

## OBJECTIFYING NUDE ART THROUGH SARTRE'S *THE IMAGINARY*

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*In an effort to address the image of the nude as a concern of both feminist aesthetics and existentialism, this paper shall provide a critique on the male gaze in visual art by means of Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of the image and the imagining consciousness. This paper aims to reassess not only the aspects surrounding the male gaze but the nature of its image. In this sense, while objectification is part of the nature of the nude, both the representation and the imagining consciousness of its spectator play a part in the objectification of the nude as image. This paper argues that through Sartre's account of the nature of images, the male gaze misconstrues the represented nude through her image in most works of art. I will show that (1) as an act of the imagination, the male gaze elicits the sexually objectified representations of the nude and that (2) the reality of the nude is conflated with its image (analogon) thereby producing unreal, objectified and prejudiced representations of women.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the sphere of feminist aesthetics, Laura Mulvey is said to have been the pioneer of the term, "male gaze" (see Mulvey 1999, 62), a term she defines in her influential essay, *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema* where she describes the sexual pleasure of looking at a woman as image and man, as the bearer of the look. In accordance to this, John Berger's *Ways of seeing* (1972) chronicles the ways of looking at nude art by thoroughly illustrating the circumstances that our way of looking and portraying the female nude in these works have on all women (see Berger 1972, 46). In a similar but broader spectrum, Anne W. Eaton (2012, 286-292) provides an extensive account of the problem of female nudity and objectification in art in "What's wrong with the (female) nude? A feminist perspective on art and pornography" found in Hans Maes and Jerrold Levinson's *Art and Pornography: philosophical essays*. Feminist aesthetics has chronicled numerous accounts of perceiving the nude (see Berger 1972, 47, Mulvey 1999, 62, Devereaux 1990, 337, Eaton 2012, 286-292 and Lavalée 2016, 77-95) as controversies

regarding the image and representations of the nude have surfaced in the last decade. With the rise of modern art, print and social media, the burden of nudity has no longer been strictly confined to the female body (see Bordo 1999, 36 and Han 2016, 60-61), nevertheless, the female nude has since maintained its prevalence.

Given these considerations, the issue on the gaze and the way we look at others has been a concern in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology* (1943) primarily in his demonstration of being-for-others in the "Look of the Other" (Sartre 1993, 252-302). However, our perception, imagination and the reality of the image is prioritized and has been widely discussed in Sartre's *The imaginary: a phenomenological psychology of the imagination* (1940) where he demarcates imagination from perception. Sartre (2004, 188) suggests that we may either perceive or imagine, as in images of works of art, but affirms that such perception and imagination do not intertwine.

With the help of Sartre's *The imaginary*, this paper shall examine and propose an alternative for addressing sexually objectifying images by examining the process of imagination through the male gaze and the representation of the nude. Though Sartre was not concerned with art, the nude, nudity in works of art or feminist issues on the male gaze, his project may shed new light in our approach to the nude as a spectacle in the realm of art and aesthetics. Considering that the nude and ways of looking at the nude have been commonly associated with representations of naked women, the woman as spectator has not been given as much significance. The nude has been, without question, equated to the female sexuality and the female reduced to a man's object of sexual desire (See Eaton 1985, Betterton 1985). "Painters and art critics alike have all condoned and maintained their pleasure, gratification, possession and appreciation of nude art and the female nude in defense of "ideal form, beauty and aesthetic value" (Betterton 1985, 5). Parallel to this, categories of nude art in the European scene have been "under attack, by situating the nude in relation to a whole range of representations which exploit female sexuality in pinups, pornography and advertising" (Betterton 1985, 5). Taking this into account, an investigation on the nature of the image enables us to see how (on Sartre's account), the means of looking and imagining the nude contributes as much in the objectification of the nude as the way these female bodies are portrayed in works of art. Seeing that most representations of the nude are idealized images, the significance of gazing at them through a Sartrean perspective considers the possibility that most of these sexualized images are simply imaginary, thereby fabricating inauthentic and oppressive concepts or assumptions toward women.

With the intention of providing a fresh perspective on the issues surrounding nude art, this paper shall provide a critique on the male gaze and sexual objectification in visual art by means of Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of the image and the imagining consciousness in *The imaginary*. This essay discloses the misconception that objectification in nude art is evoked through the manner by which the nude is portrayed and that such images compulsorily prescribes the male gaze. Alternatively, it is the male gaze that educes the objectification of the nude through their image in works of art. I claim that through Sartre's account of the nature of images, the male gaze misconstrues the represented nude through her image in most works of art. I will show that (1) as an

act of the imagination, the male gaze elicits the sexually objectified representations of the nude and that (2) the reality of the nude is conflated with her image (analogon) thereby producing unreal, objectified and prejudiced representations of women.

Given this, I must forewarn the reader that I do not intend to provide an extensive account of objectification, neither do I wish to argue for or against representations of the nude. My sole objective is to reassess the aspects surrounding the male gaze and the nature of its image. In this sense, while objectification is part of the nature of nude art, the imagining consciousness of its spectator plays a part in the objectification of its image. My intention is to first present the male gaze and its involvement in objectifying images, then reexamine the nude in the imagining process that occupies the male gaze under a Sartrean context through Sartre's comprehensive analysis of the "Irreal object," a fraction of the fourth chapter in his *The imaginary*.

## THE LOOK OF LUST

### The male gaze

Jean-Paul Sartre (2004, 140) notes that an image is an act, that is, a performance carried out through the colors formed on paper or canvas. An image entails an activity in so far as looking at paintings or images through photographs requires us to associate our perception of these images to our affections and imagination or towards imagining the real object. This supposes that looking at a painting, would to some extent, cause us to imagine the image of Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1865) and what she would have looked like if she were standing right in front of us. In his *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger (1972, 8) states that, "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach. To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it." If this is the case, then suppose we are presented with an actual nude body such as Francisco Goya's *The Nude Maja* (1800), how must do we gaze at the nude? Does the male gaze form our belief towards how we look at the body before us? While Sartre provides an elaborate explanation on the process of perceiving and imagining images, we must digress momentarily for it is vital to our investigation that we establish our preference for the male gaze as our subject of scrutiny.

The question as to how one looks at the nude opens an array of debates and controversial claims in feminist aesthetics ranging from views made by scholars such as John Berger, Martha Nussbaum, Rae Langton, A.W. Eaton, and Zoe Lavalley among others, but Laura Mulvey's *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema* (1975) and John Berger's *Ways of seeing* (1972) are two works that paved the way to numerous discourses on the subject matter. In *Ways of seeing*, John Berger (1972) expounds on a way of looking at women. He (1972, 47) states:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman

in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object — and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

Berger's way of looking and the notion of woman as object was developed further in the objectifying gaze, infamously known as the "male gaze." It is this masculine gaze which propelled Laura Mulvey as its main proponent through her *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema* (1975). Mulvey (1999, 62) explains:

...in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire.

Several scholars (see Berger 1972, 47, Mulvey 1999, 62, Eaton 2012, 286-292 and Lavalée 2016, 77-95) attempted to clarify this gaze as something which strictly belongs to men but prescribed to women as images and objects of spectacle. They would argue that "the gaze is gendered male whenever it directs itself at, and takes pleasure in women, where women function as erotic objects" (Devereaux 1990, 337). Likewise, A.W. Eaton (2012, 878), in her "What's wrong with the (female) nude? A feminist perspective on art and pornography," describes it as:

...the androcentric attitude of an image; that is, its depiction of the world, and in particular of women, in terms of male or masculine interests, emotions, attitudes, or values. More specifically, 'the male gaze' usually refers to the sexually objectifying attitude that a representation takes toward its feminine subject matter, presenting her as a primarily passive object for heterosexual-male erotic gratification.

Yet the spectator of the nude need not be a man for us to brand a certain gaze as male, whichever sex and gender one might assert may hold a male gaze. This act of viewing has been predominantly male, that is to say, looking at nude art is looking from a masculine perspective. Eaton (2012, 293) clarifies that, "to describe this way of seeing as male is not to claim anything about how all, or even most, men respond to such pictures; rather, it is to note that this is the way of seeing proper to someone in the masculine social role, a role which, it should be noted, is avowedly heterosexual." Moreover, as Rosemary Betterton (1985, 5) explains in her "How do women look? The female nude in the work of Suzanne Valadon," the nude herself is given no choice, "woman as spectator is offered the dubious satisfaction of identification with the heterosexual masculine gaze, voyeuristic, penetrating and powerful." In her *Feminist philosophy of art* (2008), Eaton (2008, 878) further explains:

A picture need not ever be viewed by heterosexual men in order to exemplify “the male gaze” because the term refers to the viewpoint or attitude that a picture adopts and the response that it prescribes to its audience – male and female, heterosexual and homosexual – namely a sexually objectifying attitude toward the woman (or women) depicted.

Yet Anne Ross Muir suggests that the gaze is in fact, gendered. In “The status of women in film and television,” Muir (1989, 143) states that, “recent feminist debates have used psychoanalytic theory to explore why the ‘male gaze’ is dominant in mainstream cinema. But there may be a more concrete (if related) explanation: that the masculine point of view is prevalent simply because men control the industry.” But the issue on the objectification persists regardless of a non-gendered gaze.

### **The nude**

Most, if not all nude art objectify women in virtue of how they require the male gaze for us to comprehend the work of art in the personal or sexual interest of both men and women. In the context of the female nude, Eaton (2012, 281-282) explains that by “female nude,” she refers to “the genre of artistic representations that take the unclothed female body as their primary subject matter. As with anti-porn feminism, the feminist critique of the female nude depends on a generalization about the dominant mode of this genre, namely that it sexually objectifies women.” In all paintings, the woman is seen as a sexual object, an object of desire and fantasy for predominantly male viewers but extends to the female through a masculine gaze of themselves. As Eaton would put it “in its sexual objectification of the unclothed female body, the female nude is one significant source of the values that sustain and perpetuate male dominance” (Eaton 2012, 285). Though not all nude images are necessarily offensive or oppressive (see Eaton 2012, 282) in their portrayal of the nude, it is given that “no image can ever entirely escape the circle of voyeurism and exploitation which constitutes male power in representation” (Betterton 1985, 4). Through the representations and descriptions attached to the images of women in these paintings, “the nude eroticizes objectification and subordination” (Eaton 2012, 294).

To objectify, as defined by Eaton (2012, 286) is “to treat as a mere thing something that is in fact not a thing.” To demonstrate exactly how pictures sexually objectify, Eaton enumerates nine ways by which artworks or images portray the sexually objectified female nude such as “Foregrounding of erogenous zones: Figure is posed so as to make breasts, pubis, and/or buttocks the focus, often while minimizing or even erasing any traces of subjectivity” (Eaton 2012, 287-288), “Divided into sexual parts...the work does not even represent the entire person but only erogenous part” (Eaton 2012, 287-288), and “Passive poses of availability and surrender, the classic pose for the female nude is (a) recumbent, (b) frontal (so that pubis and breasts are in full view), and (c) often with one arm raised above head. The pose is passive, unprotected, vulnerable, that a female gaze is but a repositioned male gaze, such as Christa Salamandra’s investigation on these sexually objectifying yet liberating Arab female gaze, there have been various versions

and suggests sexual availability” (2012, 287-288). Eaton (2012, 287) further argues that “a single artwork can objectify the unclothed female body in several of the ways described here,” referring to the many other ways a nude body is sexually objectified through images similarly proposed by Martha Nussbaum (1999, 218-39) in *Objectification, sex and social justice* (1999) and in Rae Langton’s (2009, 223-40) “Autonomy-denial in objectification from sexual solipsism” in *Philosophical essays on pornography and objectification* (2009).

Feminists often claim that most, if not all nude art, appoints women in this situation (Devereaux 1990, 337). These works illustrate the way that the female nude has come to stand as the archetypal artwork. When artists represent themselves at work, the default subject matter is often an unclothed female body. It’s not surprising then, that a nude is often the first thing one sees upon entering some of the great museums in the world which is a rarity in the case of the male nude. Eaton (2012, 302) states:

I know of very few works in which unclothed, docile men consort with clothed, actively engaged women...the disparity in the visual treatment of females and males, with an egregiously disproportionate emphasis placed on the docile sexuality of the former is an important element of the feminist critique. The second thing one must consider to fully understand the feminist critique is the sheer prevalence of the female nude in the Western Tradition.

But Betterton (1985, 5) argues that, this excuse would only shroud the underlying “relationships of power and subordination involved when a male artist depicts the female body. It ignores or denies the difference between looking at the body of a woman and looking at a pile of shit. Therefore, a feminist critique of the nude has focused upon analysis of the ways in which the act of viewing itself reinstates male power.” Susan Bordo (1999, 19) claims however, that it is prevalent that nude art is assumed by the female body and the eroticization and sexualization thereof. In a male dominated society, the nude has been gendered female without question or consideration that men too have bodies and that a man too may be stripped and utilized as a model of the unclothed human anatomy. Mulvey (1999, 63) suggests that, “the male figure cannot bear burden of sexual objectification... Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like... the man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator.”

Nevertheless, given the nature of sexual objectification in nude art, one might wonder if it is feasible to evoke a derivation of the male gaze to objectify a male spectacle. The answer, in this case, is that unlike the well-established and uncontested attitude of the male gaze, the female gaze varies. Adaptations of a female gaze has occupied a number of scholars such as Paula Marantz Cohen (2010, 78-88) in “What have clothes got to do with it? Romantic comedy and the female gaze,” Zoe Dirse (2013, 15-29) in “Gender in cinematography: Female gaze (eye) behind the camera,” Christa Salamandra (2012, 50) in “The Muhammad effect: Media panic, melodrama, and the Arab female gaze,” and Reina Lewis (1997, 92-109) in “Looking good: The lesbian gaze and fashion imagery,” all of whose female gaze vary. For while it would be simpler to suppose

of the female gaze that do not necessarily objectify a nude body. On the contrary, some versions of the female gaze require that its spectacle be clothed in the latest fashion trends (See Cohen 2010, 81) or presented in a masculine or feminine archetype (See Lewis 1997, 95).

One could also suppose that a queer gaze, or a gay male gaze may be just as suitable in instances where both spectacle and spectator are male. Yet akin to the female or lesbian gaze, prospects for a gay male gaze fail to develop a unanimous description. Each version of a queer, homoerotic or gay male gaze from Mitchell J. Wood's (2004, 43-62) "The gay male gaze," Kobena Mercer's (1994) *Welcome to the jungle: New positions in Black cultural studies*, Frank Mort's (1996) *Cultures of consumption: masculinities and social space in late twentieth-century*, Mark Simpson's (1994) *Male impersonators* to Gary Cestaro's "Self-shattering in a queerer mirror: Gaze and gay selfhood in Pier Vittorio Tondelli," all sing a familiar but a slightly different tune deviating from a difference in the gazer's sexual orientation (See Mercer 1994, Mort 1996 and Simpson 1994) to psycho-analytic frameworks (See Cestaro 96-124).

In spite of the limitations of the male gaze, it is its longevity and masculine features that dominate. But given that anyone could utilize this gaze, and assuming that the male gaze is a conventional attitude of harmless admiration representative of masculine power over the nude, we cannot help but question whether it is the image that prescribes the objectifying gaze or it is the gaze that posits objectification. How does one "undress" the already unclothed female nude in the act of the male gaze? How does the act of perceiving and imagining play into the performance of the male gaze? These are some of the inquiries that I wish to address through Sartre's *The imaginary*.

## GAZING AT THE NUDE OF PURE IMAGINATION

### The male gaze as an act of the imagination

In his *The imaginary: A phenomenological psychology of the imagination*, Sartre delineates the distinction between perception and imagination to show that an image, in so far as it is "seen," is an act, not of perception but of imagination. By retracing Sartre's account of the image and the imagination, I will show that as an act of the imagination, the male gaze elicits the sexually objectified representations of the nude.

Sartre (2004, 12) first construes that consciousness is always consciousness of something. Thomas Flynn (1975, 432), in "The role of the image in Sartre's aesthetic," clarifies that for Sartre, "consciousness is essentially awareness of an object other than itself." In other words, the act of perceiving or imagining is always directed at something. But for Sartre (2004, 140), a distinction is made between perceiving and imagining such that both acts cannot be performed simultaneously. Perception, for example, posits its object as existing. For instance, when we say that we perceive the nude, we do not see it as an image but the nude in human form. He (2004, 89) asserts that "in perception, all things are given as being what they are. It must be understood by this that the thing occupies a strictly defined position in time and space and that each of its qualities is

strictly determined: this is the principle of individuation". In her "The aesthetic views of Jean-Paul Sartre," Catherine Rau (1950, 145), clarifies that for Sartre, "whereas the object of perception is present in space and time, the object of an image is absent or non-existent." When we perceive the nude, we see her as an actual, unclothed woman and not as a facsimile of the female nude incarnate. This differs when we say that we imagine the nude or that we have in mind an image of the nude. When we have an image of the nude, it entails that the real nude is absent or non-existent. One cannot perceive the nude and at the same time, say that one imagines the nude. Perception and imagination cannot be executed altogether. Sartre (2004, 20) defines an image as "an act that aims in its corporeality at an absent or nonexistent object, through a physical or psychic content that is given not as itself but in the capacity of 'analogical representative' of the object aimed at."

Given the distinction between perceiving and imagining, we can first posit that the male gaze is an act of the imagination or an imaging act that evokes its object in the form of the nude woman, through its analogon otherwise known as the image (of the nude). In other words, if the male gaze is what is often claimed as Eaton (2008, 878) states as, a "viewpoint or attitude that a picture adopts and the response that it prescribes to its audience... namely a sexually objectifying attitude toward the woman (or women)," then it is an act constituted by the imagination where the image makes present its absent female nude, objectified as such. Sartre (2004, 12) further clarifies:

Every consciousness posits its object, but each in its own way. The image also includes an act of belief or a positional act. The act can take four and only four forms: it can posit the object as nonexistent, or as absent, or as existing elsewhere; it can also 'neutralize' itself, which is to say not posit its object as existent.

To say that we have an image of the nude means that the image is an act that aims at the nude in human form, who, for various reasons, is either absent or non-existent. But such a nude is given to us through a photograph, a portrait or a mental image. The image of the nude in a photograph or portrait or a mental image is not the nude in actuality but serves as an analogical representation, a proxy. The image is the substitute for the object intended by the imaging consciousness. This image is what Sartre (2004, 87) calls an "analogon."

Sartre (2004, 117) writes, "we find ourselves in the presence of an object that is given as analogous to that which can appear to us in perception." To say that we have before us an image of the nude is to say that we have before us, a copy or a substitute for the nude that represents it so as to -make it appear in its absence. Furthermore, our perceptual consciousness disappears in the act of imagining. When one imagines the nude through a work of art, a photograph or a mental image, one foregoes the vehicle by which the image is given. One no longer perceives the painting. When one "sees" the *The nude Maja (1800)* through the painting by Francisco Goya, one ceases to see the paint or the brush strokes, the surface of the canvas or the colors of paint fusing together; one simply begins to have the image of a nude Maja. He (2004, 120) continues,



...when one aims at Pierre as imaged through a painting, one ceases by that very fact to perceive the painting. But the structure of images called 'mental' is the same as that of the images whose analogon is external: the formation of an imaging consciousness is accompanied, in this case as in the preceding, by an annihilation of perceptual consciousness, and reciprocally. As long as I look at this table, I cannot form an image of Pierre; but if all at once the unreal Pierre surges up before me, the table that is under my eyes vanishes, leaves the scene.

Similarly, when one gazes at nude art, one aims at the female nude in actuality. The work of art only serves as a vessel that carries an image of the nude. It is needless to say that when one has the image of Maja through the male gaze, one aims at Maja in actuality. To illustrate this, Sartre (2004, 21) summons his friend, "Pierre:"

I look at the portrait of Pierre. Through the photo, I aim at Pierre in his physical individuality. The photo is no longer a concrete object that provides me with perception: it serves as matter for the image.

Flynn (1975, 434), notes that Sartre discusses the object as its primary component in his inquiry into the imagination. An image can first take the form of a physical object such as a photograph or a painting, Rau (1950, 145) affirms that "an image may be 'mental,' such as a dream or the memory of a face. He holds that there is no ontic difference between physical and mental images, for the real world and the imaginary world are constituted by the same objects." Sartre (2004, 19) explains:

If someone suddenly shows me a photo of Pierre, the case is functionally the same as when an image appears in my consciousness suddenly and without being willed. However, this photograph, if it is simply perceived, appears to me as a paper rectangle of a special quality and colour, with shades and clear spots distributed in a certain way. If I perceive that photograph as 'photo of a man standing on steps', the mental phenomenon is necessarily already of a different structure: a different intention animates it. And if that photo appears to me as the photo 'of Pierre', if, in some way, I see Pierre behind it, it is necessary that the piece of card is animated with some help from me, giving it a meaning it did not yet have. If I see Pierre in the photo, it is because I put him there. And how could I have put him there if not by a particular intention?

Accordingly, if we were to *perceive* a painting featuring the *Sleeping Venus* by Giorgione (1510), we simply see a framed, colored canvas; to perceive is to look at the object of perception as it is. But if we were to see Venus through the amalgamation of paint, Sartre notes, that our intention has begun animating the image before us: we have started to see something in the dollops of colours unified to form an image on the canvas. The painting no longer functions as an object, we no longer perceive it as a

painting but with a certain intention, procure the image of Venus. This leads to the second component of the imaging act, the content. Flynn (1975, 434) states that “the imaging act intends an object by means of a content...in art, the subject matter undergoes some sort of transformation when it is realized as the content in medium.” We have an image of the female nude as represented through the painting. It is through an intention that we see Venus as an image, and not as random spots of colour. She is realized as the content of the painting through paint on canvas. In the same way that one could simply imagine Venus, the act of imagining her and having been able to produce the image of Venus requires an intention for her to appear in our consciousness. Sartre (2004, 19) further elaborates:

We can imagine three successive stages of apprehension: photo, photo of a man standing on steps, photo of Pierre. But it also happens that the three stages occur so closely to one another as to make just one; it happens that the photo does not function as an object but gives itself immediately as an image. We could repeat this demonstration in the case of the mental image. It could indeed appear without being willed: it nonetheless requires a certain intention, precisely that which constitutes it as image. However, we must mention one crucial difference: a photo functions at first as an object (at least theoretically). A mental image gives itself immediately as an image...These various cases all act to ‘make present’ an object. This object is not there, and we know that it is not there. We therefore find, in the first place, an intention directed at an absent object. But this intention is not empty: it directs itself through a content, which is not just any content, but which, in itself, must present some analogy with the object in question.

We must reiterate that the image is an act, it is not a thing. When one has an image, of a female nude for instance, one intends the object - the female nude, but as a present-absent, non-existent, or unreal object. The imaging consciousness is the possession of the nude in human form through the image and not the image as object. Sartre (2004, 57) remarks that “the image is defined by its intention. It is the intention that makes it the case that the image of Pierre is consciousness of Pierre.” In which case, if one were to posit a female with an intention motivated through the male gaze, assuming that the latter is an imagining act, then a female nude is conceived as image. But how does this reconcile its power to elicit the objectifying features of the female nude as an object of sexual gratification?

### **The irreality of the female nude**

Sartre (2004, 125) emphasizes that “the object as imaged is an irreality. Without doubt it is present but, at the same time, it is out of reach. I cannot touch it, change its place: or rather I can indeed do so, but on the condition that I do it in an irreal way.” Hence, the female nude as imaged is inaccessible except in an irreal way. If one desired the female nude as an irreal object, then one could only resort to phantasy which the

male gaze, as an act of the imagination delivers. We do not imply that the female nude is unreal but that the image of the object one aims at, Sartre would say, makes up its unreality. The unreal is the nude as imaged. He (2004, 125) explains that

...constituting an unreal object is a way of deceiving desires momentarily in order to exacerbate them, a little like the effect sea water has on thirst. If I desire to see a friend, I make that friend appear unreally. It is a way of playing at satisfaction. But the satisfaction is only played because, in fact, my friend is not really there. I give nothing to the desire; what is more, it is the desire that constitutes the object for the most part: to the extent that it projects the unreal object before it, it is specified as a desire. At first it is only Pierre that I desire to see. But my desire becomes desire for such smile, for such physiognomy. So it is limited and exacerbated at the same time and the unreal object is precisely – at least where its effective aspect is concerned – the limitation and the exacerbation at the same time. It is but a mirage and the desire, in the imaging act, nourishes itself.

Given the phantasm of the female nude as an unreal object, we can suppose that if a man or woman, who, for various reasons, prescribes to the male gaze, desires to see a nude female then s/he makes her appear if only unreally. The unreality of the female nude satisfies his or her desire for what Mulvey describes as a sexual object. But the constitution of the female nude as an unreal object is a way of deceiving one's desires temporarily. The male gaze, the desiring gaze, plays its part in constituting what Mulvey (1999, 62) characterizes as, "woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle." The gaze, with the desire, constitutes the female nude, it projects the unreal object. This being said, the female nude as imaged, can only be realized through the position of the male gaze. The image of the female nude then, does not compulsorily prescribe the male gaze but on the contrary, it is through the male gaze that one intends and constitutes the image, the unreality of the female nude.

Sartre (2004, 125, 141) concludes that, "the act of imagination, as we have just seen, is a magical act. It is an incantation destined to make the object of one's thought, the thing one desires, appear in such a way that one can take possession of it." We can otherwise say that the desiring male gaze conjures the female nude, "the object of one's thought" appear so as to possess it. Borrowing from Sartre, it is through a sexual desire for the female nude that makes her unreal body as presented for erotic gratification appear and it is not the unreal image of the nude that provokes the sexual desire. He (2004, 141) instantiates this through his love for a woman named Annie:

In a word it is my love for Annie that makes her unreal face appear and not the unreal face of Annie that provokes a surge of love for her... But a second case can be produced: once the image is constituted, I can deliberately react to it by means of a new feeling, or judgement, which is not carried with the unreal object in the unity of one and the same constitutive movement, but which is clearly posited as a reaction, which is to say a beginning, the

appearance of a new synthetic form. For example, I can produce an image that does not have in itself a strong affective charge and yet be indignant or rejoice before that irreal object.

As a result, in light of the constituted image of the female nude, one can procure a new feeling or judgement. Let us revisit a previous example. Suppose that, as a result of a sexual desire or love for the female nude model, a painter such as Francisco Goya, constitutes the image of the *The Nude Maja (1800)*. He can react to this image with a new feeling or judgement. His -initial sexual desire for Maja, once constituted can give life to a new reaction - be it objectification, admiration, euphoria or love. In which case, a feeling which has first constituted an image evokes another feeling. The male gaze then seems to operate in the same manner. If we were to assume that Goya, prior to forming the image of Maja had in fact, possess this masculine gaze such that he had in him a sexual desire for a real Maja, he is then able to constitute *The Nude Maja* as an irreal. But one also observes that the feeling that first constituted the irreal object may also be conjured by the irreal object in the absence of the real. Sartre (2004, 142) further explains:

Yesterday, for example, a graceful gesture of Annie's provoked in me a surge of tenderness. Without doubt my tenderness can, in being reborn, bring about the irreal rebirth of the gesture suffused with affectivity. Without doubt also I can bring about the rebirth of both the gesture and the tenderness, both retaining their date and their 'absenteeism'. But it could also be that I reproduce the gesture in order to bring about the rebirth of the tenderness. In this case, what I aim at is neither yesterday's tenderness nor Annie's gesture for themselves; I want to feel a real tenderness, present but analogous to that of yesterday. I want to be able, as one rightly says in current language, to 'regain' my feelings of yesterday. It is this new situation that we want to envisage.

But Sartre (2004, 142) observes that, in spite our efforts, "we know that the irreal object cannot perform a causal action; in other words the irreal object cannot produce this tenderness that I want to find again." Immediately, once the image of the female nude has been reconstituted, it may be that the painter or spectator, though still desires to produce the feeling once invoked by the gaze, no longer finds the same feeling invoked in constituting the image. He (2004, 142-143) reveals that "once the object is reconstituted, I must determine myself to be tender in the face of it. In a word, I will affirm that the irreal object acts on me, while being immediately conscious that there is not, that there cannot be, real action and that I contort myself in order to mime this action."

Sartre (2004, 143) further deduces that "there is a difference in nature between feelings in the face of the real and feelings in the face of the imaginary. For example, love completely varies according to whether its object is present or absent." From this perspective, it would seem that while the male gaze operates in the presence of a female

spectacle, one can suppose that it is predominantly utilized in the presence of the irreal. We must recall that for Sartre, perception and imagination cannot be performed simultaneously. If one were to perceive an actual nude female who is presented in a sexually objectifying manner, one does not perceive her while at the same time executing the objectifying gaze that one implements when faced with the irreal. For to procure the image of the nude that such a gaze intends, it would be necessary to cease our perception of the real nude in favor of the work of art or the image in one's mind. It would be necessary to cease our perception of the object. He (2004, 145) further interprets this through Annie:

When Annie is gone, my feelings for her change in nature. No doubt I continue to give them the name of love, no doubt I deny this change, I pretend that I love Annie as much and in the same way as when she is present. But it is not so... Thus, from the very fact of the extraordinary difference that separates the object as imaged from the real, two irreducible classes of feeling can be distinguished: genuine feelings and imaginary feelings. By this latter adjective, I do not mean that the feelings are themselves irreal, but that they never appear except in the face of irreal objects and that the appearance of the real is enough to make them flee at once, as the sun dissipates the shadows of the night.

A feeling that constitutes an image which then produces a reaction, an emotion or another feeling, may in fact be an imaginary feelings. If one can, in the face of the irreal nude, procure a male gaze such that one holds a feeling of sexual desire, then such feeling towards the irreal nude is itself irreal.

Sartre's account of the imagination presents for us several assertions; first is that if there is a distinction between perceiving the nude and imagining the nude, then the male gaze comprises the imaging act that evokes its object, the actual female nude. In other words, if the male gaze is what is often claimed to be a "viewpoint or attitude that a picture adopts," then it is an act constituted by the imagination where the image makes present its absent female nude. Second, if one desired the female nude as an irreal object, then one could only resort to phantasy which the male gaze, as an act of the imagination, delivers. Given the phantasm of the female nude as an irreal object, we can suppose that if a man or woman, who, for various reasons, prescribes to the male gaze, desires to see a nude female then s/he makes her appear if only irreally. Moreover, the female nude, as imaged can only be realized through the position of the male gaze. The image of the female nude then, does not compulsorily prescribe the male gaze but on the contrary, it is through the male gaze that one intends and constitutes the image, the irreality of the female nude. And lastly, if one can, in the face of the irreal nude, procure a male gaze such that one holds a feeling of sexual desire, then such feeling towards the irreal nude is itself irreal. This entails that through the imaging act, it is by way of our imagination that first -projects the objectification of the nude, prior to the irreal image which conjures in us a feeling of sexual desire or even an attitude such as the male gaze. It is the spectator who procures the image of the female nude in the work of art through

the male gaze. It is the spectator who “put her there.”

### **The real female nude irrealized**

In her “Feminism, aesthetics and art education,” Elizabeth Garber (1992, 214) notes:

The male gaze works as a mechanism of oppression as it elevates males to the status of privileged spectators. Feminists respond that treating people as objects of aesthetic contemplation is dehumanizing and call for a revised aesthetic, attentive to and respectful of differences among gendered spectators. One of the questions arising from theorizing on the male gaze in film has been why, if women are objectified in Hollywood films, do they constitute more than half of the box office audience? The question of female viewing enjoyment has been variously argued. Mulvey (1989), who builds her classical essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” on the premise that film reflects the psychical obsessions of the society that produces it, hypothesizes that film provides the viewer with the pleasure of looking at another as an erotic object (scopophilia) and the pleasure of identifying with the characters on the screen who are portrayed as positive catalysts of the action.

In view of this, one might suppose that although “treating people as objects of aesthetic contemplation is dehumanizing,” a reason for the prevalence of the male gaze in that it takes “pleasure of looking at another as an erotic object and the pleasure of identifying with the characters on the screen who are portrayed as positive catalysts of the action,” is perhaps because the reality of the nude is conflated with its image (analogon) thereby producing irreal, objectified and prejudiced representations of women.

Sartre (2004,12) would say that in the presence of an image, we can be certain that while we aim at the object represented by the image, its object can be posited as nonexistent or as absent or as existing elsewhere or not be posited as existent. We notice that the common characteristic of these four theses is that they include the entire category of negation, though in different degrees. Thus the negative act is constitutive of the image. If images include an act of belief or positional act such that the object, the nude or the woman for example, is: absent, existing somewhere else or nonexistent, then we can conclude that not all objects which these images represent are real.

Given that some objects are nonexistent, the actual women represented by their analogons may in fact be dead, or make believe. In which case, representations of the nude as images are capable of producing irreal, biased or even make-believe impressions of real women. The qualities and characteristics of an actual, or would-be woman are present in virtue of the image alone, but such characteristics may not or no longer exist in actuality. One could have an image of a woman but such irreal may not come as close to the specifications of the real object in far as she is irreal, the woman is merely an image. Images act as proxies for the absent or non-existent real objects or humans. Sartre (2004, 180) states that,

...the type of existence of the imaged object in so far as it is imaged differs in nature from the type of existence of the object grasped as real.

To be clear, it is the duty of the perceiver to differentiate and take images only to the extent of what they are, images are there to ‘make present’ an absent object. We breathe life into these images just as most believe that actual nudes in art, fashion magazines or print media are representations of real women. They are as real as we would want them to be, but such images do not possess the same characteristics or attributes of all real women since the image is unreal. The analogon may possess “to-be-looked-at-ness” but the real object does not. The image may be flawless but real woman may not. Given the numerous possibilities, spectators may just be trapped in Sartre’s illusion of immanence. He (2004, 87) explains:

The image will naturally be the analogon. It represented the sensible qualities of the absent object without possessing them: one will say that it had them without being the absent object...Such is the origin of the illusion of immanence: in transferring to the analogon the qualities of the thing that it represents, one constitutes for the imaging consciousness a Panthéon in miniature and the reflective consciousness gives the imaging consciousness as consciousness of this miniature. The result of this construction is a mirage: I believe that the object of my consciousness is a complex of real but not externalized sensible qualities, whereas these qualities are perfectly externalized but imaginary. I believe that I can conduct myself in the face of that complex of sensible qualities as if it were any sensible object, I believe that I can read that which appears to me as imaged, count the columns of the Panthéon, describe, observe. I fall here into the illusion that constitutes the hypnagogic image...

On the basis of the illusion of immanence, we tend to conflate the qualities of the unreal with the real object. Through the imagining act of the male gaze, the unreal (images of the nude) are conflated with the real, we do not see real women portrayed as they are at this very moment but simply, as the object we desire to see (through the analogon or image). Through the illusion of immanence, images have been taken by most as “real,” actual women are objectified as they are likened to their images. They make for us something absent or non-existing, such as a unicorn to appear before our eyes. We falsely believe that the female nude as imaged is precisely analogous to the real woman such that we have assumed the same qualities for the two different existence.

## CONCLUSION

From this investigation, I have attempted to discuss how on Sartre’s account of the imagination and images, it is the spectator who, by means of the male gaze misconstrues the represented (female) nude and to some extent, all women through their image in most works of art. Through the imagination, the male gaze is able to elicit

sexually objectifying images of the female nude in which case, depending on one's intentionalities, feelings or affective states, one may or may not utilize the male gaze in "seeing" such images. Furthermore, it is also the spectator's duty to see the distinction between the real and the irreality of the nude. While we attempt to eliminate prejudicial and archetypal views on women, it is advisable that as viewers who gaze at images of the nude, we ought to take caution in the way we look at images of women perchance one conceives of her them, but unknowingly as a mere products of societal prejudices or of the imagination.

In light of a variety of *gazes* that derive from the male gaze, feminist scholars would find it interesting to investigate on the cultural and social influences that may have given rise to the kind of look that these gazes prescribe. Projects such as this, highlight the significance of philosophical research on gaze theory and feminist aesthetics as they struggle with the aim to reduce or eliminate the unbridled instances of sexual objectification and oppression of all bodies in visual art, film and (social) media.

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