

“The Spectacle is Vulnerable”: On the iconoclastic origins of feminist art theory¹

Alexandra Kokoli

To claim that the work of Laura Mulvey is canonical would be an understatement. More than this, as a feminist film maker and theorist, she has become something of a household name. Mulvey (mispronounced as MulvAY to sound more “European”) comes up in the popular situation comedy *Parks and Recreation* when a young male character is revising for his women’s studies module exam.² In this episode, Mulvey becomes code for women’s studies as an academic discipline, with her theorisation of the male gaze cited as the prime example of the module’s syllabus. This framing of Mulvey’s contribution – even if not especially, in popular culture – is extremely consequential since it captures a layman’s [sic] understanding of feminism’s impact on culture and society. Here, I expand an understanding of Mulvey’s feminist iconoclasm in her analysis of “the male gaze” and scopophilia in film to her actions in live spectacle, activism and public space, in order to show how they challenge “scopophobia”. “Scopophobia” is a strategic avoidance or de-emphasis of vision,³ the opposite of Mulvey’s term “scopophilia” where the subject who takes pleasure in the act of looking objectifies its target without being looked at and where the objectification of man’s others is condoned and supported by patriarchy. Mulvey’s foundational critique of spectacle and “the male gaze” are analysed here not to re-assess their value but rather to more accurately locate their origins⁴ as an insight borne out of feminist iconoclastic practice and specifically from the disruption of the spectacle of a beauty contest through feminist protest.

Iconoclasm: The practice of feminist theory

¹ An earlier and longer version of this chapter is published as “The role of activism in Laura Mulvey’s iconoclasm”, in Kimberley Lamm and Anna Backman Rogers (eds.) *Laura Mulvey: Feminist Legacies* (Bloomsbury, 2026).

² *Parks and Recreation* (NBC, 2009-2015), “Lucky”, S4E18, 2012.

³ Harris, 2007, 15.

⁴ For a more detailed review, contextualisation and critique of Mulvey’s text, see Kokoli, 2012.

The first essay in Laura Mulvey's self-curated collection *Visual and Other Pleasures* (2009), consists of an account of feminist actions in protest against the Miss World competition of 1970. It was co-authored with Margarita Jimenez but originally published anonymously in *Shrew*, the London Women's Liberation Workshop journal. "The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World, 1970" opens "Part I: Iconoclasm" of her anthology alongside "Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious or 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr Jones?'" originally published in the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* in 1973 and "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", written in 1973 and first published in the journal *Screen* in 1975. Mulvey's considered curatorial placement of her most famous essay presents it as the culmination of a political-theoretical framework that emerges from different kinds of practices, both creative and activist, including her commitment to the women's liberation movement in its emergence, her involvement in feminist protest and non-violent direct action, her work in independent feminist publishing, the writing of criticism on art, film and visual culture and the production of feminist critical discourse on film and visual culture from perspectives that could be retrospectively characterised as practice-based or practice-led. By foregrounding action and activism over an attitude or approach, the framing of these texts under the term "iconoclasm" acts as a crucial reminder that the language of psychoanalysis and the feminist analytical apparatus that Mulvey fashions with it are weapons against patriarchy and not only (nor principally) an academic exercise. Mulvey's words are performative: they become deeds.

While *Visual and Other Pleasures*, like any conventional book, translates different practices into the medium and practice of writing, it is particularly important to resist the assumption that this is a work of a theorist narrowly defined, or that theory is separate from practice, or that the labour of theorisation is performed in solitude, in libraries and at desks. This is not to underplay the significance of writing which should be listed among Mulvey's repertory of feminist practice: she describes the first two essays of the book, on Miss World and Allen Jones, as "her first steps towards writing" and notes that "the environment of the Women's Movement [was] literally liberating for me, enabling me to write".⁵ In her emergent writing practice, psychoanalytic theory furnished Mulvey with "a polemical vocabulary".⁶ Nevertheless, to contain Mulvey's foundational influence within "feminist

⁵ Mulvey, 2009, xv.

⁶ Mulvey, 2009, xv.

(psychoanalytic) theory”, in its conventional definition, misrepresents the context, content and iconoclastic intent of her work as both a writer and filmmaker. While situating the origins of Mulvey’s practice in feminism as a social movement rather than a cluster of theories, “iconoclasm” teases out a persistent resistance to spectacle that includes but exceeds how “woman as spectacle” is discussed across Mulvey’s work or in theories of the gaze.

Scopophilia, Scopophobia, Iconoclasm

In a book charting the sociocultural and methodological transformations of the discipline of art history in the last three decades of the twentieth century, Jonathan Harris proposes “a tripartite structure of sensibilities”. These pivot on the role that each emergent school of thought assigns to the act of looking, defined as:

the *scopocentric* (those who believe they ground their analysis on the act of looking), the *scopophobic* (those determined to avoid looking altogether, or who find reasons endlessly to defer it) and those somewhere in the middle – where I place myself – the *scoposceptic* (those who want to see looking at art as much as an historical as a personal activity . ⁷

In his tripartite division, Mulvey’s theory and practice are defined as “scopophobic”, although this is troubled later on in his argument, where Harris concedes that rather than centering versus avoidance, each position represents “different kinds of looking” and different understandings “of what *really* looking and *really* seeing must involve”.⁸ In his discussion of feminism, psychoanalysis and Mulvey’s contributions, Harris reframes the problem again away from looking or seeing *per se* into more pertinent questions of film as form, genre, spectatorship and the movie theatre as the assumed site of film consumption. Harris focuses on passages in Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” that, for him, betray its writer’s identity as film maker by foregrounding the wholly intentional and profoundly radical liberation project behind her critique of the gaze in Hollywood narrative

⁷ Harris, 2007, 15, emphases in the original.

⁸ Harris, 42.

cinema: “to free the look of the camera in its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment”.⁹ If it is “cinematic codes” that create the (male) gaze, the way to destroy the gaze is to change filmic language – which Mulvey went on to do in her films, including notably *Riddles of the Sphinx*, co-directed with Peter Wollen. In Mulvey’s oeuvre, “looking” is revealed as the consequence of the system that produces it. There is no turning away from the field of vision here but on the contrary, a recognition of the field of vision as the arena where patriarchy is both revealed and upheld and where it can also begin to be dismantled.

The term iconoclasm, for which Mulvey opts as a descriptor of her early writing, is most often used in the inclusive plural to acknowledge the “heterogeneity of iconoclastic acts” through history and across cultures, and stands for a destruction of images that is intentional and meaningful, in contrast to acts of vandalism.¹⁰ Iconoclasm is not reducible to an aversion to images (“scopophobia”) but rather references a transhistorical range of social movements, uprisings and actions across the world, from Byzantium to contemporary campaigns against monuments. As Kristine Kolrud and Marina Prusac note, beyond its lexical definition, iconoclasm has become a slippery concept, with its literal meaning of image destruction more often than not conflated, both conceptually and in practice, with its metaphorical association to “the attacking or overthrow of venerated institutions and cherished beliefs” and thus regarded as fallacious or superstitious.¹¹ While most historical studies of the phenomenon concentrate on Byzantium and the Reformation, Bruno Latour’s exhibition and book *Iconoclasm* has teased out the ambiguity of images – including icons and representations of iconoclastic acts – as one of the roots of their danger at the turn of the 21st century. Latour who does not engage with feminist iconoclasm in either his theorising or examples proposes a new taxonomy of contemporary iconoclasm, which includes “people who are against freeze-frame, not against images”, a modality in which Mulvey’s ideas would have been particularly pertinent.¹² Mulvey’s iconoclasm is as rich and efficacious as it is straightforward, making no demands on the reader for a historical or

⁹ Harris, 2007, 26.

¹⁰ Kolrud and Prusac, 2016, 1.

¹¹ OED 1989, cited in Kolrud and Prusac, 2016, 2.

¹² Latour, 2002, 27.

philosophical grounding in iconoclasms, as she wrote: “It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article”.¹³

Vulnerable Spectacles

“The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World, 1970” delves into a live and broadcast spectacle, where the (exclusively metaphorical) concealment of women’s bodies at work takes place through layers of fetishisation of a feminine beauty ideal as the ultimate commodity in visual culture. The iconoclastic destruction of this Mecca-produced¹⁴ entertainment spectacle did not involve any metaphorical or actual attack on the women’s bodies on stage but rather a historically informed, anarchic and carnivalesque disruption to Miss World by making noise and throwing leaflets as well as flour, smoke and stink bombs onto the stage.

Serendipitously, the location of the Royal Albert Hall made this action into a homecoming of sorts: between 1908 and 1913, the Hall was hired by both militant and pacifist suffrage groups on more than thirty different occasions as a meeting venue.¹⁵ In her book on the visual activism of the suffragettes, Lisa Tickner describes the Hall as space for suffragette pageantry as it was where the processions for the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) converged on many occasions, including on 13 June 1908 with beautifully crafted banners “‘piled in terraced ranks of raw and flaming colour’ [...] framing the platform and its distinguished speakers”; even the hostile newspaper *The Times* acknowledged “the scene as one ‘of an imposing character’”.¹⁶ The association between the Miss World protesters and the suffragettes was neither accidental nor limited to the site of the Albert Hall. The protest organisers were intensely aware that theirs would be “the first conspicuous act of civil disobedience on behalf of the British women’s movement since the suffragettes”,

¹³ Mulvey, 2009, 16.

¹⁴ Mecca Leisure Group (now Mecca Bingo, owned by the Rank Group) was a British business that ran nightclubs, hotels, theme parks, bingo and dance halls. Eric Morley, its director between 1953 and 1978, is associated with the company’s heyday, thanks to popularising the game of bingo at a time when dance halls were dropping in popularity and founding the Miss World Contest. He also stood as a Conservative parliamentary candidate for Dulwich in 1974 and 1979, unsuccessfully in both elections (Barker 2000). In a two-page cartoon in the pamphlet *Why Miss World?* (1971), Mecca is represented as a slot machine operated by Maxwell Joseph, chairman of the Grand Metropolitan Group, whose subsidiaries included Mecca at the time, making a windfall.

¹⁵ Royal Albert Hall, n.d.

¹⁶ Tickner, 1987, 86.

notably breaking new ground in achieving live television coverage.¹⁷ What the organisers did not know but were willing to risk was that their actions would also get them arrested, tried and in some cases, imprisoned. According to Anne Sharpley's report in the 11 February 1971 edition of the *Evening Standard*, "Could anyone have guessed in 1905 when the patrician Emmeline Pankhurst and the mill girl Annie Kenny opted for going to prison instead of paying their fine that it was the start of nearly a decade of fury and fighting? Is this the start of another such decade?"¹⁸ In *Why Miss World?*,¹⁹ a pamphlet issued the year after the protests and the arrests and court cases that followed, its authors cite the arrests and charges against notable suffragettes as well as the decisions of many to defend themselves in court as militant feminist acts. Such acts were specifically iconoclastic in so far as they targeted woman-as-spectacle with the counter-spectacle of the feminist protester.

Their cross-examination of witnesses, the speeches they made in court amounted to a brilliant exposure of male prejudice and the legal system. In the course of the trial we re-discovered the political importance of self-defence, both as a means of defending our self-respect and as a means of consciously rejecting the image of female acquiescence. Self-defence is a public demonstration of our refusal to collude in our own repression. It is an expression of the politics of women's liberation.²⁰

"The Spectacle is Vulnerable", published in this pamphlet, is authored in two voices and two styles, a first-person account by Margarita Jimenez and "an impersonal comment" by Mulvey who was also directly involved in the action.²¹ The text begins with a distancing from anti-pornography feminist causes: "The Miss World competition is not an erotic

¹⁷ Finch *et al.*, 2020, 6

¹⁸ Cited in Finch *et al.*, 2020, 7.: The answer to this question is an emphatic yes, albeit for longer than a decade. The women's peace camp at Greenham Common (1981-2000), a feminist occupation of the 9-mile periphery of the USAF base where nuclear Cruise missiles were kept until 1991, organised a number of actions on and off site that resulted in hundreds of arrests and court cases. See Roseneil (1995 and 2000), among others. Sue Finch was involved in both the Miss World protests and Greenham and was still taking non-violent direct action with Women in Black, an international women's peace network, at the time of publication (Finch *et al.*, 2020, 12).

¹⁹ According to Finch *et al.*, 2020, 175, this self-published pamphlet was written, illustrated and printed by some of the women involved in the Miss World protest, including Sue Finch, Jenny Fortune, Jane Grant, Jo Robinson and Sarah Wilson.

²⁰ Reprinted in Finch *et al.*, 2020, 171.

²¹ Mulvey, 2009, 3.

exhibition". The demonstration was therefore not against an erotic spectacle but one that framed the social reproduction of women's roles as a "very narrow destiny": "born to be defined by their attributes" which, if they're lucky to be considered pretty, they cash in for marriage and children. In taking the decision to demonstrate, protestors had to grapple with their own socialisation into patriarchal bourgeois femininity which made disruption, "drawing attention to ourselves, inviting the hostility of thousands of people" particularly difficult.²² Already in 1971 (referring to events of the previous year), the protest organisers sensed the danger of preaching to the converted and acknowledged the value of engaging with "the outside world" to face its "outrage and bewilder[ment]", or fight against the indifference of the press, which, in this case at least, they needn't have feared. The second half of the text is written in the first person and refers to fellow instigator Sally Alexander by her first name, interweaving a brief account of events inside the Albert Hall with a critical reflection. In this specifically gendered account of direct action, the obstacle of feminine socialisation is transformed into a vehicle of frank and open consideration of the vicissitudes of protest. The text highlights the gulf between careful planning and unpredictable execution on the day, with no flattering edits or self-aggrandisement. Mulvey and Jimenez describe that while the protesters discovered that they were not sat together, which increased their feelings of isolation, they also saw the Hall as scalable and the stage "ludicrously accessible".²³ The protesters acknowledged each other in the bar and the women's toilets – "a silent solidarity"²⁴ – and tried to blend in with the audience. "When the moment came it was easier to act than to consider; in the scuffle with the police, it was anger and determination that prevailed".²⁵ Some of the Miss World contestants expressed solidarity with the protesters when they saw them apprehended. Although the contest resumed after the prompt removal of the protesters, the action was deemed a success: "How was it, with so many odds against us, that the demonstration was successful? The spectacle is vulnerable. [...] [It] isn't prepared for anything other than passive spectators".²⁶ The final paragraph is devoted to the host Bob Hope, an establishment comedian by then well past his prime, whose script revealed more than he intended. When he was persuaded back on

²² Mulvey, 2009, 4.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mulvey, 2009, 5.

²⁶ Ibid.

stage, visibly shaken, he joked ineptly: “this is a nice conditioning course for Vietnam”.²⁷ As Mulvey remarks “[H]is continual emphasis on Vietnam revealed the arrogance of imperialism behind the supposedly reassuring family-of-nations façade”.²⁸

Television broadcasts of the 1970 Miss World Contest do not capture the extent of the disruption that feminist protesters caused that evening, both inside and outside of Albert Hall. Inside, the action took off forty minutes into the proceedings, introduced by an uncanny rattling off-stage and then whistling, followed by flour, smoke and stink bombs thrown at the stage and leaflets dropped from the upper circle. Outside, protesters came from both women’s and LGBTQ+ groups, staging a counter-contest of Mis-Fits, Mis-Conceptions, Mis-Fortunes and Mis-Laid, as they had done the previous year. Artist Margaret Harrison remembers:

My friend, Alison Fell and I went together. She had light bulbs stuck to her breasts and a little switch in her sleeve, which she pressed now and again so that the light bulbs would turn on and off (the Flashing Nipples). I was Miss Lovable Bra, in a pre-formed, black plastic chest – one of the ones you can get in the lingerie department. I stuck orange fur nipples on it and had a smile on a stick. It was totally mad and I was five months pregnant, so it was too dangerous for me to go inside the Albert Hall. I stayed outside but actually it was even worse outside.²⁹

Why Miss World (1971) also includes writing and original cartoons by Jenny Fortune and others, such as a woman’s bust with bombs stuffed in oversized bra cups: “Last night I dreamt I blew up the Albert Hall with my Maidenform BRA...”, a spoof of advertising campaigns of the time. In her 2013 interview for the oral history project *Sisterhood and After* on the lives of feminist change-makers of the 1970s and 1980s, Lynne Segal recalls the ground-shifting influence of the Miss World pamphlet on her feminist development:

²⁷ The broadcast of Miss World 1970 is available to watch on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/C0k5zXKLnCs> The rattles and whistles of the protesters can be heard from minute 39, while Bob Hope’s comparison of the protests to Vietnam is at minute 41.

²⁸ Mulvey, 2009, 5.

²⁹ McNay, 2016.

“Why Miss World?” was literally the first women’s liberation pamphlet I read and I thought it was very, very good, you know [laughs]... I remember reading it, for some reason... in the bath thinking “You know, we’re not ugly, we’re not beautiful, we’re angry and women are more than people who want to be stared at and have their bottoms pinched.” Everything [that] was in that resonated with me.³⁰

Segal here identifies feminine “beauty” as the ugly front of a pervasive objectification and exploitation of women that fundamentally negates their humanity, let alone their equality with men. She also recognises this realisation as the spark of her a wider feminist awakening and locates the actions of the Miss World 1970 protestors at the origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain. The iconoclastic actions described, defended and celebrated in the pamphlet became iconic in their own right. As a significant chapter in feminist heritage, it was only a matter of time until the Miss World protest also became the subject of a mainstream feature film, which I discuss in the next section.

From Miss World to Misbehaviour

Misbehaviour (2020), directed by Philippa Lowthorpe from a screenplay by Gaby Chiappe and Rebecca Frayn, is a comedy-drama about these events that bravely attempts to strike a series of delicate balances with mixed results. First, in a light-hearted manner, it narrates serious political events with high and enduring stakes in a genre well-established in British twenty-first century cinema, which led one critic to compare *Misbehaviour* to “heart-warming” period pieces such as *The Full Monty* and *Calendar Girls*.³¹ Secondly, while identifying itself as a feminist film which aims to educate the wider public about the history of women’s movements in Britain, it splits its attention between the group of feminist activists who organise the protest against Miss World and the experiences of Miss World contestants, especially those of colour, notably Jennifer Hosten, Miss Grenada, who went on to be crowned Miss World and Pearl Jansen, Miss Africa South, who was runner up. Jansen, a black contestant from Apartheid South Africa was a last-minute addition intended to appease anti-Apartheid protesters who, unlike the feminists, were considered a much more

³⁰ Segal cited in Jolly, 2019, 94.

³¹ Roeper, 2020.

serious threat by Mecca. According to its producer Suzanne Mackie³² the film was inspired by a 2010 episode of the BBC Radio 4 series *The Reunion*, which “reunites a group of people intimately involved in a moment of modern history”.³³ In her memoir, Jennifer Hosten also remembers that Radio 4 reunion as significant. She still found Sally Alexander and Jo Robinson “reactionary”, objecting to their correcting Peter Jolly of Mecca when he referred to them as “ladies” but ending in a conciliatory note: “we had more in common than we expected. We finally had the opportunity to connect as women”.³⁴

Misbehaviour stayed in the cinemas for only for a few days as its March 2020 release was cut short by lockdowns across the world to control the spread of Covid-19. In some ways the event of its release was more impactful than the film itself: it brought considerable public attention back to the protest and the protestors, aided by the publication of Jennifer Hosten’s memoir in the same year (with a foreword by Gugu Mbatha-Raw, the actor who plays her in the film) and it motivated the publication of *Misbehaving: Stories of Protest Against the Miss World Protest and the Beauty Industry*³⁵ which includes a facsimile of the *Why Miss World?* pamphlet. This latter publication also contains more accounts by women who were involved in the protest, what led them to feminist activism then, their critique of the beauty industry then and now and the causes that continue to drive their feminism. The authors of this book met and worked with the makers of the film which they generally supported but towards which they declared a degree of ambivalence, in their book. *Misbehaving* is, in some ways, not just a companion but a response to the film, with corrections and counterarguments.

In her interview with Poppy Sebag-Montefiore for *History Workshop Online*, on occasion of the film’s release, Sally Alexander talks about its inaccuracies, one of which nearly led her to disassociate herself from the project entirely:³⁶ the scene where Sally’s partner tries to convince her not to join the protest because of a bomb explosion the day before never took place; had she been aware of such violence, she wouldn’t have risked

³² Moorhead, 2020.

³³ BBC Radio 4, n.d.

³⁴ Hosten, 2020, 147.

³⁵ Finch et al, 2020.

³⁶ The interview also addresses the origins of Sally Alexander’s involvement in the women’s movement and her radical foundations in the History Workshop movement, which sought to democratise, politicise and deprofessionalise historiography. For a short account of the History Workshop movement and its journal, whose founding editorial team includes Sally Alexander, see Taylor, n.d.

demonstrating. Another entirely fabricated scene at the end of the film was possibly inspired by Radio 4's *The Reunion*: Alexander has been arrested and is led out of Albert Hall, when she asks to be allowed to the toilet; at the same time, Miss World winner Hosten rushes in, overwhelmed by the attention focused on her and in need of a moment of reprieve in solitude. There they have a brief but significant exchange. Alexander explains that she and her fellow protestors are not targeting the contestants but the contest, while Hosten defends her agency as a self-aware opportunity-taker. Moments of solidarity between feminist protesters and Miss World contestants are also highlighted in "The Spectacle is Vulnerable": "As I was lifted bodily out of the hall, three Miss Worlds came running up to me, a trio of sequined, perfumed visions, saying 'Are you all right?', 'Let her go'".³⁷ According to actor Gugu Mbatha-Raw who plays Hosten the bathroom encounter in *Misbehaviour* is a politically purposeful addition to the story. Not an untruth but a reparative gesture: the legacy of feminist iconoclasm is drawn upon to bridge gaps and re-negotiate racial and class disparities in the broad constituency of "women" in the present moment. Mbatha-Raw continues:

It was a bit of dramatic licence, but it really goes to the crux of intersectional feminism, and opens up the idea that all women need to be included in this movement. A lot of the criticism made of the feminist movement in the 1970s was that it was just for white middle-class women. The optics of Jennifer being the first woman of colour to win are so powerful about cultural standards of beauty. She was a pioneer.³⁸

A text that was unattributed when published in the *Why Miss World?* pamphlet and subsequently claimed by Mary Kelly specifically addresses the racism in Miss World, "carefully concealed behind the 'family of nations' façade".³⁹ The fetishistic spectacle of a white and a black beauty queen from Apartheid South Africa made it possible to ignore the brutality of that regime, which survived for another quarter of a century past Miss Africa South's success. In other words, Miss World acted as screen in both gender and global

³⁷ Mulvey, 2009, 5.

³⁸ Sturges, 2020.

³⁹ Kelly, 2019, 128.

politics. Such reflections are retrospective since the protesters could not have predicted the outcome of the competition at the time of their action. Jane Grant reflects:

Did I care about who won the Miss World title? On the night of the competition, we were ejected long before Jennifer Hosten, Miss Grenada, and Pearl Jansen, Miss Africa South, were announced as the winner and the runner-up. We probably heard about this later that night or read it in the morning papers. I remember feeling a buzz that they were both black, but the excitement would have been more at the level of giving the finger to apartheid and to the white establishment in general than about feeling this was important.⁴⁰

Grant who was raised in the US goes on to consider feminist intersectionality as a work-in-progress in which solidarity with black people over police brutality and her employment in the 1970s as a midwife both played a big part. As Shirley Anne Tate has explored, black feminism's approach to beauty is often distinct and less overwhelmingly negative because the denial and misrecognition of black beauty have been so intricately implicated in the workings of white supremacy.⁴¹

Such considerations nuance and complicate rather than invalidate the Miss World protests and their legacies. In this chapter, I foreground the on-going vitality of Laura Mulvey's contribution to future feminisms, where creative practice and direct action are pursued passionately, in tandem and towards cultural as well as political change. Feminist iconoclasm as distinct from scopophobia (or -phobia of any kind) marks an unruly space of material(ist) plenitude and persistence where generative encounters are made possible and whose potential is still being worked through.

Coda: Feminist Pageants

While researching this chapter, I discovered that one of my students on BA Fine Art at Middlesex University London was Miss Tunisia 1978. As a North African feminist, Malek

⁴⁰ Jane Grant in Finch et al., 2020, 62-63.

⁴¹ Tate2022.

Namlaghi viewed beauty contests as opportunity-makers and, like Jennifer Hosten, she did not share the white feminist view of pageants as oppressive or exploitative, or negatively positioning women in competition with each other, as “objects-to-be-looked at”. Namlaghi’s participation in the Miss World competition in London proved eventful and ultimately transformational and it also gave her the opportunity to articulate an emergent intersectional feminist politics of resistance which could also be deemed iconoclastic. In her participation, Malek refused to remove her face cover or participate in the swimsuit competition or allow the public to place bets on the potential winner (a big money maker for the organisers), to the great irritation of Miss World director Julia Morley and the ire of British tabloids. She was branded ‘Miss Yashmak’ by *The Sun* and initially disqualified from the competition, before being allowed back after diplomatic intervention. Namlaghi retrospectively views her involvement in Miss World as a feminist protest from the inside, a different kind of disruption to that in Miss World 1970 in which Mulvey participated.

Another echo can be found in an early performance by Sarah Maple and Beverley Knowles, *Dedicated to World Peace*, at the defunct La Scatola Gallery, London. On 30 March 2012, Maple, Knowles and volunteer collaborators mimicked some of the stock gestures and poses of beauty pageant contestants casting them as a form of highly gendered labour towards the production of a spectacle that has curiously survived multiple feminist waves. Maple, who is of English and Iranian heritage and was raised in the southeast of England as a Muslim, uses irony and provocation to unsettle ideas of femininity and feminism alike. Speaking about the abuse she has received for her work, she cites her ‘all-time favourite’, which [she] often use[s] in [her] biography: “Sarah Maple is only successful for being attractive and Muslim”.⁴² Maple, Namlaghi and the Miss World 1970 feminist protesters all deploy their own bodies as “site[s] and conduit[s] for civil disobedience”⁴³ that sabotage the spectacle that female and femme bodies are still expected to produce. As tokens of both feminist touchstones and intersectional fault lines, beauty, beauty contests and their disruptions demand continuous re-evaluation.

⁴² Sarah Maple cited in Bekhrad, n.d.

⁴³ Franklin, 2017, 104.

FIGS. 1-2 (only available in the published version): Malek Namlaghi, *Miss World, 1978/2025* (2025). Mixed media installation, Middlesex University Fine Art degree show 2025, Hendon campus, London. Reproduced with permission from the artist; photographs by Alexandra Kokoli.

References

- Barker, D. (2000) 'Eric Morley: Obituary'. *The Guardian*, 10 November. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/nov/10/guardianobituaries2> (Accessed: 28 September 2023).
- Bekhrad, J. (n.d.) 'The Marvelous World of Miss Maple', *REORIENT: Middle Eastern Arts and Culture Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.sarahmaple.com/text> (Accessed 26 April 2024).
- BBC Radio 4 (n.d.) *The Reunion*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007x9vc> (Accessed: 28 September 2023).
- Finch, S. et al. (eds) (2020) *Misbehaving: Stories of protest against the Miss World contest and the beauty industry*. London: Merlin Press.
- Franklin, M. I. (2017). "(Un)Dressing in Public: Defiant Embodiments and the Geopolitics of Seeing", in Zeena Feldman (ed.), *Art and the Politics of Visibility: Contesting the Global, Local, and the In-Between*. London: IB Tauris, pp. 73-113.
- Harris, J. (2007) *The new art history: A critical introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Hosten, J. (2020) *Miss World 1970*. Toronto: Sutherland House Books.
- Kelly, M. (2019). "Miss World", in Sophia Yadong Hao (ed.), *Of Other Spaces: Where does Gesture become Event?* London: Sternberg Press, pp. 126-129.
- Kokoli, A. (2012). "Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1975)", in Diana Newall and G. F. Pooke (eds.), *Fifty Key Texts in Art History*. London: Routledge.
- Kolrud, K. and Prusac, M. (eds) (2016). *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*. London: Routledge.
- Latour, B. et al. (2002) *Iconoclasm*. Karlsruhe: ZKM/ Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- McNay, A. (2016) 'Margaret Harrison: "You need to have a strategy to draw people into the work"' [interview]. *Studio International*, <https://www.studiointernational.com/margaret-harrison-interview-accumulations-middlesbrough-institute-of-modern-art> (Assessed 26 April 2024).
- Metacritic (n.d.) 'Misbehaviour: Critic Reviews', <https://www.metacritic.com/movie/misbehaviour/critic-reviews/> (Accessed: 28 September 2023).
- Moorhead, J. (2020) "'I heard the signal – and threw my flour bombs': Why the 1970 Miss World protest is still making waves", *The Guardian*, 26 February. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/26/i-heard-the-signal-and-threw-my-flour->

bombs-why-the-1970-miss-world-protest-is-still-making-waves (Accessed: 28 September 2023).

Mulvey, L. (1996) *Fetishism and Curiosity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press/London: BFI.

Mulvey, L. (2009) *Visual and Other Pleasures*. 2nd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mulvey, L. and Wollen, P. (2023) *The films of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: scripts, working documents, interpretation*. Edited by O. Fuke. London: British Film Institute.

Roeper, R. (2020) '“Misbehaviour”: Feminists crash the pageant in a cheeky British period piece', *Chicago Sun Times*, 23 September, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/movies-and-tv/2020/9/23/21449494/misbehaviour-review-keira-knightley-miss-world-1970-gugu-mbatha-raw-jessie-buckley-greg-kinneer> (Accessed: 28 September 2023).

Royal Albert Hall (n.d.) *The Suffragettes*. Available at:

<https://www.royalalberthall.com/about-the-hall/our-history/explore-our-history/royal-albert-hall-stars/the-suffragettes/> (Accessed: 22 September 2023).

Sebag-Montefiore, P. (2020) 'Beyond “Misbehaviour”: Sally Alexander in Conversation', *History Workshop Online*. Available at:

<https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/feminism/beyond-misbehaviour/> (Accessed: 7 September 2023).

Sturges, F. (2020) *Gugu Mbatha-Raw: Misbehaviour 'goes to the crux of intersectional feminism'*, *inews.co.uk*. Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/culture/gugu-mbatha-raw-misbehaviour-actress-first-black-miss-world-interview-feminism-407615> (Accessed: 18 September 2023).

Taylor, B. (n.d.) 'History Workshop Journal - Articles - Making History'. Available at:

<https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/HWJ.html> (Accessed: 27 September 2023).

Tate, S.A. (2022) *From Post-Intersectionality to Black Decolonial Feminism: Black Skin Affections*. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/b23223>.