism in all its manifestations' depends upon the image of the 'castrated woman' to give order and meaning to its world: 'Woman's desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it.' The woman's lack of a phallus gives meaning to the man's possession of such, and the power and status it brings. This process is both displayed and reinforced in the

cinema. Cinema, according to Mulvey, affords two forms of pleasure: 'scopophilia', the erotic, voyeuristic pleasure of subjecting others to a 'controlling and curious gaze' and which is associated with the 'libido'; and the 'narcissistic' pleasure of 'identification' with the male protagonist (or the camera's point of view) which Mulvey associates with the 'mirror phase' of Jacques Lacan's crackpot psychology: the moment that the child misrecognises himself in his own reflection, thereby constituting his 'ego'. For Mulvey identification is *always* with the male point of view, even for the female audience, and female characters are always subject to the controlling male gaze. Male protagonists and audiences are active, female characters and spectators are passive. There is no room in Mulvey's ramblings for the pleasures of the female viewer, other than masochism, and no room either for identification across gender, or for identification for gay audiences: the male form cannot be subject to eroticization in the way that the female form can. The female body exists for the pleasure of the male gaze. However, since the female form has no phallus, it is identified with the 'threat' of castration and the spectator resorts to either the sadistic, voyeuristic pleasure in the spectacle of the punishment of women, the bearers of guilt (who, being 'castrated', must have done something to deserve it) or disavowal of the threat of castration through 'fetishism'. This fetishism can take almost any form: extravagant set design, excessive camera movement, musical numbers - just about anything that can't be explained by 'sadistic voyeurism' in fact, meaning that Mulvey can claim to have explained the entire cinema experience with a minimal number of psychoanalytical terms. Since 'pleasure' is identified purely with patriarchal domination, pleasure must be done away with. Mulvey advocates the 'destruction of pleasure' as a 'radical weapon': 'The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked.' The whole article reads like a parody of joyless feminism. If it all sounds like gibberish to you, that's because it is. There isn't a shred of evidence any of the psychodynamic processes involved actually exist and Mulvey offers no attempt to establish that they do. Instead she just regurgitates the work of Freud and Lacan and expects us to take their lunatic theories on trust. The theory is pessimistic, deterministic and also 'essentialist' in that it is trans-historical; it is deeply reactionary as it rests upon a view of a universal, unchangeable human nature. Mulvey's theory takes masculinity as 'normative' in that the feminine as is defined in terms 'deviation' from the masculine (hence 'lack', 'absence', 'otherness'). Her uncritical support for the 'avant'garde' also displays the usual pseudo-left contempt for 'the masses' in upholding the capitalist division of labour which valorises the intellectual labour of the ruling elites over the physical labour of the oppressed; in fact issues of class, 'race' or alternative sexualities which might over-ride simple sexual dichotomies are entirely absent from her work. Psychoanalysis is simply inadequate in dealing with differences other than

those which are sexual. Likewise there is no discussion of 'camp' readings of film. There's no discussion of the *context* in which films are viewed other than the darkness of the cinema, something Mulvey inevitably associates with voyeurism, and the fixed seating which she sees as a 'repression' contributing to identification with the screen image - but are the psychodynamic processes involved in watching a film at the cinema the same as those involved watching a DVD in the more relaxed context of the home? In any case, audiences are often far from 'repressed': witness the cheers, jeers and laughter of the cinema audience. Even if we were to suspend our utter disbelief in psychobabble Mulvey's essay contains much which is demonstrably wrong: In Hitchcock 'the male hero does see precisely what the audience sees' according to Mulvey. However Hitchcock usually employs two strategies to create suspense: situations in which the perceptual points of view of the protagonist and the spectator correspond; and situations in which the viewer holds the privileged position of knowing things that the protagonist *does not*. It's about time this gibberish was cast into the trashcan of history. It is a blight upon both film theory and feminism in general.

Visual and Other Pleasures (Language, Discourse, Society) My God, I could only read about 20 pages of this pretentious nonsense! Are people like Ms Mulvey (or Mulva?) really considered intellectuals by the larger society? Boy, no wonder we're in trouble as a nation. The lunatics are truly running the asylum!

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