

# VENUS

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Dramaturgical Research

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# MISCELLANY

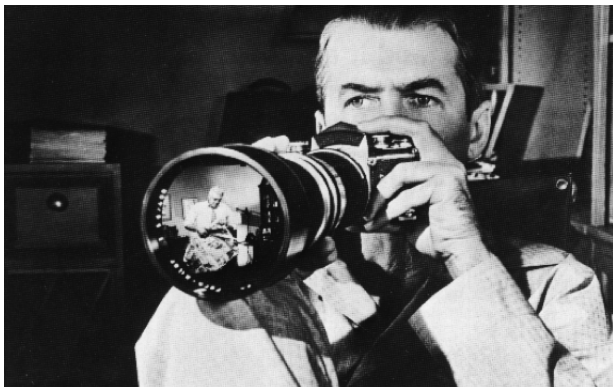


# GAZE

“Gaze” is a theoretical idea proposed by Second Wave feminist film critics like Laura Mulvey and John Berger in the 1970s and 80s. As its name suggests, gaze involves the act of *looking* and *being looked at*. But gaze is really about power and the flow of power between the object (she who is looked at) and the observer (he who looks). It is a gendered dynamic in that the object is usually female, positioned to invite the consumption of her (mostly naked) body, luring the spectator in with a “come hither” look, and unable to act or have agency as she is a passive object to be looked at. The ideal spectator is positioned as male (usually white and heterosexual too) and holds the power (agency) as the active looker over the passive female body.

John Berger, in his 1972 book *Ways of Seeing*, stated that “according to usage and conventions...men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (45).

According to Berger, many Renaissance images feature nude women painted exclusively for the male viewer. These women are often shown in poses that open their bodies towards the viewer while their heads are turned away or gazing in a mirror. Thus, the woman is aware of being the object of the male gaze. Women come to see themselves through the gaze of others.



Scenes from Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954)



“Exhibits such as Baartman’s...managed...public anonymity in new ways. In the structured setting viewers did not have to be responsible for their gaze, for their encounter with the unfamiliar. The whole point of a structured show was to permit staring in a way that caused little discomfort on the part of the viewer, and which downplayed, through the artifice of the display, empathy with the person staring back from the stage” (Crais & Scully, 73-4)



Diego Velázquez, *The Rokeby Venus* (1647-1651)

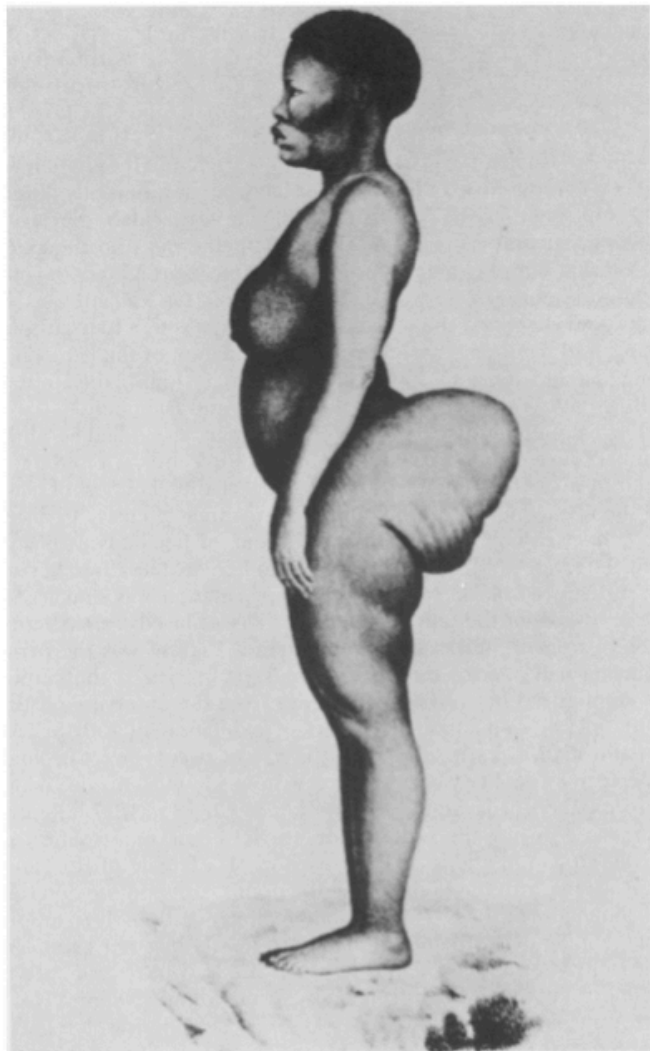


FIG. 5.—“The Hottentot Venus.” Georges Cuvier, “Extraits d’observations faites sur le cadavre d’une femme connue à Paris et à Londres sous le nom de Vénus Hottentote,” 1817.

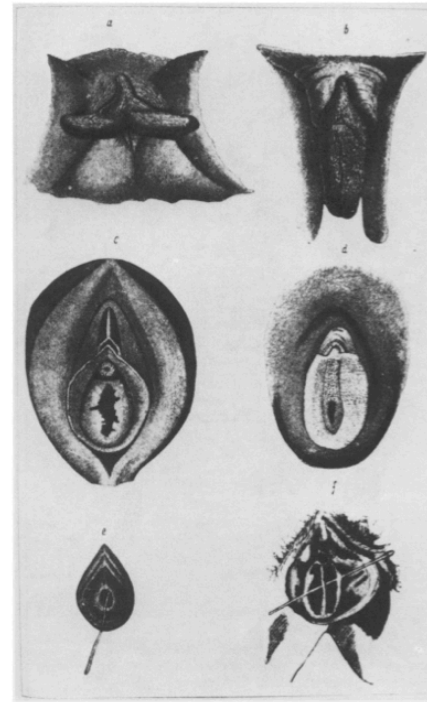


FIG. 13.—The “Hottentot Apron” (figs. a and b) and other genital anomalies. Cesare Lombroso and Guillaume Ferrero, *La donna delinquente: La prostituta e la donna normale*, pl. 1, 1893.



The perception of the prostitute in the late nineteenth century thus merged with the perception of the black. Both categories are those of outsiders, but what does this amalgamation imply in terms of the perception of both groups? It is a commonplace that the primitive was associated with unbridled sexuality. This was either condemned, as in Thomas Jefferson’s discussions of the nature of the black in Virginia, or praised, as in the fictional supplement written by Denis Diderot to Bougainville’s voyages. It is exactly this type of uncontrolled sexuality, however, which is postulated by historians such as J. J. Bachofen as the sign of the “swamp,” the earliest stage of human history. Blacks, if both G. W. F. Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer are to be believed, remained at this most primitive stage, and their presence in the contemporary world served as an indicator of how far mankind had come in establishing control over his world and himself. The loss of control was marked by a regression into this dark past—a degeneracy into the primitive expression

Sander L Gilman. “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century, Art, Medicine and Literature.”

*"I've come to take you home -  
home, remember the veld?  
the lush green grass beneath the big oak trees  
the air is cool there and the sun does not burn.  
I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,  
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,  
the proteas stand in yellow and white  
and the water in the stream chuckle sing-songs  
as it hobbles along over little stones.*

*I have come to wrench you away -  
away from the poking eyes  
of the man-made monster  
who lives in the dark  
with his clutches of imperialism  
who dissects your body bit by bit  
who likens your soul to that of Satan  
and declares himself the ultimate god!*

*I have come to soothe your heavy heart  
I offer my bosom to your weary soul  
I will cover your face with the palms of my hands  
I will run my lips over lines in your neck  
I will feast my eyes on the beauty of you  
and I will sing for you  
for I have come to bring you peace.*

*I have come to take you home  
where the ancient mountains shout your name.  
I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,  
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,  
the proteas stand in yellow and white -  
I have come to take you home  
where I will sing for you  
for you have brought me peace."*

**Diana Ferrus, "A poem for Sarah Baartman"**



# Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A* (2012)

Returning the Colonial Gaze

