

MALE GAZE AND THE HEROINES OF OUR ERA

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Master of Arts

In

Cinema Studies

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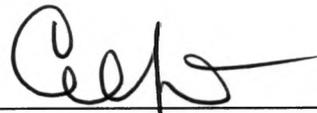
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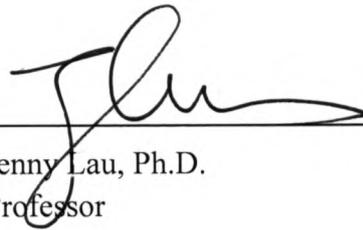
May 2018

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read “Male Gaze and the Heroines of our Era” by Cady Monroe Conaway, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Cinema Studies at San Francisco State University.



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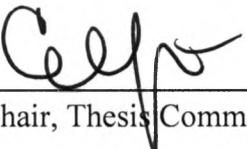
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MALE GAZE AND THE HEROINES OF OUR ERA

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San Francisco, California
2018

Laura Mulvey defines the objectification of women in cinema through the cinematic apparatus as 'the male gaze.' Since publication, Mulvey's theories have been highly debated and revised, including by Mulvey herself. This long theoretical discussion is continuously relevant in our discussions of the representation of women on screen in Hollywood. With the addition of Michel Foucault's theories on power and resistance, I challenge Mulvey's original assertion that independent feminist cinema is the location of a cinema free of the male gaze. Through an in-depth analysis of Mulvey's original work and various revision to her theory, I will approach Patty Jenkins' 2017 film *Wonder Woman* as a change to the dominant cinematic apparatus that creates the male gaze. Through the subversion of the trope of the spectacle, Jenkins presents to us a world on screen without the male gaze, inviting further changes in the dominant Hollywood film world for more accurate and authentic, non-objectifying representations of women.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

5-17-18
Date

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INTRODUCTION

From the massive franchise of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, with a grand total of twenty films released between 2008 and the end of 2018, to the eleven X-Men films 20th Century Fox has produced, superhero films guarantee a box office hit. Despite the assumed success of any film falling into the superhero genre, only one woman-superhero film has been released in the past decade. The apparent argument behind this is that woman-superhero films won't attract male audiences and won't make as much money because women also don't go to superhero movies, as "young men are the audience," despite statistics showing that women typically make up around half of movie-goers (Moloney). But one superheroine proved these arguments false. Released in 2017 and directed by Patty Jenkins, director and screenwriter of the critically acclaimed 2003 film *Monster* starring Charlize Theron, *Wonder Woman* stars Gal Gadot as the title character. The film's opening weekend grossed over one hundred million dollars, with a total domestic gross of over four hundred million, and worldwide eight hundred million dollars ("Wonder Woman (2017)").

These statistics place the film above all three *Iron Man*, all three *Captain America*, all six *Spiderman*, and every *Superman* film made. Domestically, *Wonder Woman* ranks number seven (of one hundred) in lifetime gross in theaters, beaten by, in order, *Black Panther* (2018), *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *The Dark Knight*

Rises (2012) (“Genres – Superhero”). It is also important to note that the highest domestic grossing superhero movie is *Black Panther*, making the most successful superhero movie one with a black man as the lead. These statistics show that women and people of color are just as strong, if not a stronger box office draw than white men who all fit a cookie-cutter mold. But the studios aren’t listening. They continue to make films that focus on white male leads. Why?

When asked in a 2014 interview about female-lead superhero movies, Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige said that “it comes down to timing,” a purposefully vague way of saying, *not now* (Huver). “We find ourselves in the very strange position of managing more franchises than most people have — which is a very, very good thing and we don’t take for granted, but is a challenging thing” Feige told Scott Huver of Comic Book Resources. “You may notice from those release dates, we have three for 2017. And that’s because just the timing worked on what was sort of gearing up. But it does mean you have to put one franchise on hold for three or four years in order to introduce a new one?” (Huver). While it is true that Marvel Studios has four major franchises—*Captain America*, *Iron Man*, *Thor*, and *Guardians of the Galaxy*—not including the team uniting franchise, *The Avengers*, *Iron Man* had, at this time, finished its three movie run. *Thor* and *Captain America* had one more movie each to their individual franchises, *Guardians of the Galaxy* had a sequel, and the massive culminating project of *Avengers: Infinity Wars* that ties together all the separate franchises for one final showdown was in pre-production.

But Marvel Studios *did* have time to fit in *four* new franchises. Peter Parker was introduced in the third chapter of *Captain America*, 2016's *Civil War*, and he got his own movie in the summer of 2017 with *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. We also had *Ant-Man* (2015) introduce a new character, Scott Lang, Ant-Man. Doctor Stephen Strange had a cameo in Chris Hemsworth's last independent hero film, *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), after his origin story *Dr. Strange* (2016). Finally, there was the outstandingly successful *Black Panther* (2018) that follows the story of the first black superhero with his own franchise, T'Challa, King of Wakanda, the Black Panther. How, then, was there no time to fit in a more diverse group of characters? ¹

Prior to the introduction of Scarlett Johansson as Natasha Romanoff, the Black Widow, in *Iron Man 2* (2010), the only women in these films were girlfriends or love interests: Gwyneth Paltrow as Pepper Potts, the secretary turned CEO turned girlfriend of Tony Stark; Natalie Portman as Jane Foster, astrophysicist and love interest of Thor; and Hayley Atwell as Peggy Carter, MI6 spy and love interest of Captain America. Of the three, Paltrow went on to reprise her role five times after her initial performance, Portman only once more. Atwell kept Peggy Carter alive in the television series *Agent Carter*, which would grow the character into a fan favorite, but was cancelled after two seasons. While these women are all powerful, successful, and great role models, that is all 'bonus,' as their main role in the films is that of the love interest. Black Widow was joined by villain-turned-teammate Wanda Maximoff, the Scarlet Witch, portrayed by Elizabeth Olsen in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Captain America: Civil War*. *Guardians of the*

Galaxy also brought us the green-skinned Gamora, played by Latina Zoe Saldana. Even these heroines have been turned into love interests; Black Widow for the Hulk, Scarlet Witch for the cyborg Vision, portrayed by Paul Bettany, and Gamora for Peter Quill, Chris Pratt. *Black Panther* brought us more developed women in the MCU, with the technological genius in Princess Shuri, T'Challa's sister played by Letitia Wright, warrior-spy Nakia played by Lupita Nyong'o, and the Dora Milaje, the all-female elite warriors that serve the King of Wakanda, led by Danai Gurira as Okoye.ⁱⁱ

On the other end of the competitive comic scene is the DC Universe, best-known for its big three—Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. Superman and Batman have each seen remake after remake, star after star, with Wonder Woman relegated to television film (*Wonder Woman* 1974), and television series (*Wonder Woman* 1975-1979) status until Gal Gadot's introduction as the character in *Batman vs Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016). Meanwhile, Batman has been played by six actors on the big screen since the 1960s—Adam West, Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer, George Clooney, Christian Bale, and now Ben Affleck—Keaton, Kilmer, and Clooney all within an eight year span. Superman has had five major stars, Kirk Alyn in 1948 and 1950, George Reeves in '51, Christopher Reeve (by far the most well-known with four movies from 1978 to 1987), Brandon Routh for a brief stint in 2006, and finally Henry Cavill with a much darker take on Superman in *Man of Steel*, *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, and for the last act of *Justice League*. This disparity between women leads and men only highlights the need for more diversity in the superhero genre. It is unnecessary to focus

only on the white men, especially so many movies of the same character over such a short span of time.

2017 showed a marked improvement in superheroines on screen with Patty Jenkins' *Wonder Woman*, an origin story set in World War I that shows Diana's evolution from the only child on the Amazon-haven Themyscira, to wide-eyed innocence in 1918 London, to determined warrior in No-Man's Land, to victorious goddess with a renewed faith in humanity. DC is quite a bit ahead of Marvel in terms of diverse representation on the big screen. To compare franchises, it is easiest to pit their two "teams" against each other, Marvel's Avengers and DC's Justice League. Marvel sports five white men—Tony Stark/Iron Man, Steve Rogers/Captain America, Thor, Clint Barton/Hawkeye, and Bruce Banner/Hulk—and only one white woman, Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow. While *Justice League* also only has one woman, there are two men of color, Jason Momoa as a Polynesian Aquaman—a move away from the blond haired, blue eyed Aquaman of the comics, and Ray Fisher as the young black man who has robotic prosthetics covering more than ninety percent of his body, Cyborg.ⁱⁱⁱ

But DC's line up is not only more diverse than Marvel's, they have also given a woman a stand-alone film before Marvel, who has had significantly more opportunities, with five years of superhero films released before DC's 2013 *Man of Steel*. And while Marvel is releasing *Captain Marvel*, its first woman-lead superhero film in 2019, DC will release its second, the *Wonder Woman* sequel, the same year.^{iv} *Captain Marvel* is set to be directed by filmmaking duo Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden, who also wrote the

screenplay for the film. The hope is that these directors will choose to represent the title character with the respect and agency given to *Wonder Woman*. With Patty Jenkins behind the wheel of *Wonder Woman*, we were delivered a film free of the male gaze, that does not objectify the woman superhero. This makes the film the best representation of a woman in a superhero movie because it lacks the male gaze. Her role in directing the sequel will undoubtedly lead to more of the same.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing in the 1970s, in the middle of the “bra-burning” era of feminism, Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” examines the role of the patriarchal society on the cultured body of the film viewer as well as the cultured body of the film industry. The cultured body refers to the idea that we are not blank slates when we enter the theater, our own experiences and the ideology we were raised in come with us. The same can be said of the film itself—it was not made in a vacuum, and thus is marked by the culture it was made in. Mulvey’s focus is in psychoanalysis and how scopophilia, voyeurism, and fetishism align the female body on screen with that of a passive object meant only for spectacle. Scopophilia can be defined as ‘pleasure in looking,’ as Mulvey says “There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure” (839). Unlike voyeurism, the erotic satisfaction of “watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other” (839), scopophilia is “pre-genital auto-eroticism,” and “instinct” (839). Scopophilia is a “curiosity and the wish to look” (840). For Mulvey, film moves from being scopophilic to voyeuristic in the space of the movie theater, where “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” (839-40). Voyeurism requires a degree of secrecy; the object does not know the voyeur is there. Fetishism is the sub- or unconscious act of displacing sexual desire from the genitals onto a non-genital body part or another object all together. For Freud, this was specifically in terms of the penis, discounting female genitals as a source of fetishistic desire (Freud).

Mulvey uses psychoanalytic film theory as a way of discussing the “socially established interpretation of sexual difference which *controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle*” (837 emphasis mine). This base of patriarchal ideology as defined by psychoanalysis guides Mulvey’s language and argument, grounding her in a discussion of the world as phallogentric.

As she states at the beginning of this essay and in later revisions, Mulvey is not attempting to offer up a solution to this problem, rather she believes that in identifying and dissecting patriarchal culture using patriarchal culture, in this case phallogentric psychoanalysis, we can begin to figure out how to solve the issue of what she calls ‘the male gaze.’ There has been an increasing awareness of the disparities between women in media as presented by men and as presented by women with the development of independent women’s media, from companies such as Reese Witherspoon’s Hello Sunshine, acclaimed producers and showrunners like Shonda Rhimes, and directors such

as Patty Jenkins. Feminist film theory has been working to identify the source of this disparity since the mid-1970s, with Mulvey's 'male gaze.'

Gaze theory has been a central element of psychoanalysis and film theory with scholars such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz presenting foundational theories on the gaze and film. According to Robert Stam in his overview of film theory, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Metz argues that the cinematic apparatus creates a sense of invisibility within the spectator that heightens the visibility of the screen (Stam 169). This, in turn, guides the processes of identification. The "primary identification" in the filmic audience is with one's own "act of perception" that is created and guided by "the anterior look of the camera" (164-5). In other words, the camera guides our perception, and we know that we are in the act of gazing at something and/or someone, and that that someone is recorded by the camera.

With an origin in Lacanian psychoanalysis' mirror stage, the gaze refers to both seeing and *being seen*. For visual media, this is focused on the ideology that is presented in media through the influence of the producer of the gaze—media producers and directors—the ideology that the audience is guided to adopt through this presentation of gaze, and the ideology of the world within the media, that which the characters hold as composed by the producer of the gaze.

Mulvey, in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," concludes that an independent feminist cinema is where we will find a solution to the problem of gaze in

Hollywood, however, Mulvey fails to take into account an idea presented by Michele Foucault, that positions of power are also the positions of resistance. Inherent in the dominant Hollywood structure is the very resistance to its dominance that Mulvey argues is to be found in independent feminist cinema.

In *History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, Michel Foucault writes on what he calls “power relations,” and the place of resistance within systems of power. “Where there is power, there is resistance,” Foucault writes; “and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). Resistance lies *within* structures of power, on the *interior*. This Mulvey has a handle on when she discusses the modes of resistance available to the female spectator when viewing traditional Hollywood cinema. In “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by ‘Duel in the Sun’ (King Vidor, 1946),” Mulvey answers criticism of her article as excluding the women in the audience and excluding those narrative films that center on an active female heroine—the maternal melodrama. For Mulvey, the ‘woman in the audience’ is constantly oscillating between two positions of identification: the masculine phantasy wherein she controls the drive as an active subject, and the enforcing, through narrative, of a ‘proper’ femininity as a passive object. According to Mulvey, this masculine phantasy is “a phantasy of ‘action’ that correct femininity demands should be repressed. The phantasy ‘action’ can only find expression, its only *signifier* for a woman is through the metaphor of masculinity” (“Afterthoughts” 15). Thus, a masculine phantasy. For Mulvey, it is through the dissection of film form,

the understanding of psychoanalytics and the male gaze that women can approach the dominant cinematic form from a place of resistance.

However, Foucault goes on to say that resistance exists throughout the entirety of power structures, not just in a removed spectatorial analysis as Mulvey states in “Afterthoughts.” The dominant power structure can only be changed from within, not without. It is films such as *Wonder Woman* that offer up the strongest point of resistance. Foucault writes that “it is in this sphere of force relations that we must try to analyze the mechanisms of power” (97). By taking in and understanding Mulvey’s breakdown of the cinematic apparatus of dominant Hollywood ideology, and working against it to create something that does not conform to those standards *from within* the dominant cinematic apparatus, a voice of resistance can reach thousands. The success of *Wonder Woman* and *Black Panther* should show the studios that there is more than one way of re-presenting the world through the screen. If not their own success, then the reactions of thousands of fans—money-spending fans—should help to push these corporations to change. That change should start with the male gaze.

A central pillar of the male gaze is the woman as spectacle. Mulvey says of this “Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle” (Mulvey 841). These women, pin-up girls and showgirls, become the object on which the gaze is focused. “The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (841). Woman as

spectacle, according to Mulvey, has no fluid placement in the narrative and diegesis of the film, and creates a sense of fracture, one that often draws the spectator into a moment of intimate gaze. “Traditionally,” Mulvey writes, “the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (841-2). Showgirls in film are a perfect example of this, wherein “the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man’s-land outside its own time and space” (842). This description of woman-as-spectacle as a “no-man’s land” is most apt for this discussion, as Diana, in her first true action as Wonder Woman, storms World War I’s famous No-Man’s Land to save the people of a small Belgian town who have been essentially enslaved by the Germans. The spectacle of this scene is an inversion, however, of the trope Mulvey describes. This halt in the narrative of the film, according to Mulvey, is part of the evidence that women on screen are classified as passive objects rather than active subjects as the men are classified. The question then becomes one of classification. Is Wonder Woman a spectacle, halting the narrative? Or does Diana drive the action of the narrative? Is she passive object or an active subject? These questions, once answered, will reveal the nature of the gaze in Patty Jenkins’ 2017 superhero film *Wonder Woman*.^{vi}

It is significant to use this base of feminist film theory to understand how psychoanalytic film theory helps to identify the issues present in the dominating formal structure of Hollywood cinema. *Wonder Woman* could be classified as that alternative Mulvey dreams of in this essay; the film demonstrates how the camera should treat women, especially in response to other representations of woman superheroes, including other versions of Wonder Woman. Contrary to Mulvey's assertions that film free of the male gaze is to be found in independent feminist cinema, *Wonder Woman* shows us that major Hollywood productions, belonging in the dominant ideological structure of filmmaking, can also be a place of resistance. Patty Jenkins, as producer of the gaze in *Wonder Woman*, is showing us how the Hollywood system can move away from the male gaze through the subversion of the 'Spectacle' trope.

NO-MAN'S LAND DENOTATION

Diana's introduction to the front starts when she begins her trek across the European countryside, guided by Chief, a Blackfoot smuggler, along with Steve Trevor, an American spy and British agent; Sameer, a Moroccan actor-cum-linguist-cum-conman; and Charlie, a Scottish sniper with PTSD. As they walk through the mud, there are crying children, men trying to get a horse out of the mud where a cart is stuck, and wounded soldiers all grabbing for Diana's attention. She wants to help all of them, but the men in her group drag her away. The group make it to the British trench and start working their way down the line.

Diana is stopped by a woman holding a child and crying out for help in Flemish. Diana crouches down to her level and asks what's wrong. As the woman describes the horrors her village is facing at the hands of the German army, Diana asks where this is. When told the village, Veld, is just across No-Man's Land, Diana gets up. Steve and the other men tell her 'No'. "This is No-Man's Land," Steve tells her.

"It means no man can cross it, alright? This battalion has been here for nearly a year, and they've barely gained an inch. Alright? Because, on the other side there are a bunch of German's pointing machine guns at every square inch of this place. This is not something you can cross, it's not possible."

"So what, so we do nothing?" Diana demands. "No," Steve says, voice exhausted. "We are doing something. We are. We just-we can't save everyone in this war." Sameer comes up and starts pulling Steve away. "This is not what we came here to do," Steve says, a note of finality in his voice. Diana turns away from Steve, the camera focused on her face, with Sameer and Steve in the background. As the film enters slow motion, Diana sports a look of fierce determination. The camera circles around her as she bends her head and pulls out her hair pin, letting her long curls fall down her back, taking a moment to fiddle with something. Diana lifts her head, flipping her hair over one shoulder. She now sports the diadem her mother gave her, the one belonging to her dead aunt, Antiope. "No," she says. "But it's what I'm going to do," a look on her face and

tone in her voice brokering no argument. She moves to the ladder that climbs out of the trench onto No-Man's Land.

The camera cuts to a medium close up of Diana as she climbs the ladder, her cloak falling away to reveal the shield strapped to her back. Then, a series of close ups focus on her hands and forearms, famous vambraces covering them, then her armored boots, and finally the Lasso of Hestia where it sits on her hip as she climbs the ladder. Then the scene cuts to a medium close up of Diana as she appears above the trench, climbing the ladder, her face fiercely determined. Then it cuts to a close up of her hands as she grabs the tops of the ladder to finally climb out of the trenches. It cuts to a medium shot of Steve and Sameer as they turn in horror to see Diana climbing out. "Diana!" Steven shouts, trying to stop her. He and the others race towards her position. Finally, we see Diana step out into No-Man's Land, and her iconic armor is revealed for the first time. She stands out as a bright spot of color in the otherwise gray-green palette of the war, a long shot showing her fully as she stalks across No-Man's Land towards the camera, explosions all around her.

The camera tracks a bullet as it flies towards her, which she deflects, in slow motion, with one of her vambraces. There is a close up of her face, eyes laser focused on something past the camera. The camera cuts to the German trenches, where a soldier shouts orders and the men all line up on the trench, their guns pointed at Diana. The next shot is a close up of her booted feet as they pick up into a run. The camera cuts to a pan up her body as she continues to deflect bullets. Diana, still running and deflecting bullets,

pulls her shield from her back. A medium long shot from the side shows Diana, still running, use her shield to deflect an artillery shell to the side. The Germans begin firing their machine guns at Diana, who comes to a stop in the middle of No-Man's Land, her shield held in front of her, head ducked behind it to withstand the onslaught of fire. The camera alternates between medium shots of Diana from the side, shield held out in front of her, taking heavy fire from the Germans, with bullets flying in streaks of light, deflecting off the shield, chunks of dirt flying up around her, and long shots of Diana, still from the side, as her legs begin to bend, coming into a crouch, full body protected by the shield. Another shot is introduced, a close up of Diana's tucked face, contorted in a grimace. Back to the Germans and then an overhead shot of Diana, three streaks of light coming at her, representing the machine gun fire from the Germans converging on her shield. There's a brief break in the fire, and Diana takes the opportunity to rise and run for the German trench. The British in their own trench shout, "She's done it!" and begin storming over the trench into no-man's land. As the British soldiers sprawl across No-Man's Land like a swarm of ants, Diana leaps, higher than humanly possible, covering the distance remaining in No-Man's Land to land in the German trench breaking the machine guns, her lips pulled back in a snarl.

Once the team make it to the town of Veld, Diana races ahead into some buildings occupied by Germans. The following fight sequence, Diana against a handful of German troops, armed only with a sword, whip, and shield, while the Germans have guns, is full of quick cuts as Diana moves from enemy to enemy, using only her shield and fists. A

gun gets caught between her back and bent arms, and, in slow motion, her abdomen caves in, pulling her arms forward and snapping the gun into pieces. The camera, in a medium shot of her torso, showcases her muscular arms and clenched fists. As Diana moves into another room, breaking the door with a thrust of her shield, she draws her sword. The sequence focuses on slow motion long shots of her full body as it athletically tumbles through the room from enemy to enemy, occasionally pulling closer to focus on her face. One extreme close up of her eyes is followed by a long shot of her body rolling through the air to drop to the ground, pick up her shield and push back up onto her feet with all the grace of a warrior trained for close quarters combat. More slow-motion shots show Diana flipping through the air, her sword slicing through a couple of German soldiers. Then a medium shot shows Diana facing the last of the soldiers in the room, before a long shot follows her leap, knee to the man's chest, out a window onto a conjoined rooftop.

Diana arrives in the town square, facing more troops and even a tank. She leaps fully across the town square, a slow-motion medium shot focusing on her fierce eyes and furrowed brow as she flies through the air. She body slams the tank, denting the side, before a medium close up shows her snarling face as flips the tank with her bare hands. Diana and the others clear the square of soldiers, but then the sound of a gunshot catches their attention and the camera points from behind Diana's hip to a civilian falling to the ground, dead. Diana and Steve look up to the bell tower, where we get an over the shoulder shot of a German sniper aiming down at the town square. "Sniper!" Steve calls out as he fires down on them. "Move!" Steve and Diana run to one of the buildings,

Diana protecting the women in the doorway from gunfire. “Get in!” she orders, before turning. Steve spots the siding from the tank laying in the center of the square. He runs to it, calling for the others to follow and give him cover fire. When they get there, Steve, Sameer, and Chief haul the metal plate up. “Alright, we’re gonna put this on our backs, and when I say go, lift hard,” Steve instructs. “Diana!” Steve calls, a medium close up showing her looking from the bell tower to the men. “Shield!” Steve shouts as the men haul the metal plate onto their backs. Recalling a move Steve witnessed on the beach at Themyscira involving Antiope, Diana takes a running approach and leaps onto the metal plate. The men lift the plate beneath her and she launches into the bell tower, a medium shot shows her pulling the shield up in front of her face before she slams into the bell tower, crumbling the brick and knocking the tower down.

NO-MAN’S LAND ANALYSIS

It is important to note that in this sequence the German soldiers don’t look at Diana as a woman, as a non-threat, a sexual being to be ogled and leered at. Instead they turn all of their fire on her, identifying her as a threat and as a fellow soldier. All of Diana’s fight sequences are economic, perhaps a bit showy and full of CGI, but what can you do when your character is a god? All of Diana’s poses are ones of strength; a lone figure in an empty field. The close ups in this sequence are on her face, sometimes contorted in a grimace, sometimes with a look of fierce determination and focus. This is showcasing her strength in a different way. By focusing on her face with these expressions, we are forced to see the effort behind Diana’s actions, and the seriousness

she is bringing to her fighting. While Gal Gadot is undeniably stunning, these shots are not meant to highlight the beauty or ‘sexiness’ of Wonder Woman. Even the shots that focus in on segments of her body—her arms, her legs, her face—they are designed not to chop her up into objects of fetishistic focus, but to show her strength and ability.

What could be taken as moments of spectacle in the film—Diana charging No-Man’s Land, the Fashion Sequence^{vii}—provide more than just a halt in the narrative. No-Man’s Land, in fact, drives the narrative forward. Without crossing the trench lines at that point, and saving the town of Veld, the heroes of our story would not have heard the news of Luddendorf’s location, or been able to so easily reach the location of the German gathering. This sequence is also the first time Diana becomes Wonder Woman, even though the name is not used within the film. It is the first reveal of the iconic uniform, and a strong demonstration of her abilities and strength. When Diana crosses No-Man’s Land, takes the German trench, and then frees the town of Veld, she is a spectacle, but she is not Mulvey’s passive show girl. The narrative does not freeze and there is no need for the scene “to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative” (Mulvey 841). This *is* the narrative here, Diana *becomes* Wonder Woman to a crowd of men who find no pleasure in a *performance*, rather respect and gratitude in her *action*.

Over and over again, Diana has been told ‘No,’ first by her mother in Themyscira, ‘no’ to training, ‘no’ to wielding the ‘God Killer,’ ‘no’ to helping Steve. Diana says ‘no’ back to all of these, in different ways. First by secretly training with Antiope, and the last two at the same time by deciding to steal the ‘God Killer’ and helping Steve escape. Once

in London, Diana is repeatedly told ‘no,’ by Steve—no, they can’t hold hands; no, she can’t hold the baby. She is told ‘no’ by all of London society; according to Etta Candy, no, Diana can’t wear her armor, or carry her sword and shield^{viii}. According to the men, no, Diana can’t be in the war room, she can’t translate Dr. Maru’s notebook, she can’t go to the front. She finally has enough when Steve and the others tell her that she can’t help Veld, that she can’t cross No-Man’s Land. Diana finally says ‘no’ back: “But it’s what I’m going to do.”

In this moment, Diana is inspirational, not only to the audience, but to the men in the film. Steve, Chief, Charlie, and Sameer all join her in No-Man’s Land when they see that the Germans are focusing all their fire on her. A British soldier even moves to follow them but is stopped by his commanding officer. However, once Diana takes the German trench, the British, hardly believing their eyes, cheer and race across No-Man’s Land to hold the trench.

DIANA AS NARRATIVE DRIVE

Diana’s entrance into World War I breaks the frozen stalemate the nations are currently caught up in. In London, the men are arguing about whether to keep fighting or sue for an armistice—they’re stuck and going nowhere. They haven’t made any headway in either direction—towards winning or an armistice, with an armistice just being another stalemate. Yes, Steve brings Dr. Maru’s notebook, he has the plan, but that wouldn’t be

possible without Diana's help leaving Themyscira. Also, Diana is the only one who can translate the notebook, *she* provides the information to drive Steve into action.

Even on Themyscira, Diana was the only catalyst of change. The island was a paradise frozen in time, with Diana as the only one we see age, all the other characters being suspended around middle age. Steve's arrival and the German's attack breaks their frozen state, and Antiope and many others die. We have no way of knowing if Amazons die of illness or age, as it is not explored within the film. With all apparent evidence, this is the first time Amazons have died since the war with Ares. But it is in Diana's leaving that Themyscira's role in the world changes.

Diana's charge of No-Man's Land breaks the repetitive pattern of trench warfare on the front. Recall Steve's speech to Diana, "This battalion has been here for nearly a year, and they've barely gained an inch." Sameer, Charlie, and Chief were all stuck in a self-serving state until Diana inspired them to fight for something. Charlie's line "who gets paid for honor" highlights this, as does Diana's conversation with Chief about taking sides in the war. It is the liberation of Veld that changes these men, the morning after showcasing this when Steve gives the men an opportunity to leave, as their two days' worth of pay has passed. The men refuse. Diana even breaks Ares out of his holding pattern of whispering in humanity's ears and inciting wars—she also ends the war by stopping Ares and helping Steve destroy Dr. Maru's weapons and killing Luddendorf. Diana's entire being is one of forward drive. Everything around her bursts into motion, the narrative keeps going because Diana keeps going.

This film is a search for Diana's identity, from the only child on Themyscira, their princess, to a warrior training to fight Ares, to an outsider in London and on the front. Diana finally comes to herself in the final battle, after losing all faith in humanity, she regains it through Steve Trevor, quoting his words to her back at Ares: "You're wrong about them," she says to the God of War about humans. "They're everything you say, but so much more... It's not about deserve, it's about what you believe. And I believe in love." This is a story, a narrative, about Diana as she moves through the world. Who else would drive the action?

COMPARISON WITH *JUSTICE LEAGUE*

Many *Wonder Woman* fans, this writer included, looked forward to the release of *Justice League* in November of 2017 simply for more of Gal Gadot's portrayal of Diana Prince. Many of us were disappointed. Not only did the film completely change the way the camera treated Gadot's body—up-skirt shots galore—her character was retconned—that is, retroactive continuity, referring to the act of changing a previous event or detail to fit the new plot—to be driven entirely by her love for Steve Trevor. Beyond this, the brief glimpse we get of Themyscira and the Amazons brings us mid-drift bearing bikini armor that serves little practical purpose, but shows off the muscled and toned bodies of the women who wear them.

The Artistic Director for the Athena Film Festival and founder of womanandhollywood.com, a website devoted to gender equality in Hollywood, Melissa

Silverstein tweeted a photo comparing the costumes of the Amazon warriors in *Wonder Woman* to those in *Justice League*, writing “Here is a fantastic example of the difference between the male and female gaze. Patty Jenkins’ Amazon warriors on the left. Zack Snyder’s on the right” (@melsil). Amy Ratcliffe, Managing Editor at the Nerdist, responded with a photo of the training costumes from *Wonder Woman*, saying “Look, I’m not a fan of skimpy Amazon costumes, but if you’re going to share the Justice League pic, remember these were their training costumes in Wonder Woman”

(@amy_geek) The photo depicts three Amazons displaying their muscled torsos, arms, and legs in mid-drift bearing costumes. There are two major counterpoints to Ratcliffe’s presentation of these costumes as being comparable to the costumes in *Justice League*. One, these characters weren’t wearing *armor*. That would be like comparing workout gear for the gym, such as yoga pants and a tank top, to the full tactical gear worn by U.S. soldiers. Crop-top, bikini top armor as what was worn in *Justice League*, while perhaps being more comfortable as a costume according to one of the actresses (@SamWJo), is incredibly impractical and very likely to leave the wearer open to near-fatal or fatal injury. While the actresses comfort should, of course, be taken into account, and while it is good that these women felt empowered on set, you cannot deny the cultural impact of seeing the Amazons in *Wonder Woman* versus in *Justice League*, especially for little girls. And while there is nothing wrong with women showing skin, the question is why they do so. Do they like their own bodies and enjoy what they wear? Or are they doing it because it is ‘attractive to men’? This brings us to the second point; the training costumes

were designed by a woman and chosen by a woman, costume designer Lindy Hemming and director Jenkins. It is two very different things when women dress themselves or other women in revealing costumes, and quite another when men do so, as is the case with *Justice League* costume designer Michael Wilkinson—who gave the male characters completely practical armor for their fight sequences.

Especially when compared to her appearance in *Justice League*, there are no up-skirt shots in *Wonder Woman*. Even if the costume is just as short as in *Justice League* there aren't any shots of her from that angle—a high angle shot from behind Diana, at her feet, aiming up at her skirt and showing her butt cheeks hanging out of her undershorts. The first of many of these shots occurs in the opening sequence, where Diana saves a bank from religious zealots who plan to blow up the building, with hostages still inside. Diana's fighting style is just as acrobatic in this scene, but her body is treated differently. The focus is no longer on her strength, the expressions on her face that show signs of the effort behind her actions. Diana is there to be looked at, in fact, this sequence does nothing for the narrative, it is an opening move of objectification that provides no narrative drive. In fact, it contradicts something said of Diana later in the movie.

Diana is criticized throughout the movie by Bruce Wayne for 'hiding.' "Superman was a beacon to the world. Why aren't you?" He asks her. "I'd never heard of you until Luther stole a picture of your dead boyfriend" (Snyder). There are many issues with the relationship between Bruce and Diana in this movie, but this moment highlights two of them. The first is that, somehow, Diana's escapade at the beginning of the movie

received no news coverage whatsoever, and apparently that moment we see at the end of *Wonder Woman*, where Diana is in her office at the Louvre in Paris and hears sirens and goes to the roof in her Wonder Woman armor, did not garner any attention either. This seems to be a retcon of the fact that Wonder Woman hasn't been mentioned in any of the other DC films, specifically, in this case, in *Man of Steel*, the only film in the current DC film series Diana is not in. But how does this match up to Diana's entire characterization in *Wonder Woman*?

At the end of Jenkins' film, Gadot gives a voice over, mirroring the opening of the film.

"I used to want to save the world. To end war and bring peace to mankind. But then I glimpsed the darkness that lives within their light, and learned that inside every one of them there will always be both. A choice each must make for themselves. Something no hero will every defeat. And now I know that only love can truly save the world. So I stay, I fight, and I give for the world I know can be. This is my mission now. Forever."

This speech, and Diana's leap into action as Wonder Woman, imply that Diana keeps fighting as Wonder Woman throughout her one hundred years away from Themyscira. In no way does this indicate that she "closed [herself] off to everything," as Diana tells Cyborg in *Justice League*. "It's my job," she says later, "And I haven't been doing it. I've been reacting, not leading" (Snyder). While it is great that *Justice League* sets up Diana

to be the de-facto leader of the team, there are still continuity errors in her characterization. The only answer that makes sense is that she was directed by a woman in *Wonder Woman*, and free of the male gaze and the objectification and complication that comes with woman heroes being directed by men. An example of this is in Marvel's Black Widow who, in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, is not only reduced to being Bruce Banner's love interest, but she is further objectified through a glimpse into her backstory.

Trained as a spy for the Soviet Union from childhood in a program called The Red Room, Natasha Romanoff was not only forced to kill from a very young age, she was also forcefully sterilized as a "graduation ceremony." "It's efficient," she tells Bruce as she fights back tears, "One less thing to worry about. The one thing that might matter more than a mission. Makes everything easier, even killing. You still think you're the only monster on the team?" (Whedon). According to writer/director Joss Whedon, Natasha feels monstrous for being unable to have children. It wasn't enough that her backstory involved being brainwashed from youth to become the perfect assassin, her character's dark past needed further justification and complication. In fact, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, the forced-feeling romance between Natasha and Bruce, and the focus on reducing her character to the ability or lack thereof to have children, further objectifies the Black Widow. When compared with Diana in *Justice League*, there is some overlap.

Throughout the film, Bruce is constantly needling Diana about Steve Trevor, like a jealous schoolboy; "picture of your dead boyfriend," is only one example of many in the film. Somehow, Diana's character has been reduced from a woman fighting for what

she believes in, for the good of mankind and the world, to a girl who still hasn't gotten over her first boyfriend after one hundred years. There is a sense of romantic and/or sexual tension between the two heroes, with Bruce's butler Alfred, played by Jeremy Irons, teasing Bruce about liking Diana: "Oh, well perhaps I should fly to Paris with a note, will you be Bruce's teammate? Check yes or no." He teases on Bruce's private plane. "I'm only interested in her skillset," Bruce replies. Alfred sarcastically says under his breath "I'm sure you are" (Snyder). This tension between the characters makes Diana's apparent re-entry into the superhero spotlight seem like it was inspired and influenced by a man telling her what she should be doing. Diana's decision is not her own; the furthering of her narrative is incited by Bruce, not Diana.

Further objectification occurs during another fight scene, beyond the continued up-skirt shots we see from director Zack Snyder. During an early battle, the first one where the characters unite as a team, Barry saves Diana from being crushed by grabbing her and throwing the both of them out of the way. Of course, when they crash to the ground, Barry lands on top of Diana and, mirroring a scene in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* with Bruce and Diana, his face is pressed into the breastplate of her armor, essentially her bosom. One might assume this moment is present as a ha-ha moment, but it purposefully points to a sexualization of Diana, drawing the focus, once more, to her body.

There is a shot early in *Justice League* that parallels one that occurs in what is colloquially referred to as "the pool scene" of *Wonder Woman*. In *Wonder Woman*, Steve Trevor stands in the foreground of a long shot, still naked from his bath, with Diana in

the distance. The camera is positioned at shoulder height; all we see of Steve is his back and head. In *Justice League*, Barry and Bruce arrive in Gotham to find Diana waiting for them. There is a similar long shot of the men approaching Diana who stands in the foreground, only this time the camera is positioned low and angled high, drawing our attention to the character's leather-clad hips, derriere, and legs. Once again, Diana is an object of the male gaze, serving no narrative purpose but a spectacle to be ogled.

POOL SCENE DENOTATION

In a reversal of typical male gaze tropes, the beginning of *Wonder Woman* offers a gratuitous moment of nudity in the form of Steve Trevor bathing, interrupted by Diana. The scene opens with a medium long shot of Steve in the water, only his head and shoulders visible, one foot sticking out, extended from his body. We cut to a long shot of the system of pools. Steve swims to the edge and starts to stand but we cut away to a long shot of the cave entrance, where Diana enters. Steve stands up entering the foreground, his back to camera. A medium shot of Steve reacting to her entrance follows, naked torso on display, hand going below frame and his body ducking back a little. "Woah, I-uh-" he begins. Cut to a medium shot of Diana, looking at him with her head tilted to the side and eye line aimed down, presumably at his genitals. "Uh..." Steve continues as we cut to a medium shot of him in the same pose. "I didn't see you come in," he says as he stands up straight, arm dropping to his side, exposing his genitals to Diana out of frame. A reaction shot of Diana in a medium close up follows. Her head is tilted, gaze down with a look of confusion on her face. "Would you s...say you're a..." Diana begins distractedly. Her

gaze comes up, head straightening. “Typical example of your sex?” She finishes, meeting Steve’s gaze. Cut back to a medium close up of Steve, “I am...” his head tilts back and forth in, perhaps false, modesty. “Above average,” he finishes with a small smirk.

There is a pause in the conversation as we cut to a medium shot of Diana, blinking and looking in confusion. “What’s that?” She asks, followed by a reaction shot of Steve looking down at himself then back up at her, brow furrowed. “It’s a, uh...” he stumbles, looking back down, he notices something out of frame. A quick glance up at Diana in realization, Steve points to something out of frame and moves towards it. “Oh. It’s a watch,” he explains. We cut to a close up of the watch sitting on top of a sea sponge, Steve’s hand entering the frame, grabbing the watch. A medium shot of Diana saying, “A watch?” followed by Steve starting to speak off screen, “Yeah, it’s a watch,” he continues in the next shot, a medium shot of him holding up the watch with one hand, the other down covering his genitals again. “It tells time,” he says as he steps forward, up and out of the water. “My father gave it to me,” Steve continues as we cut to a long shot of Steve climbing out of the pool, one hand covering his genitals with the rest of his body exposed. Diana stands, back to the audience in the foreground. “Went through hell and back with him and now it’s with me. And...” Steve continues into the next shot, a medium close up, holding the watch up by his face, “Good thing it’s still ticking,” he finishes. Cut to a long shot of Diana, Steve’s back and head in the foreground. “What for?” She asks. A reaction shot in medium of Steve, dryly saying “Because it tells time.” A medium shot of Diana, smiling like that’s silly follows. Off screen Steve continues,

“When to...” Cut to a medium shot of Steve, “eat, sleep, wake up, work.” He turns away from the camera and we cut to a long shot of Diana, chuckling and moving down the steps. Steve pops up and back out of frame in the foreground as he grabs a piece of fabric. “You let this little thing tell you what to do?” Diana asks. A reverse shot of Steve unfolding the fabric, “Yeah,” He says sheepishly.

Back to Diana, her face growing serious and regretful. She looks down and away while Steve presumably covers himself with the cloth. We cut back to Steve, who is looking up in a corner and then around him. “Can I ask you some questions?” He turns back to her, also serious. A medium shot of Diana, shrugging a yes. “Wh-where are we?” Steve asks off screen. “Themyscira” Diana replies. Off screen Steve continues, “No, I got that before, but I mean...” Cut to a medium shot of Steve, hands together like in prayer pose. “Where are we? What is this place? Who are you people?” He points and looks to the side, “Why does the-the water do that?” He looks back to Diana, his brow furrowed. “how...” cut to Diana as he continues speaking off screen “...come you don’t know what a watch is? How can you speak English so well?” Diana on screen says, “We speak hundreds of languages. We are the bridge to a greater understanding between all men,” she says earnestly. A medium close up shows Steve’s reaction to this, looking confused. “Right,” he nods, then shakes his head. We cut back to Diana who is smiling, and then back to a medium shot of Steve, looking down and shuffling his feet. “You know,” he says, “I didn’t get a chance to say this, uh...earlier.” He looks up at Diana, “But thank you for dragging me out of the water.” Diana responds in a medium shot, “Thank

you...for what you did on the beach.” A medium shot of Steve staring at Diana is followed by a close up of Diana, her eyeline matching to Steve’s eyes. We cut back to Steve, looking away and reaching down for clothes, the camera following him as he bends to pick them up. “So...” he starts, the camera still moving with Steve as he stands up straight and leans over to pull on his pants. “You’re here to let me go?” He asks, looking up at Diana.

“I tried,” Diana says in a medium shot. “But,” we cut away to a medium shot of Steve looking upset as Diana continues off-screen, “It’s not up to me.” We go back to Diana. “I even asked them to send me with you.” A reaction shot of Steve shows him looking up quickly in surprise, and then back to Diana in a medium close up as she continues, “Or anyone. An Amazon. *The Amazons*.” Steve’s reaction is caught in a medium close up, “The Amazons?” He says, disbelieving. Off Screen Diana says “It is our sacred duty to defend the world.” Steve looks down and then back up, where we cut to a medium close up of Diana. “And I wish to go. But my mother will not allow it.”

A medium close up of Steve shows him looking down to buckle his belt. “Well,” he sighs and looks back at Diana. “I can’t say...” his line continues in a medium close up of Diana who looks intrigued, “I blame her. Way this was is going,” a long shot of Steve, pants on and turning to grab his shirt, “I wouldn’t want to let anyone I care about near it.” A reaction shot frames Diana in a medium shot, “Then why do you want to go back?” Steve pulls his shirt on in a medium shot, “I wouldn’t say ‘want’ is the word. I guess I gotta...try,” he turns to grab something. “My father told me,” Steve starts as he turns

back to the camera and straightens up. “If you see something wrong in the world you can either do nothing or do something. And I already tried nothing.” A medium close up of Diana closes the scene, with her nodding and then turning away from Steve and the camera, with a glance back over her shoulder.

POOL SCENE ANALYSIS

We never see Diana or any other woman in the film as undressed as Steve is in this scene. While the camera doesn’t quite track Steve’s body the way it has been known to track the female body on screen, there is still a sense of gaze in this moment. There is no rational, non-sexualized reason for the exchange in *Wonder Woman*’s Pool Scene—Diana telling Steve that he can’t leave, even though she tried to convince her mother, Steve revealing a little bit about the outside world, the war, and his own life—to take place while Steve is naked and then dressing. Steve is there to be looked at, *he* is the spectacle. Steve also is not quite dissected into limbs by the camera and frame as women often are under the male gaze. *Justice League* is a perfect example of how the male gaze treats women’s bodies. Not only are there gratuitous shots from behind Diana, high angle and showcasing her derriere, her costume shows her butt cheeks hanging out the bottom of her undershorts.

All we have here is a gratuitous nude scene wherein we don’t see the character explicitly. The focus, once Diana’s attention moves past Steve’s lower body, is on the character’s face. Perhaps not a full scene of spectacle, the beginning of the sequence is

the closest we get to the type of ogling of a woman's nude form that occurs in many, many films. But the scene itself doesn't halt the narrative. Diana is learning about the War and about Steve himself—character development, which is more than the showgirl numbers that Mulvey describes. The opening of the scene, the “typical example of your sex” exchange, could, however, be considered a halt in the narrative, being utterly unrelated to the plot, providing no information for the narrative, acting as nothing more than comic relief.

This could be considered a moment of the “female gaze,” if such a thing exists in the same way that the male gaze does. If there is, in fact, a “female gaze” at work in this and other films, it is not as institutionalized as the male gaze. It does not permeate nearly every film we watch, and it does not cause the same distress. Taking *Wonder Woman* as an example, there is more respect for the object of the gaze as a person, a *subject* of the gaze, if you will. For while Steve is undeniably objectified in the above sequence, he holds more agency than many women do fully clothed in the films of the classic Hollywood era that drove Mulvey's argument in “Visual Pleasure.” For one, the camera cuts back and forth in shot-reverse-shot, rather than focusing solely on Steve, as was often the case with the show-girl numbers described by Mulvey, including Marilyn Monroe in *The River of No Return* and Lauren Bacall in *To Have or Have Not*. Second, this sequence reveals much about Steve as a character, including his sense of duty and honor—“I wouldn't say ‘want’ is the word. I guess I gotta...try”—motivations for

fighting—"I already tried nothing"—and his desire to protect others—"I wouldn't want to let anyone I care about near it."

As a potential alternative to the male gaze within the Hollywood system, the "female gaze" could be considered a "feminist gaze," aligning with many of the tenants of feminism, including the desire for equality between men and women, rights for *all* genders be they traditional or non-conforming, and a world free from racism. *Wonder Woman* serves as strong example of the first, with some elements of the last—Sameer says to Diana "I wanted to be an actor, but my skin is the wrong color"—with the potential for the middle, if the Amazonian culture on Themyscira could be explored for opportunities of presenting transgender, agender, and gender-non-conforming individuals. This "feminist gaze" treats all people with respect, no matter their sexual orientation, gender, race, or ethnicity. Or, at least, that is the hope for the future of the gaze in film.

CONCLUSION

Throughout *Wonder Woman*, the audience is invited to identify with Diana as the active subject that drives the action forward and guides our gaze. It is through Diana's outside perspective that we see the ridiculousness and misogyny that was 1918 London society, and perhaps get a glimpse of the ridiculousness and misogyny of our own worlds. Through the eyes of Diana and the lens of Patty Jenkins, women are allowed to gaze into the world of film through eyes that match their own and bring them to a place of, if not

bliss, then perhaps contentment. There is still a feeling of wanting *more*, wanting *better*, even though *Wonder Woman* makes us think “This is good, give me more.” We want films to keep getting better. A place of bliss would be heavenly, absolute perfection. We would think “Never do anything else again.” However, we are not quite there, so we are content with this film, but look forward to more representations of women without the male gaze, to improvements to the “female gaze,” until it becomes a “feminist gaze” that presents each and every person with the subject-hood, dignity, and agency that they deserve.

Diana, Princess of Themyscira, Wonder Woman, Superhero, Goddess. These titles mean a lot to the character and her fans, but it is Patty Jenkins who truly deserves the title of hero. She has given us a way of looking at the world through the camera that doesn't leave women feeling like a piece of meat, or worse, relegated to ‘sidekick’ status. The glory of femininity shines through without sacrificing the active agency of subjecthood typically associated with the feminine on screen. Jenkins has shown us that, yes, women can be active subjects within mainstream Hollywood, employing most of the typical tropes of the superhero genre, but turning them on their head, re-appropriating them for a feminist film within the dominant power structure, offering resistance to that dominant power.

End Notes

ⁱ Marvel Comics have a plethora of diverse heroes to choose from in their comics. Captain Marvel, a white woman, *is* in fact getting her own film in 2019. But even then, there are minority superheroes that could have been introduced to the big screen, including Luke Cage, who has his own show produced by Netflix along with three other Marvel heroes. There is Ms. Marvel, a young Muslim-American girl named Kamala Kahn. America Chavez, Miss America, is a lesbian Latina. Spectrum, Monica Rambeau, who has gone by many superhero monikers including Captain Marvel, is African American. And even Danielle Moonstar, a mutant student of Professor Xavier, is a Cheyenne woman, previously unavailable to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but with Disney's recent purchase of Fox, could now find her way onto the same screen as Iron Man and Captain America.

ⁱⁱ From the start of *Black Panther*, we are introduced to Nakia as a spy for Wakanda, in the midst of an undercover mission in Nigeria to infiltrate a human trafficking ring. She makes it clear that her role is not just that of a love interest. In fact, she says that she refused to be T'Challa's queen because she thought she could do more good by helping those outside Wakanda's borders (Coogler). Nakia is the love interest for T'Challa, but her role is still more than that. After the assumed death of T'Challa, Nakia tries to convince Okoye to join her in rebelling against Killmonger. They two fight, with Nakia saying that she loved T'Challa, and her Wakanda; "Then you serve your country," Okoye tells her. "No, I *save* my country," Nakia counters. The Queen Mother, played by Angela Bassett, even suggests that Nakia should be the one to take the mythical heart-shaped-herb that instills one with the powers of the Black Panther. Nakia refuses and takes it to M'Baku, chief of the mountain clan, arguing that she is only a spy, and doesn't have an army to help them fight (Coogler). Shuri is the inventor and engineer that designs Black Panther's suits and other technology, as well as other weapons. She is also an expert in medical technology, perhaps even in practicing medicine as well—she "fixes" both Bucky Barnes, the Winter Soldier, and Martin Freeman's character, Everett Ross (Coogler). Okoye's role is that of warrior and protector, first and foremost. Her devotion to Wakanda knows no bounds. She willingly stays by Erik Killmonger [Michael B. Jordan] after he presumably kills T'Challa and takes the throne. And then she is ready and willing to kill her lover "for Wakanda" when he rebels against T'Challa (Coogler). These are not underdeveloped characters, passive objects to highlight and assist the male lead. They are fully developed characters with agency. But none of these women have their own franchise.

ⁱⁱⁱ DC's comic books have even more options for diversity than Marvel, starting with the other characters that make up the "Batman Family," including two different women holding the title Batwoman, three Batgirl's, and a black man as Batwing. For heroes of color, there are three Green Lantern's DC could have made a film about instead of Ryan Reynolds' failed stint as Hal Jordan: two black men, John Stewart and Simon Baz, and Latino Kyle Raymer Vasquez. Other black heroes include Mr. Terrific; Steel; Firestorm, an entity created by two men, one of whom is black, fusing together; Black Lightning; Aqualad; Static; and Bronze Tiger. Other Latinx heroes in the DC universe include El Diablo from *Suicide Squad*, a gangbanger with the uncanny ability to control fire and even turn into a giant skeletal figure set aflame; Wild Cat; Hawkgirl; and Blue Beetle iteration Jamie Reyes, a Mexican-American teen.

^{iv} DC is providing future diversity, more so than the MCU, with a stand-alone *Aquaman* film set for December of 2018, a *Wonder Woman* sequel in November of 2019, and a stand-alone *Cyborg* film in April of 2020. New president of the DC Extended Universe Walter Hamada is focusing on male heroes' films, including *Flashpoint*, a stand-alone Flash film, and *Shazam!* Starring Zachary Levi as the title hero. Marvel, meanwhile, is producing four more white-male lead films with *Ant-Man and the Wasp* in July of 2018, which does place Evangeline Lilly's Hope van Dyne, The Wasp, as a major player, but it is unknown how the character will be presented. A stand-alone villain film, *Venom*, starring Tom Hardy is set for release in October of 2018, with the *Spider-Man* sequel slated for July 2019, along with a *fourth Avengers* movie set for the same year. The only MCU film in production, with a confirmed release date, that offers

any sort of diversity is the *Captain Marvel* film, about a white woman turned intergalactic superhero. The most diverse Marvel projects are all either on Netflix—*Luke Cage* and *Jessica Jones*—or animated. That is one out of five films for Marvel, while DC has three confirmed films out of five in development and with a release date. That's forty percent better than Marvel, and more than fifty percent of DC's films in production.

^v It was Mulvey's location in time and space that formed the most fundamental work of feminist film theory, one that is taught in classrooms to this day as the cornerstone of film theory. Laura Mulvey's "Introduction: 1970s Feminist Film Theory and the Obsolescent Object" focuses on the obsolescence of her own work in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," citing changes in feminist film theory towards engagement with race and sexuality that were not present in her work. At the same time, she urges us not to reject the foundations of feminist film theory. Firstly, she argues for an interrogation of history as it has been narrated by the dominant white male patriarchy. Mulvey finds two modes of feminist history in the work of other feminist film scholars, that of obsolescence and that of the ghost. Like feminist film theory of the 1970s, Mulvey argues that the obsolescent object can re-emerge and take on a new life in a different use. The 'ghost' on the other hand, returns years, perhaps decades or even centuries, down the line as a haunting reminder, ignoring the dominant understanding of time as chronological. In this way of looking for a feminist understanding of history and time, a feminist way of *reading* history and time, Mulvey's theories from the 1970s can take on a new life through adaptation and application to the modern cinematic apparatus, as well as haunt us as a ghost, reminding us of the continued existence of the male gaze, and the significance of Mulvey's theories in films produced today.

^{vi} As a foundational essay for feminist film theory, Mulvey's work has not gone unnoticed. While the essay is still considered an essential read for film students and scholars, the problems within the work are known to film theorists, even Mulvey herself. Mulvey's work has received many critical responses, some challenging her assertions, picking apart her language choices, others concurring with her and expanding on her ideas for how to challenge the dominant form of Hollywood cinema that leads to the presentation of the male gaze. Mulvey herself has responded to these criticisms and has continued to revise her theories as decades have passed and social ideology and society has changed. Mulvey's analysis of *Duel in the Sun* (1946) provides an example of her argument, stating that it is the *form* of the narrative that guides the spectator to identify and journey with the hero, and this is what drives the woman in the audience to that location of transsexual identification first broached in "Visual Pleasure." Mulvey writes that Freud argued that masculinity, as it were, matches the self-image for woman at some point early in development ("Afterthoughts" 13). Mulvey also describes here the ways in which modern "narrative grammar" follows Freud's "convention" of masculine/active, feminine/passive dichotomy. This, combined with Freud's identification of early masculinity in women, and "the ego's desire to phantasies itself in a certain, active, manner" lead to what she calls "trans-sex identification," that she claims to be "*habit* that very easily becomes *second Nature*" (13). This second nature is what allows for "transsexual" identification in spectatorship.

^{vii} The fashion sequence when Diana and Steve first arrive in London is another spectacle moment of the film, but it does serve a purpose. It introduces Diana to the world she has entered. It is here that she learns, from Etta Candy, the rules that WWI London has for women, from how to dress—"keep our tummies in"—to their political role—"that's how we'll win the vote." It is important to note that this sequence provides the perfect opportunity to showcase Gal Gadot's physical form, by showing her strip her uniform for the more restrictive English dresses. Even when Diana looks over a corset asking, "Is this what passes for armor," there was an opportunity to see her in nothing but a corset. Jenkins does not do this however. Instead of flashing some boobs or butt, Jenkins has Diana pull up the skirts of a purple monstrosity of a dress, revealing petticoat and pantaloons, testing the range of motion she has in these new and unfamiliar clothes. She also rips the tight skirt of another outfit with a testing kick. Diana ends up with a rather conservative outfit—a long skirt with a matching, high collared suit jacket over a blouse, with glasses and a hat. Despite this, Steve still calls her "distracting," and Etta Candy calls her "the most beautiful woman you've ever seen." Even when first arriving in London and later on the Front, Diana's "revealing" armor, when not fighting, is covered by a long black cloak.

^{viii} Diana is an outsider entering a rather racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, classist, and heterosexist society. Diana is faced with opposition to everything she is. Nothing makes sense to her, especially not their politics and military strategy. Diana's entrance into the world outside of her island paradise is rife with issues of gender roles, social ideology, and male gaze. It is in Diana's response to London society where the women in the audience may find identification. For every ridiculous assertion that the men make about Diana's place among them, Diana displays exasperation and contempt. When Steve justifies her presence in the male sphere by calling her his secretary, Diana doesn't even try to hide her eye roll; she doesn't understand why she has to be 'explained.' She is always asking why they are doing something, and she doesn't stay where she's told to. Diana is shocked by the honk of a car when she first arrives in London with Steve—he has to pull her out of the way. She is also confused by his comments on hand holding. More importantly, Diana does not understand the gender roles of 1918 London, most likely because there is no such thing on Themyscira. In London, 'proper' femininity is as a passive object. Diana is trying to fit in in London, listening to what Steve tells her, even if she questions it all. She wears the clothes Steve and Etta make her pick out. She gives up her sword and shield to Etta so she doesn't stand out. She rolls her eyes but allows Steve to escort her from the war room when the he is chastised for bringing her in.

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