THE MALE GAZE IN CHICAGO FILM (2002)

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ABSTRACT

This study is to identify and analyze how the male gaze operates in Chicago Film (2002). Based on Male Gaze theory by Laura Mulvey used in this study, it focuses on the gaze of the man audiences when looks at the women. This study will identify several frames of scenes in the movie which focus on two female characters in this film in order to identify and investigate how the male gaze operates in this film. Identifying this movie by using qualitative method of film studies, the writer identified the aspects of narrative and non-narrative (camera shots, camera angle, make-up and costume) and found that the movie carried much conviction that women are being the object of male gaze to fulfill the desire of the audiences especially the men.

Keywords: Male Gaze; Narrative; Non-Narrative; Women

1. Introduction

In modern era, media (electronic and print) have been growing significantly and supporting any issue around our life. One of popular issues raised in the media is women’s issue. Nowadays, the women’s issues become the focus of the feminists for 30 years (Byerly & Ross 2006, p. 17). One of the issues raised and to be discussed is several research findings regarding the position or representation of women in the media as the object.

‘Tuchman et al.’s work, they found that advertising, television, films, news, and other genres in Western nations, as well as those in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, disproportionately emphasized women’s traditional domestic roles or treated them as sex object.” (Byerly & Ross 2006, p. 17)

Like Tuchman says, film is one of media using women as the object and positioning women as sexual object. Women become the actresses who are displayed in the film and there are two levels which position the women as the display:

“Traditionally, the women displayed have functioned on two levels: as erotic object for characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectators within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen.” (Gigi Durham & Kellner 2006, p. 347).

The important thing is who watch the film. Audiences are the subjects who watch the film. The audiences start to make a gaze staring at the film. Based on Lacan’s theory, McGowan states that the gaze is the objet petit a of the scopic drive (the drive that motivates us to look) (2007, p.6). McGowan explains the objet petit a as a special term about the entity of gap between the subject (audiences) and film. This gap within our look shoots the point at which our desire manifests itself in what we see. Gaze as an object acts to trigger our desire visually, and as such it is what Lacan calls an objet petit a or object-cause of desire (2007, p. 5).

The way audiences or the spectators watch the object is called spectatorship. Judith Mayne suggests that spectatorship is not only the act of watching a film, but also the way one takes pleasure in the experience (Bainbridge 2008, p. 32).

From the explanation above about media, the women’s issue and film, in this study the writer attempts to investigate the issue of women as the object. The study is about The Male Gaze in Chicago Film. Chicago is a Broadway film that uses women as the actresses who perform at the Broadway stage. Chicago, a film by Miramax production, is a Broadway Musical Chicago originally directed and choreographed by Rob Marshall. This film was released in 2002.

Therefore, the same as the explanation about the result of Tuchman’s research that women are object (sexual object), there is a similar issue to be analyzed in this study. In this film, women are displayed on the stage. On stage, women are unaware that the audiences are watching them. The act of viewing the activities of other people unbeknown to them is called voyeurism (Hayward 2000, p. 446). In the film,
the director directs the position of the camera which films the act of the women on the stage. The camera which shoots the women on the stage also enacts as the voyeur (the agents who view the act).

From the performing of women’s sexiness on the stage, the director wants to create a fantasy for the audiences. The fantasy created by the film-maker is in-relation to but distinct from the fantasy perceived by the spectator as constituted subject (Hayward 2000, p. 109). As already explained before, about two levels of women as display, women as the erotic object for the spectators within the auditorium means that women are watched by audiences. Audiences have the gaze that can trigger their desire.

"Fantasy is inextricably linked with desire, which, according to Lacan, is located in the imaginary. Fantasy is the conscious articulation of desire, through either images or storie – it is, then, the mise-en-scène of desire.” (Hayward 2000, p. 109)

McGowan states (2007, p. 7-8) that, based on Lacan’s theory about the gaze in visual field, the gaze is not the spectator’s external view of the filmic image, but the mode in which the spectator is accounted for within the film itself. In this film, the women are the performers on the stage which have the talent for entertaining the audiences (being looked at as the object). The women have the appearance which can attract the audiences. For supporting how male gaze operates in this film, the writer will identify the aspects of this film based on narrative and non-narrative. There are two main components in narrative, story and the plot. For the non-narrative, there is mise-en-scène. Mise-en-scène is the tools of how to read the shoot of the film. Monaco explains (2000, p. 179) that mise-en-scène is to answer two main questions, what to shoot and how to shoot it. There are a lot of aspects in mise-en-scène, however only camera shoots, camera angle, costume, and make-up will be analyzed in this study.

This study uses the “Male Gaze” theory by Laura Mulvey which argues that women are the object of pleasure and men are the bearer. In her article Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, there are two ideas bound in the Mulvey’s theory ‘Male Gaze’ (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey uses Freud’s (psychoanalysis) and Lacan’s theories. Mulvey explains about the pleasure of looking at the object. Scopophilia (Mulvey 1989, p. 16), i.e., we are in a shape that looking itself or being looked at is kind of a source of pleasure, so the people can be the objects, and subjecting them as the controlling and curious gaze. The identification of ego is based on Lacan’s theory (Mulvey 1989, p. 17). It is the theory that shows the audiences’ process to identify their self by looking at the mirror. In the mirror, we can look at you and identify who we are. Lacan says that when we (child) look ourself in the mirror; it can be the crucial constitution of the ego. This process is not good enough for the child’s ego because the image in the mirror may not be as good as our hope. There is a misrecognition which some children believe that their reflection is more perfect than their self. In the film, this theory is implemented in the identification of the audiences. The screen of the film is like a mirror through which the audiences can feel their feeling regarding the movie. It is a kind of joyous, and also the narcissism.

Mulvey splits the spectators into two, active spectators (male), and passive spectators (female) (Mulvey 1989, p. 19). As the active spectators, men’s eyes are to be the camera looking at the object (women). Women are displayed as sexual object and being looked at, and their appearance is the code of strong visual and erotic. Therefore, the female is connotated to-be-looked-at-ness.

There are a number of previous studies discussing women issues particularly women as the object. The first is ‘Cyberbabes: (Self-) Representation of Women and the Virtual Male Gaze’ conducted by Sullivan (1997). In her article, Sullivan uses the theoretical framework of Laura Mulvey “Male Gaze.” Sullivan argues that:

“Mulvey argued that the operations of classical Hollywood cinema positioned the camera so as to represent the male character’s point of view and to encourage male spectators to identify voyeuristically with this male character who invariably observes women.” (Sullivan 1997, p. 191).

Sullivan’s research discusses about the implications of the operation of the male gaze in the milieu of the Web, drawing on examples of “Cyberbabe” Web-sites. This reasearch analyzes the women as the object of male’s pleasure in the websites which are accessed mostly by men.

The next previous study is an undergraduate research of English Department Airlangga University conducted by Greta Maurita Rahany. The title of the research is “Male Gaze on Axe Advertisements: Semiotic Study.” She proposes two objects of the study namely the AXE advertisement with library
version and the one with sauce version which are taken from the internet. She describes the objects in details through narrative and non-narrative aspects. Camera techniques used in this study is the camera shot that consists of establishing shot, long shot, medium shot, over-the-shoulder-shot, and close-up shot (mostly used in the objects).

The last research used in this study is conducted by Rina Saraswati for her master degree thesis. The title of the thesis is “Ambivalensi Tokoh Lolita dalam Film Lolita (1997): Sebuah Kajian Berperspektif Feminis” (Saraswati 2011). In this study, Saraswati analyzes the main character of the film Lolita who is the object of gaze and also the subject of the film. Similarly, this study also uses narrative and non-narrative to analyze and identify the film. The theoretical frameworks used in this study are textual approach by Roland Barthes, Postmodern feminism by Laura Mulvey and mimicry strategy by Luce Irigaray.

Those previous studies are different from the current study in several aspects. Previous studies employ similar theory about male gaze but they are different in terms of object. The last related study takes two objects, novel and film, and compare them. The research is done using several theories. It is similar to the current study as it analyzes the male gaze in the scenes of film. From those differences, all studies definitely have different results and conclusions which have already been described above.

This study would give example on how every part of the film can support the story of the film, such as the non-narrative aspects. Those aspects can provide different point of views to each audience. They will know and feel how the position of a woman as an object of male’s perspective. Therefore, the readers will know how to read a film from a female’s and male’s point of view. Second, this study adds more knowledge for the writer also the readers about issues on women and feminism so that the readers are aware of the women’s right to be portrayed equally in the media. The last aim is to give contribution to English Department students of Universitas Airlangga who want to have the same study that concern to films as their specialization.

2. Research Method

The writer uses Qualitative method of film studies in this study. For the data, there are two types of sources used in this analysis. The primary source of this analysis is the movie itself, Chicago directed by Bob Marshall in 2002. Furthermore, there are secondary sources which are taken and chosen for supporting and explaining the object of this study; any printed and unprinted reliable or trustworthy materials such as books, articles, and scholarly journals such as the previous thesis related to this study are used as supporting data in this study.

In order to have a comprehensive and deep analysis, scope and limitation will be applied. The writer limits this study to several scenes in the film which have several frames consisting of the main characters, Velma Kelly and Roxie Hart, who perform on the stage.

Through purposive sampling, the writer chooses several frames which needs analyzing. The writer performs several steps for the data collection. The first step is sorting certain scenes of the film showing the stage performance. Then, the writer captures the frames of the scenes that focus on two main female characters in the film, Velma Kelly and Roxie Hart. After that, the writer transcribes the dialogue. Last, those frames will be elaborated based on narrative and non-narrative aspects and the theory will be applied to analyze the frames.

Within the narrative aspect, the writer analyzes the story and plot. The story analysis is focused on the two main female characters. The writer will discuss the operation of the theory. Applying the theory of Laura Mulvey – Male Gaze, there are several points which will be analyzed. First is based on Freud, Scophopilia and second is about Identification of the Ego based on Lacan’s theory.

After analyzing the narrative aspects, non-narrative aspects will be then analyzed. Non-narrative aspect is the supporting system to identify how the narration is presented in the movie; it is all about techniques of film making. The analysis of non-narrative aspects is also intended to make a stronger analysis that completes the analysis of narrative aspects. Non-narrative aspects that become the focus of this study are mise-en-scène. Giannetti explains that there are several aspects in mise-en-scène. However, only camera shots, camera angle, costume, and make-up are taken to be analyzed in this study.

3. Discussion
3.1 Narrative

Chicago is a film which is adapted from a Broadway musical performance in 1975. Actually this show is a repackage or remake of a show with the same title in 1926. It indicates that this story is influenced by the condition in 1920s; therefore, the attitude of the women in this film is the attitude of the people in 1920s. Besides, at that time, Broadway musical also grew and became an industry which could give entertainment for the audiences and twenties is the age of glamorous movie stars and Jazz were growing (Sagert 2010, p.5). In 1926, Elinor Glyn wrote a book and a movie script for the first time; the book she wrote then became a part of Jazz age slang (Sagert 2010, p.XV). It shows that twenties is an era of Jazz.

As explained before, the writer focuses on two main female characters in this film which are mainly exposed and have primary role in the story. This film is packed as Broadway Musical. The main scenes are on the stage. Renée Zellweger as Roxie Hart is a chorus dancer in a club. Catherine Zeta-Jones as Velma Kelly is a club dancer and singer. She usually performs with her sister Veronica as a group. Their group’s name is The Kelly Sisters. 

Chicago is opened with an overture and continued with the first performance of the main female character, Velma Kelly. Velma comes to the stage by taxi; she opens taxi’s door and puts down her leg first. Then she runs away to prepare her performance (changing her clothes and putting make-up on). The performance is opened with an introduction by a male band leader.

Band Leader : Ladies and gentlemen, the Onyx club is proud to present Chicago’s hottest dancing duo. Two Jazz babes moving as one. The Kelly Sisters [Audiences Applause] (00.03.16)

After band leader opens the show, Velma Kelly is on the stage and singing All that Jazz. This song is the opening song:

Velma : Come on, babe, why don’t we paint the town. And all that jazz! I’m gonna rouge my knees and roll my stocking down. And all that jazz. (00.03.22)

It’s just a noisy hall where there’s nightly brawl. (00.03.32)

The lyric shows that Velma, as a singer, wants to invite the (male) audiences to see her. She rouges her knees and rolls her stocking down; it indicates that she wants to have a good time with the audiences. In her article, Laura Mulvey states that women in film are the object of male gaze. Mulvey explains that the spectators of pleasure in looking at the object are divided into two, the active spectators (male) and the passive spectators (female). Male as active spectators are more powerful to make their desire of looking at the object (female). The male spectators start to make their gaze by looking at the object (female) and their gaze constructs their pleasure for looking at female as sexual object. Their pleasure of looking the object as sexual object is called Scopophilia. Scopophilia arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight (Mulvey 1989, p.18).

In the opening scene, the film starts with an overture (Jazz) which introduces the audiences that this is a Broadway musical (theatrical performance). Then, Velma Kelly comes to the Onyx Club by taxi and puts down her leg first. She wears short skirt which is popular at that time. The fact is in 1920’s, the dresses were daringly inched up to calf length then knee length and from 1926 through 1928, the knees themselves were exposed (Sagert 2010, p.2). It shows that the director constructs women as the object of spectators especially the active ones. In this scene, the heteromative men start gazing at Velma’s leg and their desire arises. Woman’s leg is a part of body which can attract men’s sexuality. In Western, women who have slender legs are sexier (Saraswati 2011, p. 89). The men’s gaze at Velma can be considered as Scopophilia because they enjoy an object as their sexual object.

Furthermore, the band leader opens the show with an opening speech in which there are sentences that can attract the audiences to see the show. There are the words babes and hottest in the opening speech which aim to introduce and attract the audiences especially men audiences. It is an excellent start of the film; therefore, the (male) audiences can start operating their gaze. Babes means an informal Sweetheart; dear, used as a term of endearment. Hottest is a slang word refers to a term about sexually excited, or people who are popular or famous. Those two words refer to women who perform on the stage and are considered as object.

On the stage, Roxie dances while looking at mirrors. Mulvey adapts Lacan’s theory about the identification of ego which says that someone will look at him/herself at mirror. Looking at the mirror
connotes that the spectators look at the object on the screen. The pleasure and the identification of ego come from the object on the screen. Pleasure in looking connected to ego is called narcissism which rises from the identification of women who look on the screen. Roxie looks herself in the mirrors and the men look Roxie on the screen. In this scene, Roxie supports the notion which says that women have a traditional role as objects which are displayed and watched. Mulvey says that women are objects looked by men as active spectators (Mulvey 1989, p.19). Women in film are merely as object to receive the gaze of the male audience and the camera while they are simultaneously being displayed for Scopophilic pleasure of the male spectators. Here, women are connotated as to-be-looked-at-ness (women are positioned as the object of men’s pleasure).

As the writer said before, the women in 1920s were called Flapper. In this decade, the ultramodern and audacious young women danced and drank; smoked chic cigarettes; bobbed her hair and showed her skin; and shook and shimmied in jazz halls and clubs of uncertain reputation (Sagert 2010, p.11). Women dared to expose their bodies as something that was very prevalent to be displayed in public, especially for men. Flappers did rebellious activities such as having intercourse, following the trend of fashion, and also enjoying being a part of Broadway. Sex, Illicit Sex is a normal thing that they were doing. Therefore this film also exposes intercourse (Sagert 2010, p. 11).

3.2 Non-Narrative

In the figure above, Velma puts down her leg first from the taxi and walks away to the club. After that, the camera captures Velma’s leg. Figure 1 and 2 are close up shots in which the camera focuses on the object in order to make the object clearly viewed and make the continuity of the object which in this scene the camera moves from her leg to her body. The director wants to attract the audiences especially men to look at the woman’s legs. Woman’s legs can attract men’s sexuality because actually men have fetish to leg. Those figures are shot in low angle because the camerawants to make Velma as the focus object for the audiences.

Figure 3.

Figure 5 is categorized as a long shot which has a purpose to fully show the object and the setting of the frames (my translation Javandalasta 2011, p. 33). It shows Roxie as she sings in front of the mirrors. Based on Lacan’s theory, the identification of the ego starts when we reflect our body to the mirror.

“In the looking-glass faces of women, man finds a figure which consoles and motivates him, forces him to the work of civilization while at the same time permitting him the solace of private, primitive godhead.” (Woolf cited in Squier 1981, p.274).

The mirrors can be considered as men’s eyes and women who reflect their bodies in the mirrors are then displayed as objects of men’s eyes (male gaze). Therefore, Roxie can be considered as the object of
men’s eyes (the mirrors). The men start to make a gaze at Roxie and their eyes actually represent mirrors. Actually, the men’s gaze when looking at Roxie is a type of categorized as voyeurism. Voyeurism can be treated as a kind of pleasure in which men watch a woman and the woman may not know that she is being watched by the men and thus she may not watch the men in return. In psychoanalytic term, voyeurism cannot be separated from fetishism which says that men look at women as their sexual object.

Figure 4.

Davis states that what we wear, including cosmetics, jewelry, coiffure can be assumed under the general notion of a code (1992, p. 12). Here, the clothes and the make-up are the code adapted from 1920’s style, Flapper, which is a youth’s reaction against the dark and serious clothes, behavior, and mood of an older generation still clinging to old Victorian and Edwardian value (Herald 2007, p.6). Therefore, women wore clothes which made them move easily and in contrast to Victorian era in which women wore tight corset and Victorian dresses made from heavy materials and make them difficult to move. Women in twenties were more independent and they had changed from the Gibson Girls (1910’s) who were feminine. Roxie and Velma wear Flapper style in order to make them move easily as dancer and singer in Broadway.

4. Interpretation of Findings

Based on the explanation above, the writer found that Chicago is a film which adapts the Broadway Musical in 1920s. Therefore, the social condition in this film is made related to the condition in 1920s. The social condition in the film is mostly the same with the social condition in 1920s. In this decade, the social change was swifter and faster than that in previous decade because Americans wanted to change their life after they felt the miseries of World War I. By 1914, millions of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were flooding the United States (McNeese 2010, p. 14). After World War I, there was a shift of power from Europe to America in the West. Therefore, the Americans wanted to make their country grow and grow after World War I. American rich people emerged and they found how to cure their wound due to the war.

In this decade, women also changed rapidly; it can be seen from their activities such as fighting for equality, expressing sexuality and fashion. Hedonistic could also be seen in their social life in which the America men and women came to a place to have a party together. The 1920s is the Jazz Age and called as “Roaring Twenties”, a period of escapism after the horrors of World War I (McEvoy 209, p. 5). The coming of Jazz in this era was a sign of optimism, an era of prosperity, and also time for having a good time. As mentioned above, American people really needed something new after the miseries of World War I and they spent more money recklessly for less purpose than what they actually needed for their life.
“As leisure time increased, so did access to leisure activities, whether that meant listening to the radio, watching silent—and then talking—movies, dancing at smoky jazz clubs, or taking thrilling Sun-day afternoon drives” (Sagert 2010, p. 16).

The younger generation in the decade turned their backs on the formality and dark, buttoned-up clothing of the previous century (McEvoy 2009, p. 5). They enjoyed going to the Jazz club and watched Broadway performance. McEvoy explains that in this decade, social class and high society emerged. Thus, despite the revolution breaking around them, smart society and the older generation in general, still dressed in accordance with the social calendar (2009, p. 7).

Concerning the fashion and women’s activities in this decade, there were several changes from the 1910s generation to 1920s. Clothes reflected the new mood of liberation in looser, lighter garments and with a simpler shape. (McEvoy 2009, p. 7). 1910s is known as Gibson Girls who dressed like Victorian era with a heavy gown and were feminin meanwhile 1920s is popular with the term Flappers.

“Flappers was the ultramodern and audacious young woman who danced and drank; smoked chic cigarettes; bobbed her hair and showed her shins; and shook and shimmied in jazz halls and clubs of uncertain reputation” (Sagert 2010, p. 11).

Jazz became a common thing in 1920s era. Young women wore short, above the-knee-dresses, neckling parties, and discussion of sex was common picture (Nugraheni 1995, p. 64). “Coco” Chanel, perhaps the most influential designer of her generation, stepped out in her own smart but casual jersey clothing (Herald 2007, p. 12).

Adapting 1920s social condition, this film was made in 2002 using the development of technologies and cinematography. The development of technologies and cinematography influence the film making. Lately in 19th century, moving pictures emerged as a public amusement (Bordwell & Thompson 2008, p. 2). Here, the writer sees theartisticsideoafilmin which thefilmwas adapted from the storiesthat occurred several years ago. The development of the era as well as the development of the film industry will bring the way and systems how a film can be a masterpiece for entertaining the audiences. Nowadays, America has grown. By and large, their faith in the “American dream” was rewarded with good fortune (Gritzner 2008, p. 62). The economic in America has grown along with materialistic and idealistic. It is mostly similar to America in the 1920s in which the people wanted to change and grow after the World War I. The Americans are now more competitive and more hedonistic.

5. Conclusion
Based on those scenes analyzed by the writer, it can be concluded that two main female characters (Roxie and Velma) are the objects of male’s pleasure. Based on the analysis of the narrative and non-narrative aspects of the film using Male Gaze theory by Laura Mulvey, women are being the object of male’s pleasure. Men can manage their fantasy when they watch the film and raise a gaze to women as sexual object. It shows that women still play their traditional role which is being the object and displayed as object for male’s pleasure.

6. References