

Virtual Bookshelf: *Subverting the Gaze*

Welcome to the *Subverting the Gaze* Virtual Bookshelf, curated by [Charlotte Woolf](#) in collaboration with the artists in [Eyes on Atlanta: Subverting the Gaze](#).

This living document will be updated with new additions throughout the exhibition run. If you have suggestions or additions, please submit them [HERE](#).

This list brings together books, articles, films, and other media related to the gaze. Each artist in *Eyes on Atlanta: Subverting the Gaze* will be paired with a reading and a related quote. Links include PDFs of articles and book chapters, access to published articles, and information about books.

The list began as a resource for *Special Topics in Studio Art: Gender & the Body in Contemporary Art*, a course Charlotte Woolf taught at Kenyon College in Spring 2023 and Spring 2024.

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EXHIBITION STATEMENT

Eyes on Atlanta: Subverting the Gaze, curated by Charlotte Woolf, explores the ways artists challenge, complicate, and reclaim systems of looking that have historically shaped how people are represented and understood. While the concept of the gaze is often associated with the male gaze, a term film theorist Laura Mulvey introduced in the 1970s, the idea has expanded to examine broader relationships among power, visibility, and representation.

Building on and challenging existing conversations around the gaze, bell hooks introduced the concept of the oppositional gaze, a critical, resistant way of looking that recognizes systems of power. Her work examined how Black women were often excluded from dominant conversations around representation and expanded feminist theory through an intersectional lens. The oppositional gaze recognizes that looking is

not passive, but a way of engaging with, questioning, and challenging the images and narratives created within systems of power.

This exhibition considers the many gazes that artists may choose to subvert, including but not limited to the male gaze, white gaze, colonial gaze, cis gaze, Western gaze, and medical gaze. Through photography and related practices, artists challenge the power dynamics inherent to the camera itself, question cultural expectations around beauty and identity, and take the depiction of self into their own hands.

Subverting the gaze can take many forms. It may mean disrupting familiar ideas of who is worthy of being seen, challenging the expectation that a photograph of a person must function as a traditional portrait, or creating images that resist easy interpretation. Abstraction, fragmentation, and alternative forms of representation can also become acts of subversion by refusing familiar ways of seeing.

At its core, *Subverting the Gaze* asks: Who is looking? Who is being looked at? Who controls the image? And what possibilities emerge when artists challenge the systems that have historically shaped visibility and representation?

i. Subverting the Gaze

Emily Greenslade

['Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'](#) by Laura Mulvey (1975)

"It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it...The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked. Not in favour of a reconstructed new pleasure which cannot exist in the abstract, nor of intellectualised unpleasure, but to make way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film. The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire."



Nydia Blas

[‘The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators’](#) by bell hooks (1992)

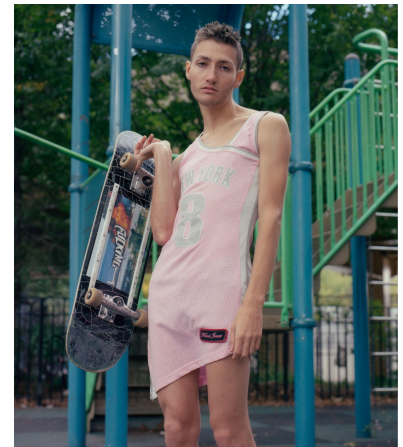
“Since I knew as a child that the dominating power adults exercised over me and over my gaze was never so absolute that I did not dare to look, to sneak a peep, to state dangerously, I knew that the slaves had looked. That all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: ‘Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.’ Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.”



Ross Landenberger

[Selections from *The Queer Art of Failure*](#) by Jack Halberstam (2011)

“*The Queer Art of Failure* dismantles the logics of success and failure with which we currently live. Under certain circumstances, failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world.”



Jamil Fatti

[Selections from *The Queer Art of Failure*](#) by Jack Halberstam (2011)

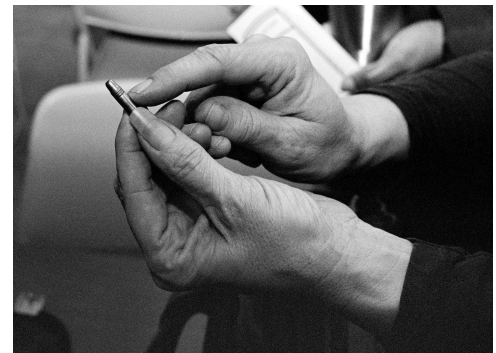
"The emptied-out spaces demand that the viewer fill in the blanks; we may feel almost compelled to complete the picture in front of us, to give it meaning and narrative. We people it ourselves by allowing it to reflect back to us, not the missing self, but the unwillingness we feel at the edge of the voice. The photographers lead their viewers to the site of dispersal and then leave us there, alone, to contemplate all that has been lost and what remains to be seen."



Natasha Lehner

[*When the Camera Was a Weapon of Imperialism. \(And When It Still Is.\)*](#) by Teju Cole (2019)

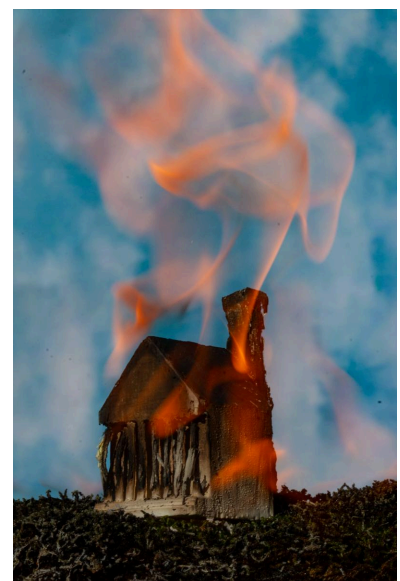
"When we speak of 'shooting' with a camera, we are acknowledging the kinship of photography and violence. ... Still, photographic reportage has the power to quicken the conscience and motivate political commitments."



Melissa Hope Sarah Brown

[*The Most Terrifying Trope in Modern Horror \(That No One Will Touch\)*](#) by Legacy of Folktales (2025)

[*BLM How Can We Win Speech*](#) by Kimberly Jones (2020)



Further Materials

- [*Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra*](#), A Film by Kate Horsfield, Nereyda García-Ferraz & Brenda Miller (1987)
 - ['If you don't "pass" as cis, you don't exist.' The trans audience's reproofs of 'Cis Gaze' and transnormativity in TV series' by Villegas Simón, Isabel; Sánchez Soriano, Juan José; Ventura, Rafael](#) (2023)
 - ['The Cis Gaze and Its Others \(for Shola\)' by McKenzie Wark](#) (2021)
 - [Why I Don't Talk About 'The Body': A Polemic](#) by Gordon Hall (2020)
 - ["Cartoonist's Introduction"](#) from [The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For](#) by Alison Bechdel (2008)
 - [Selections](#) from [Selfie Aesthetics: Seeing Trans Feminist Futures in Self-Representational Art](#) by Nicole Erin Morse (2022)
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ii. Performing the Body

Jordan Putt

[*A Performance is Always Happening* by A.L. Steiner \(2011\)](#)

"What is the performance of an actor? A politician? An artist? A dancer? How are you being a man? A woman? Is all gender a drag? What constitutes consciousness? Why do you think what you think? Why do you like what you like? Are you conscious of your body? Did you make that decision? Can you dance at a party? How did you envision your life? Was it your vision? When you are acting? What are you acting out? Life requires play, and not much else is worthwhile."



Natalie Arrué

Coming soon



Gabrielle Barnett

[Economies of Hyper \(In\)visibility: Fattening Discourse Within Economic Markets](#) by Elyse Neumann (2025)

[A Multisensory Assemblage of our Fatness: Weaving the Affective Entanglements of Fat Politic Across Distance](#) by Carly-Ann Haney (2025)



Further Materials

- [The Obscene/Body Politic](#) by Carolee Schneemann (1991)
- [Selections](#) from [Disidentifications: Queens of Color And The Performance of Politics](#) by José Esteban Muñoz (1999)
- [Queer Exercises: Amber Hawk Swanson's Performances of Self-Realization](#) by David J. Getsy (2013)

- ["Beauty Laid Bare: Aesthetics in the Ordinary" and "Being the Subject of Art"](#) from [*Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*](#) by bell hooks (1995)
 - ["Always Be Optimizing"](#) from [*Trick Mirror: Essays on Self-Delusion*](#) by Jia Tolentino (2020)
 - ["Beginnings" and "Fatness"](#) from [*Female Body Image In Contemporary Art: Dieting, Eating Disorders, Self-Harm, and Fatness*](#) by Emily L. Newman (2018)
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iii. Glitch in the Matrix

Haylee Anne

['Sick Woman Theory' by Johanna Hedva \(2020\)](#)

"The most anticapitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care."



Sulé Indigo

[*Dune*](#) by Frank Herbert (1965)

[*The Gilda Stories*](#) by Jewell Gomez (1991)

[*Parable of the Sower*](#) by Octavia Butler (1993)



Further Materials

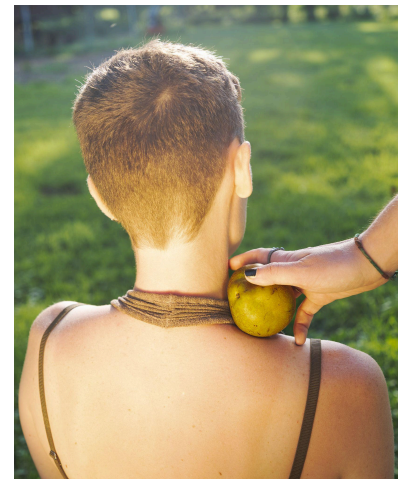
- "[A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century](#)" by Donna J. Haraway (1985)
 - [The Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century](#) by VNS Matrix (1991)
 - [Glitch Feminism](#) by Legacy Russell (2020)
 - [Selections](#) from [Feminist, Queer, Crip](#) by Alison Kafer (2013)
 - [The Summer of Her Baldness: A Cancer Improvisation](#) by Catherine Lord (2003)
 - [For New Exhibition in Basel, Berenice Olmedo Pushes the Boundary of What We Consider to Be a Body](#) by Shanti Escalante-De Mattei (2023)
 - [My Body is a Clock](#) by Sara J Winston, NYT Op Ed (2023)
 - [Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* Artist Statement](#) (1996)
 - [All the Beauty and the Bloodshed](#), Nan Goldin & Laura Poitras (2022)
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iv. Queer Futurity

Mads Nunes

[*After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life*](#)
by Joshua Chambers-Letson (2018)

"If we insist that life is extinguished utterly and totally through the withdrawal of the live from presence and its recession into memory, we refuse the possibility that the lives of those we have loved and lost can extend beyond the point of their death by way of memorial performance. In other words, we kill or lose them a second time. The reproductive faculty of



memorialization is not necessarily annulled as a result of performance's ephemerality, impermanence, and withdrawal from presence."

[We Were Here: Sexuality, Photography, and Cultural Difference](#) by Sunil Gupta (2022)

[Trans Care](#) by Hil Malatino (2020)

Further Materials

- [How to Do Nothing](#) by Jenny Odell (2017)
 - [Selections](#) from [Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals](#) by Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2020)
 - [Radical Softness as a Boundless Form of Resistance](#) by [Gender Fail](#) (2021)
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