



Female desire in the UK teen drama *Skins*

An analysis of the mise-en-scene in 'Sketch'

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Introduction

Gender, desire and sexuality are often discussed topics within the scholarly field of teen drama.¹ *Skins* is an example of a British teen drama, of which its makers moreover claim it to be 'free from a conservative, social-issues-based, often didactic narrative symptomatic of the US series'.² In her essay, Susan Berridge (2013) discusses teenage sexuality in *Skins* and contradicts the above-mentioned claims about the series. She concludes her article by saying that 'despite the programme's nihilistic ethos, *Skins* is underpinned by more conservative ideologies, particularly regarding the depiction of gender and sexuality'.³ She refers to the different attitudes between men and women towards sex(uality). According to Berridge, men in *Skins* experience sex(uality) as something more positive and consequence-free, opposed to the women, who often experience the (negative) consequences.⁴

Skins (2007-2013) is a British teen drama, which focuses on youth culture in Bristol. The series ran for seven seasons on channel E4 and was created by the British (television) writers Bryan Elsley and Jamie Brittain. Each two seasons of *Skins* revolve around a different generation of students in their final two years of secondary education. Each episode is named after a character that plays a significant role in that particular episode.⁵ There are three secondary characters that are brought into the series to disrupt the lives of the core characters. Lucy Sketch is one of these three characters.⁶ Lucy Sketch has her own episode named 'Sketch'.⁷

In this thesis I will respond to Berridge's conclusion about the conservative ideologies concerning sexuality in *Skins*. I will do this by examining how the female desire is visualised in the UK *Skins* episode 'Sketch'. I have chosen this particular episode because it depicts the female protagonist Lucy Sketch (Aimee-Ffion Edwards), who problematises the dichotomy between the active/male and passive/female in the practice of looking and desire. The narrative of the episode revolves around Sketch's desire for the homosexual Maxxie Oliver (Mitch Hewer). In her attempt to seduce and manipulate Maxxie (and later his friend Anwar), she variably takes on a masculine or a feminine position. The research question of this bachelor thesis is the following: 'In what way does the episode 'Sketch' of the UK teen drama *Skins* present female desire?'

¹ Moseley (2015): 40.

² Ashe (2015).

³ Berridge (2013): 785.

⁴ Berridge (2013): 785.

⁵ Moseley (2015): 39.

⁶ The second generation has Sophia and the third has Luke.

⁷ Season 2, Episode 2 (2008).

Anneke Smelik describes in 'Feminist Film Theory' the overall development in criticism on the position of women in the classic film narrative. Smelik addresses the topics of the female spectator, masquerade, subjectivity, and desire.⁸ The discussion about the (im)possibility of female subjectivity mainly started around 1975 with Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking article 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema', in which she analysed the structures of the patriarchal unconscious in the pleasures of popular cinema through psychoanalysis.⁹ She stated that: 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female'.¹⁰ This binary opposition makes men bearer, or the subject of the look/desire, while women are the image, or the object of the look/desire.¹¹ The article was mainly criticised for its lack of the female gaze and spectator.¹²

Mulvey then wrote in her 'Afterthoughts' (1981) that the female spectator is possible, in that she adopts a masculine point of view.¹³ According to Doane, the female spectator lacks a distance to the image because she is the image (or the desired object). The distance is yet a necessary component to the act of voyeurism and desire. The female spectator consequently either adopts a masculine position through transvestitism, or takes in an excessively feminine position (the masquerade). Teresa de Lauretis (1984) claimed that subjectivity derives not only from spectatorship, but also from the narrative structure, which is based on the subject's desire.¹⁴ The female subject is made to desire femininity and to conform to the ideal image of what the man has of them.¹⁵

The practice of looking and desire are interrelated, indeed as Linda Williams (1984) described it; 'to see is to desire'.¹⁶ The three chapters in this thesis are rather divided between the private, public, and in-between space. Rachel Moseley poses in her chapter 'Teen drama' that '[t]he classic settings for teen drama are the high school and the family home, in particular, the teen bedroom'.¹⁷ Both spaces provide different functions for the narrative. The teen bedroom is a space in which identity is expressed in conversation, action and in the mise en scene, while the high school is a site of confrontation, humiliation and desire.¹⁸ Considering the limited space of this thesis I will narrow my analysis down to five scenes.

⁸ Smelik (2007).

⁹ Stacey (1994): 20.

¹⁰ Mulvey (2009): 19.

¹¹ Ibid.: 19-20.

¹² Smelik (2007): 494.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Smelik (2007): 496.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Williams (1984): 83.

¹⁷ Moseley (2015): 39.

¹⁸ Ibid.

In the first chapter I will examine how the gaze and desire are visualised in the context of the private space. I have chosen to analyse the first scene, because it is located in the protagonist's teen bedroom. This scene provides an evident contrast between the subject (Sketch) and the object (Maxxie) of desire. The activities performed and the objects seen in the teen bedroom present the protagonist's desire and identity through the mise-en-scene. I will focus in this chapter on properties, clothing, and camera distance, movement, angle and perspective.

In the second chapter I will analyse the use of public space of the (school) theatre in the scene three and 25. The third scene foregrounds the contrast between Sketch's desire of proximity to Maxxie and the actual frustrating distance. The transition between proximity and desire is in the scene 25 rather approached through confrontation and humiliation. In this scene, Sketch achieved the proximity, but she is punished for it, which ultimately results in distance to the object of desire. In this chapter I will focus especially on camera distance, angle and perspective.

The third chapter is an analysis of the last two scenes of the episode.¹⁹ These scenes are located in a space which can neither be counted to the private space (of the protagonist) nor to the public space, it is rather an in-between space. It is located inside Anwar's bedroom, as a space in which Sketch performs the female masquerade. Moreover, the episode seems to end with an attempt to reclaim her lost subjectivity.

The method I will be using is by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson as described in *Film Art: An Introduction* (2010). Bordwell and Thompson provide a guide on how to analyse a film through its different properties. They distinguish mise-en-scène (*what* is seen in the frame) and cinematography (*how* the frame is established), which is misleading according to John Gibbs.²⁰ Gibbs instead uses mise-en-scène as an umbrella term for both concepts, because these elements inseparably influence the interpretation of the film.²¹ Mise-en-scène, according to Gibbs, encompasses thus not only lighting, costume, décor, properties, and the actors, but also the use of camera, for example distance, framing, and angle. I will use Gibbs' working definition of the mise-en-scène for the aforementioned reason and its convenience. Yet, Bordwell and Thompson provide a more extensive terminology and is therefore of added value to Gibbs' umbrella term. I will use this method because the visual elements add to the interpretation and understanding of the narrative of the episode that I will analyse. I will focus in particular on the use of space, clothing, properties, camera distance, movement, perspective,

¹⁹ Scene 28 and 29.

²⁰ Gibbs (2002): 34.

²¹ Ibid.: 54.

and angles.

This research will contribute to the field of feminist television studies because it gives insights on the gender politics within the genre of teen drama and UK *Skins*. The research furthermore shows the contemporary relevance of the debate about the representation of women and the possibilities and limitations of female desire in film/television series.

Chapter 1: Private space

In this chapter I will analyse how female desire is visualised in the first scene of 'Sketch'.²² The first scene is located in the private realm of the home. Moseley states that 'the shared spaces of the home are the site of conflict and resolution of family relationships in negotiation with the identity in process of the teen protagonist(s)'.²³ Conflict and resolution between Sketch and her mother indeed occur in 'Sketch', yet I will leave out the shared spaces of the home, because they do not necessarily contribute to my analysis of female desire.²⁴ Instead I will focus on the teen bedroom, which Moseley describes as:

a key space through which identity is expressed in conversation, action and in the mise en scène: band posters, diegetic and non-diegetic music, books, clothing and other accoutrements of teenage life. This private space is resonant in teen drama and one of the main ways in which intimacy, the key mode of address of teen television, is achieved, alongside first-person narration and/or diary writing as a direct expression of subjectivity and teen self-hood.²⁵

I will argue that Sketch's desire derives from the camera uses and all other properties shown in her bedroom. First of all, I will contextualise the episode within the series and relate the episode to the previous episode. Secondly, I will describe the gendered space and function of the teen bedroom. In the third section I will focus on the interaction between Sketch and Maxxie through the voyeuristic gaze. In the last paragraph I will address all the properties within the bedroom that contribute to the identity and desire of the character Sketch.

1.1 Contextualisation of 'Sketch'

The first scene is not only an introduction to the episode, but also to the character Sketch. Sketch is neither known by the other characters within *Skins*, nor to the audience of the series.²⁶ The only indication of her existence is found in the previous episode.²⁷ The recap sequence, prior to the episode 'Sketch' shows fragments from the previous episode to serve as a background for 'Sketch'.²⁸ In one fragment, Maxxie's back is seen from a high angle subjective

²² 01:19-02:54.

²³ Moseley (2015): 39.

²⁴ Sketch is living with her mother. They are in conflict when her mother finds out that Sketch has been lying. This conflict results in Sketch tying her mother up to the bed. Later, when Sketch unties her mother, they reconcile.

²⁵ Moseley (2015): 39.

²⁶ Audience and viewer are equivalent here.

²⁷ Tony and Maxxie: Season 2, Episode 1 (2008).

²⁸ 00:00-00:44.

POV (short for point of view) shot.²⁹ The shot is subjective in that the camera takes in the position of a character within the narrative.³⁰ The high-angle means that the camera is looking down on the framed material.³¹ In cinematic terms this angle often presents the image as dwarfed and defeated.³² The high angle indicates moreover the position of the character who is looking, which suggests that the character is located above Maxxie. The POV shot allows the viewer to look 'through the eyes' of the character and become one with the character's optical standpoint and perceptual subjectivity.³³ The viewer in this shot rather looks through the lens of a photo camera, which becomes evident by the light and sound of a camera flash³⁴. Maxxie is then filmed from an objective straight-on angle while he turns around to see where the light came from.³⁵ 'Objective' refers to the idea that the point of view is not belonging to a specific character. The term 'objective' is rather problematic, because the shot is always framed in a certain way to direct its viewer.³⁶ Maxxie looks at the blue apartment building in the background, but is unable to distinguish from which window he is being photographed.

In another fragment, Maxxie walks down the stairs of his apartment building when he hears a noise. Again, he attempts to figure out where the noise comes from, but he is not able to do so, because the space offers him a limited field of sight. The objective viewpoint withholds information from the viewer.³⁷ The narration is in other words restricted, which moreover inclines to create greater curiosity and surprise for the viewer.³⁸ The point-of-view is however reversed in the first scene of 'Sketch', as it provides the perspective of the protagonist Sketch. The viewer becomes in other words acquainted with what Maxxie is unable to see and know. This unrestricted narration is often called an omniscient narration, which means that the viewer knows, sees, and hears more than the other characters do.³⁹

1.2 Gendered space

The first three shots of the episode 'Sketch' show the same blue apartment building as displayed in the recap. The first shot is filmed from a low angle, which visually increases the

²⁹ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 96.

³⁰ Ibid.: 95.

³¹ Ibid.: 194.

³² Ibid.: 196.

³³ Ibid.: 94.

³⁴ The 'photo camera' (belonging to the properties within the episode) is not to be confused with the (film) camera, which establishes the shots of the episode.

³⁵ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 194.

³⁶ Sturken & Cartwright (2009): 450.

³⁷ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 97.

³⁸ Ibid.: 94.

³⁹ Ibid.: 91.

size of the building and makes it look powerful.⁴⁰ The blue, grey, and white colour scheme of the building blends with the blue sky in the background. The uniformity of the numerous windows lacks a focal point that is supposed to attract the viewer's attention. The second shot contextualises the building in its environment. The horizon is filled with buildings and cranes, which foreground its seclusiveness of the environment. The third shot shows the same building as from the opening shot, but this time closer and from a straight-on angle. The shot is filled entirely with the symmetry of the windows, and once again misses a focal point. The lack of a focal point is, as shown in the fragment of the recap, meaningful in that it obstructs Maxxie from uncovering where the flash of light came from. The windows of the building separate the outside from the inside and are moreover accesses to different private worlds and potential narratives. The camera approaches the building between the first and third shot, to focus on one narrative in particular. Only the first three shots and the last shot of the episode are located outside, while the other shots are located inside the bedroom.

The teen bedroom is according to Moseley a space in which the audience is positioned as confidante.⁴¹ The viewer is allowed into the private space, which is exclusively accessible to the protagonist herself. The private space of the bedroom is moreover a space in which women often epitomise their marginalisation.⁴² The teen bedroom is often, contrary to the shared spaces of the home, the only space within the home that is personal, personalised and intimate. It can be described as a biographical space, because the activities and objects within it represent the protagonist's identity.⁴³ The only other character that could potentially enter Sketch's room is her mother. Yet she is because of her multiple sclerosis bodily immobile and limited to the shared spaces. The only way she enters is vocally, through a baby phone. The baby phone in this way connects the private bedroom with the shared spaces of the home. The bedroom is, besides the baby phone, entirely secluded from sight. This seclusion enables Sketch to perform according to her own fictional narrative, which is not necessarily corresponding with the outside world.

1.3 Voyeurism

The fifth shot shows the back of Sketch's head and shoulders. Sketch is looking out of the window, onto the window in the opposite (blue) apartment building. This shot is a so-called

⁴⁰ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 196.

⁴¹ Moseley (2015): 39.

⁴² Nayak & Kehily (2008): 55.

⁴³ Nayak & Kehily (2008): 55.

over the shoulder shot.⁴⁴ Other than the POV shot, as mentioned earlier, the viewer is not looking through the eyes, but 'over the shoulder' of the character. In this way it is evident who is looking. Behind this window that she is looking out to, vague movements of a person can be seen. For the viewer it is predictable that this person is Maxxie, since the previous, fourth shot shows a photo collage of Maxxie on the wall.⁴⁵ As his movements continue, the sixth shot presents a closer view on the window. Maxxie is framed by the rectangular shapes of his windows and the horizontal lines of the window blinds. The window frames Maxxie's body from the waist up in a medium shot. In this way his bare upper body is revealed. On his window is a rainbow sticker, which signifies his homosexual orientation.⁴⁶ The seventh shot finally reveals the face of Sketch, whilst a climax of musical instruments is heard. This climax foregrounds the revelation's importance. The frontal medium close-up shows her facial expression and her reciprocally bare upper body.⁴⁷ Her facial expressions show the curiosity (slightly open mouth) and pleasure (a smile) she experiences in gazing at Maxxie.

The pleasure in the active act of looking is referred to as voyeurism.⁴⁸ Contrary to scopophilia, which connotes taking pleasure in being looked at, voyeurism lacks the reciprocal relation of looking. Voyeurism is rather associated with the pleasure one takes in looking without being seen.⁴⁹ Sketch in this sense is the one who looks, while Maxxie is unaware of being looked at. The one-way interaction between Sketch and Maxxie constitutes a certain power relation. The subject of the look is commonly regarded as being more powerful than the person who is the object of the look.⁵⁰ The subject position is however, according to Mulvey, solely devoted to men. She states that 'the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure'.⁵¹ Looking and desire do therefore not only pertain to men, but are also inseparable entities. Sketch seems to reverse this dichotomy of active/male and passive/female, in the act of looking. Sketch could rather be considered as the subject of the look, who projects her fantasy onto the male figure, Maxxie. Shot eight, eleven, and thirteen to seventeen, are medium shots of Maxxie, showing him from the waist up, while he is performing his daily routine. The POV shots of Sketch on Maxxie alternate in a fast pace and are fragmented. The camera follows Maxxie's movements, resulting in a bumpy image. This image is achieved through the use of a handheld camera, which functions to create a subjective point-

⁴⁴ Sturken & Cartwright (2009): 462.

⁴⁵ I will come back to the photo collage in the next paragraph.

⁴⁶ It is already clear to the audience that Maxxie is a homosexual.

⁴⁷ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 195.

⁴⁸ Sturken & Cartwright (2009): 459.

⁴⁹ Ibid.: 124.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 111.

⁵¹ Mulvey (2009): 19.

of-view and can be seen as a substitute for the character's (eye) movement.⁵²

1.4 Properties

The wall of Sketch's room is decorated with a photo collage of Maxxie. This collage is shown for the first time in shot four. Maxxie is photographed from various angles, distances and in different locations. Moreover, he seems unaware of being photographed. During the second instant that the collage is shown (shot nine) the camera moves down the collage in a tilt motion, which rotates the camera vertically.⁵³ The photo collage is repeatedly shown in a fragmented way as an interlude of the action taking place. The repetition foregrounds the importance and the magnitude of the photo collage. In the third instance, which is in shot twelve, the camera moves down in the same way, but ends at a photo camera, which is placed on the table below.

The photo camera is a tool to duplicate the act of looking—the viewer looks through the lens of a camera twice, hence a camera within a camera. The voyeuristic gaze is also in this way performed through the act of photography. The camera is an instrument to capture, and make something or someone into an image. It is a tool with which Sketch can manifest her desire, but it at the same time betrays her position.⁵⁴ In the second part of the scene Sketch is pointing her camera outside at Maxxie, while he is riding his bicycle down below on the street. The viewer looks once again through the lens of Sketch's photo camera, which becomes evident by the light and sound of the flash. Maxxie immediately responds to this light and stops his activity to look into the direction of the camera. In the next and last shot the camera takes in the position of Maxxie, from a low angle. The multiplicity of windows again foregrounds the complexity and limitations of sight, as Maxxie is unable to see where the light comes from.

Another property which is a manifestation of Sketch's obsession, is a logbook, as shown in shot ten. In this logbook, Sketch keeps track of the location, time and duration of Maxxie's activities. The camera moves over the logbook in a diagonal movement. This movement foregrounds the quantity of the records being kept. It appears as if Sketch is constantly keeping an eye on Maxxie, and this way controls him. Moreover, her own activities are built around Maxxie's activities and schedule.

The third property is clothing. In the eighteenth shot Sketch is displayed in the foreground in a close-up, which only shows her face. Her reflection is shown in a mirror in the background in a medium shot, which reveals her bare body from the waist up. The mirror

⁵² Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 200-201.

⁵³ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 199.

⁵⁴ This happens in scene fifteen.

exposes Sketch's activity: she flattens her breasts with ace bandage. Instead of looking in the mirror Sketch gazes to the left of the frame, presumably at Maxxie. This shot is altered by a shot of the baby phone, through which her mother asks for Sketch's attention.⁵⁵ Again Sketch is shown, ignoring her mother's plea for help. Instead, she violently continues to tie up her bandage, which implies her priority of binding over helping her mother. The reason for this binding is the difference in gender and sexual orientation between Sketch and Maxxie. Because Maxxie is homosexual, she obscures her female features in an attempt to appeal to him. Looking away from the mirror implies not only that Sketch is experienced with binding, but it moreover paradoxically points at a form of narcissistic pleasure. Doane argues that the female spectator's desire can be described only in terms of narcissism.⁵⁶ The object of the gaze functions moreover to make the subject appear as lacking.⁵⁷ In other words, when Sketch gazes at Maxxie, she realises their difference, or her own lack (male features). The female look therefore demands a becoming or transformation to compensate this lack.⁵⁸ Sketch masculinises her appearance, not only to appeal to Maxxie, but also to obtain mastery over the image and the possibility of attaching the gaze to desire.⁵⁹ The masculinisation of her appearance can be referred to as female transvestism.⁶⁰

1.5 Conclusions

The intimacy of the teen bedroom opens up possibilities for the subject to manifest her desire. The audience gains access to a world in which female desire is sympathetically visualised through the different camera uses.⁶¹ Sketch employs multiple levels of looking to manifest this desire, since the field of vision is the field of desire.⁶² These ways of looking derive from a voyeuristic pleasure. Voyeurism entails a distanced unidirectional gaze, which empowers the subject (Sketch) over the object (Maxxie). She uses this gaze moreover to keep track of Maxxie's movements and activities, resulting in a logbook. The look is doubled by the use of the photo camera, with which she literally transforms her object into an image. To manage this normally masculine position she conceals her femininity through transvestism.

⁵⁵ This is the first time the viewer hears Sketch's first name (Lucy)

⁵⁶ Doane (2003): 63.

⁵⁷ Sturken & Cartwright (2009): 122.

⁵⁸ Doane (2003): 63.

⁵⁹ Ibid.: 65.

⁶⁰ Ibid.: 65.

⁶¹ Moseley (2015): 39.

⁶² Kelly (2003): 72.

Chapter 2: Public space

In the previous chapter I have examined the way in which Sketch's identity and desire is constituted and expressed in the context of the private space of the teen bedroom. The private space is personal, personalised and intimate. The voyeuristic gaze, moreover, gives Sketch the potential to look and invade other's private space, without being looked at.

In this chapter I will focus on the public space of the school, which is according to Moseley, within teen drama, a site of confrontation, humiliation and desire.⁶³ The space I focus on in this chapter is the school theatre, because this is the place where confrontation, humiliation and desire occur.⁶⁴ I will examine fragments of scene three and 25, which are both located in the school theatre. The pattern of the development is based on a goal-oriented plot, in which Sketch takes steps to achieve her desired goal.⁶⁵ Subjectivity in this way derives not only from spectatorship, but also from the narrative structure, which is based on the subject's desire.⁶⁶ The desire of Sketch is kissing Maxxie, because the kiss would according to her, be the moment that everything changes (hence, he would fall in love with her). The woman has according to Doane a problematic relation to the visible and is rather closer to the sense of touch.⁶⁷ The kiss becomes the physical goal of her desire. Scene three revolves around Sketch's desire, while scene 25 focuses on the 'succession' of achieving this goal. The outcome is rather punished through confrontation and humiliation. The camera uses which are of importance here are angle, distance and perspective.

2.1 Desire

The transition between the second and third scene is covered by a sound bridge. The sound bridge shows the image of the current scene, while the sound of the next scene is heard.⁶⁸ While Sketch takes care of her disabled mother, she is shown in a close-up, while the viewer gains access to what she hears. This auditory point of view is not a perceptual subjectivity, as in the first scene, because the sound is not part of the space she is positioned in, in scene two.⁶⁹ The sound is rather part of her mental subjectivity, representing her fantasy and her desire to be somewhere else.⁷⁰ The sound is an internal voice of Sketch, who is citing the lines

⁶³ Moseley (2015): 39.

⁶⁴ The theatre is located inside the school.

⁶⁵ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 91.

⁶⁶ Smelik (2007): 496.

⁶⁷ Doane (2003): 65.

⁶⁸ Ibid: 296.

⁶⁹ In cinematic terms this is called a non-diegetic sound.

⁷⁰ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 95.

of Michelle's role in the musical.⁷¹ The sound bridge is not only a transition between scenes, but in fact cinematically connects the private and public space. While Sketch is taking care of her mother she desires to be somewhere else, which is in the school theatre, right in front of Maxxie.

The image then follows the sound; the next shot shows Maxxie looking into the camera, while citing the lines of his role. The image of Maxxie is altered by Sketch, who is similarly looking into the camera and citing 'her' lines. The camera cuts back and forth (a shot/reverse-shot), between Sketch and Maxxie, through an eyeline match.⁷² The eyeline match means that 'shot A presents someone looking at something offscreen; shot B shows us what is being looked at. In neither shot are both looker and object present'.⁷³ Because of the lack of an establishing shot, which delineates the overall space in which the characters are positioned, it appears that the characters are looking at and standing in front each other.⁷⁴ In shot ten Sketch leans forward in anticipation of a kiss. In the line of expectation, the camera would cut back to Maxxie in the next shot, who would similarly lean in. Instead, the camera is positioned beside Maxxie, while he leans in from the left, and Michelle, rather than Sketch, leans in from the right. The disruption of the eyeline match points at the discrepancy of desire and reality.

The next shot shows where Sketch is actually standing; high above on the rafters where she is working on the lighting for the musical. The camera is showing Michelle and Maxxie kissing from a low angle, while Sketch is shown standing above. The distance foregrounds the powerlessness of Sketch's position. Although she again takes in the position of the unseen voyeur, she does not experience this position as desirable. A close-up shows her jealousy and envy, while she gazes down at the kissing couple. The shots including Sketch are all from a straight-on angle, which presents an objective position. The shots showing Maxxie and Michelle kissing are, on the other hand, mostly from a high angle. These high angle shots are both presented through an over-the-shoulder shot, and a point-of-view shot, functioning as Sketch's perspective.

Sketch disrupts the rehearsal when she drops a light from above. This action is seen through a point-of-view shot of Sketch, positioning Maxxie and Michelle left, while the light moves into the empty space on the right. Only then do the other characters notice the presence of Sketch and start to look up. Sketch is finally filmed from a low angle, suggesting it to be the 'other's' point-of-view. This low angle does not portray Sketch as powerful, but rather

⁷¹ This musical is called 'Osama: The Musical' and is about the 9/11 attacks. A banker (played by the character Maxxie) and his assistant (played by the character Michelle) fall in love with each other.

⁷² Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 494.

⁷³ Ibid: 239.

⁷⁴ Ibid: 238.

foregrounds her inability to intervene. Interaction between Sketch and the others only takes place in low and high angle shots. In the next high angle shot, Maxxie looks into the camera, suggesting that he is looking at Sketch. The gaze is in this way returned and disrupts Sketch's voyeuristic position. Her marginalised position gives her the power to look and bring in objects (that could severely hurt the ones standing below), but this position is at the same time an obstacle and undesirable. Female specificity is theorised in terms of spatial proximity. The voyeur must maintain a distance between itself and the image.⁷⁵

2.2 Confrontation and humiliation

Other aspects of the public space of the school (theatre) besides desire are confrontation and humiliation.⁷⁶ Throughout the episode, Sketch succeeded in getting Michelle's part in the musical, through (violent) manipulation. Scene 25 revolves around the musical kiss, which I will analyse from the kiss onwards.⁷⁷ Shot nine shows Sketch and Maxxie facing and moving closer towards each other. When they stop singing they start kissing. During the kiss the camera moves up in a crane shot, while Sketch and Maxxie slowly spin around in circles.⁷⁸ This rotating movement is similar to the 'Orbital Kiss', as it is called in cinematic terms.⁷⁹ The camera would normally spin around the characters in a 360 degree movement, to create an intimate and 'magical' moment for the two people involved in the act of kissing. The rotating movement of Sketch and Maxxie can be seen as a translation of the film technique to the stage. The imitation is moreover a dramatisation of the act of kissing and its insincerity.

After the kiss, the camera cuts to a close up of Sketch, as an over-the-shoulder shot of Maxxie. Sketch appears to be satisfied with the succession of achieving her goal. However, her smile disappears when Maxxie starts to whisper: 'Nothing'. The camera cuts to a close-up of Maxxie as an over-the-shoulder shot of Sketch. 'I felt nothing', he continues. The camera returns to a close-up of Sketch who looks astonished and hurt. As Maxxie walks away Sketch violently pulls him back and hits him in the face. The music immediately stops playing. Maxxie towers over Sketch while he says that she should look at herself and leave him alone. Then there is a shot of a close-up of Sketch, foregrounding the tears that are dripping down her face, accompanied by the soft sound of her crying. The camera then cuts to the audience, who has witnessed the whole scene and is quietly awaiting the outcome. The sound of the crying is louder at this point. The camera then cuts back to Sketch, who is standing on stage in complete

⁷⁵ Doane (2003): 63.

⁷⁶ Moseley (2015): 39.

⁷⁷ Shot nine to 21.

⁷⁸ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 199.

⁷⁹ TV Tropes (2016).

isolation. The background darkens around her, while a spotlight is pointed at Sketch. The camera moves up in a crane shot, and moves from a medium-long shot to a long shot. The camera is in other words distancing the viewer from the subject, leaving Sketch appearing dwarfed and defeated. Finally the curtains are drawn with a squeaky noise, foregrounding the humiliation. The public humiliation can be explained as a punishment for the female gaze.⁸⁰ According to Doane 'the woman's exercise of an active investigating gaze can only be simultaneous with her own victimization'.⁸¹ The closing of the curtains does not only conclude the musical, but also a chapter for Sketch, as her goal has unsuccessfully been achieved.

2.3 Conclusions

The public space involves social interactions, which influences the succession of Sketch's manifestation of desire. Her desire is visualised in scene three, which is to have proximity to the object, while she finds herself distanced from it. Throughout the episode Sketch attempts to achieve her desired goal, which is the intimate act of kissing, to make Maxxie fall in love with her. Yet she only succeeds in kissing him, but fails to seduce him.

⁸⁰ Williams (1984): 83.

⁸¹ Doane (1984): 72.

Chapter 3: The in-between space

The previous chapter focused on the public space of the school theatre. The goal-oriented plot of the episode, which revolves around Sketch's desire to kiss Maxxie to make him fall in love with her, is only partly achieved, since Sketch succeeds in kissing Maxxie. Yet she is confronted with and punished for her behaviour through public humiliation. The plot could have stopped after the failure of her ultimate goal. Instead, Sketch sets up a new goal, which will be discussed in this last chapter.

In this chapter I will focus on the last two scenes of the episode.⁸² These scenes are located in the private bedroom of Maxxie's best friend Anwar, yet because Sketch enters this space, the room becomes a kind of in-between space—between the public and the private. In the first part of the chapter I will discuss shot six to eight of scene 28. What follows is Sketch's attempt to seduce Anwar, in an effort to still be 'close' to Maxxie. Instead of transvestism, with which she tried to seduce Maxxie and compensate her lack (of masculine features), she puts on a female masquerade. In the last part of the chapter I will examine the last scene, which is a sex scene between Sketch and Anwar. I will discuss shot seven to nine, because Sketch's look and the camera uses suggests an involvement with the viewer. I will focus on the camera angle, distance, perspective and the depth of field.

3.1 The female masquerade

In scene 27, Sketch removes her symbol of transvestism (her ace bandage) and puts on a black low cut dress. In scene 28 Sketch goes to Anwar's house, and positions herself underneath his window. The shots are namely shot/reverse-shots between Sketch and Anwar, who is positioned at his window above. Shot five presents Sketch through Anwar's high angle in a medium long shot. In this way, her black low cut dress foregrounds her cleavage. The high angle moreover connotes her vulnerability. Shot six shows Anwar from Sketch's low angle in a medium shot. He is dressed in a black bathrobe, which reveals his mutually bare chest. While he gazes at Sketch his facial expression changes from confused to relaxed, as a smirk on his face appears. The seventh shot presents Sketch from Anwar's high angle, foregrounding her cleavage. Sketch looks down at her body and immediately rearranges her dress to hide her cleavage. This gesture connotes her discomfort in being objectified, but at the same time she uses her body to provoke this exact reaction. In the eighth shot Anwar reorganises himself, acknowledging with that to be objectifying Sketch.

⁸² Scene 27 and 28.

The gaze is rather scopophilic than voyeuristic, since Sketch is aware of being watched, watches herself being looked at, and looks back at Anwar. Because she fails in successfully taking on a masculine position, she assumes the masquerade to become an object of desire herself.⁸³ The objectifying look of Anwar is therefore intended by Sketch. The female masquerade can be explained as a mask of femininity, or an excessive feminine appearance.⁸⁴ Sketch assumes this position to conform to Anwar's desire and his ideal image of women.⁸⁵ The sexual mobility is, according to Doane, a distinguishing feature of femininity.⁸⁶ Sketch, as a female protagonist is unable to achieve a stable sexual identity. She is torn between, what Mulvey calls, passive femininity and regressive masculinity.⁸⁷

3.2 The look at the camera

The last scene is a sex scene between Sketch and Anwar. Shot six shows Sketch, lying in bed while Anwar lies on top of her. The shot zooms in on Sketch's face, from a medium close-up to a close-up. The zooming in foregrounds the disconnection between Anwar and Sketch. Anwar is removed out of the frame once the camera has fully zoomed in. His voice fades away and non-diegetic music starts playing. Sketch moves her face from the front to the right, and starts smiling. Shot seven is established through a racking focus. The object in the foreground is sharply visible and the background is rather blurred. Sketch is seen in the reflection of a picture, while her finger moves towards it. The focus then goes to the background, while the foreground becomes blurry.⁸⁸ In this way it becomes evident what is seen on the picture: Maxxie and Anwar. Sketch strokes the image of Maxxie, which suggests that she still desires him.

In the last shot Sketch returns her gaze towards the camera, and slightly turns her head. The look into the camera is not, as discussed in the second chapter, directed to another character. This look rather goes beyond the world of the film's story (the diegesis); it is directed at the viewer. In this way Sketch acknowledges the audience and returns its voyeuristic gaze. She reduces in other words the distance between the viewer and herself. The viewer is again positioned as confidante of Sketch's desire—information that is restricted to the other characters, namely: her ongoing desire for Maxxie.

⁸³ Berger (2003): 38.

⁸⁴ Doane (2003): 66.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 66.

⁸⁷ Mulvey (2009): 32.

⁸⁸ Bordwell & Thompson (2010): 178.

3.3 Conclusions

Scene 28 shows the dissimilarity in looking between Sketch and Anwar. While both the characters' bare chest is revealed equally, Anwar's look connotes objectification and desire, while Sketch's look is merely provocative. On the contrary, her vulnerable position as object is foregrounded through the camera's high angles and distance. Sketch active subject position, as visualised in the first scene, is reversed and rendered by the male character once again. Yet she does not entirely give her position away—she still maintains the viewer's role of confidante and determines the conclusion of the narrative.

Conclusion

In this research I examined the UK teen drama *Skins*' episode 'Sketch' as a response to Berridge's conclusion about *Skins*' conservative ideologies concerning sex(uality). Her analysis rather remained on the level of the narrative, while my own research explored how the different uses of mise-en-scene influenced the interpretation of the narrative. This thesis centralised around the question: 'In what way does the episode 'Sketch' of the UK teen drama *Skins* present female desire?' I have chosen this particular episode because the female protagonist initially reverses the binary opposition between active/male and passive/female in the act of looking and desire.

The distinction between the private, public and in-between space provided different approaches to social interaction, intimacy and ultimately, desire. I analysed five different scenes in which the (im)possibilities of achieving female desire were prominent through the mise-en-scene. I focused in particular on the use of space, clothing, properties, camera angles, movements, distances and perspectives.

The private space allowed Sketch to position herself as a subject and to freely express her desire for the object. Her bedroom becomes a manifestation of this desire through the different properties. Her gaze is performed through transvestism, which provides her mastery over the image, and compensates for her lack of masculinity.

The public space of the school theatre on the other hand involves social interaction and becomes a site of confrontation and humiliation. Sketch's desire is expressed through her mental subjectivity, and connotes a wanted proximity to the object. Instead, she experiences a frustrating distance.

The in-between space of Anwar's bedroom is a site of seduction and intimacy. Sketch takes on the female masquerade as an excessive femininity to seduce Anwar and succeeds. Yet it appears that Sketch's intentions are based on her ongoing desire for Maxxie. Sketch's last look at the camera returns the voyeuristic gaze of the audience foregrounds the articulated instance of the filmic world.

The theory of Mulvey on the determining male gaze and desire to a certain extent resounded in my analysis. The episode seems to contradict this theory at first glance. Yet throughout the episode, the narrative shows various problematic instances which seem to conform to Mulvey's theory. Doane's theory about transvestism and the masquerade moreover seems in line with the narrative, and adds to the interpretation of its development.

The method of Bordwell and Thompson provided a useful apparatus to answer the

research question. The camera angles, perspective and distance did not only give insights on the relation between the characters, but also determined the viewer's involvement. The camera uses either positioned the viewer as omniscient, or restricted the viewer from certain information.

Because of the limited space of the research, I had to make decisions on which scenes to depict. I choose these particular scenes because they were significant in order to answer my research question. This does therefore not mean that the scenes I left out are not relevant for the interpretation of the narrative. Moreover, Sketch is not representative for all female characters within the series. On the contrary, Sketch seems to be an exceptional, marginalised character within the series. Further research could engage other marginalised characters within the series to problematise the conservative ideologies.

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Filmography

Skins. Elsley, B. & Brittain, J. (11 February 2008) United Kingdom: Company Pictures, Storm Dog Films. Season 2, Episode 1.

Skins. Elsley, B. & Brittain J. (18 February 2008) United Kingdom: Company Pictures, Storm Dog Films. Season 2, Episode 2.

Appendix

Plot summary: 'Sketch' is about the character Lucy Sketch who lives together with her mother, in an apartment building. Her mother suffers from multiple sclerosis, making her dependent on Sketch's care. Sketch has told her that Maxxie, a boy from her school, is her boyfriend. Sketch takes care of the lighting for the school play called 'Osama: The Musical'. The musical is about the September 11 attacks, where a banker and his assistant fall in love with each other and finally kiss. These two roles are played by Maxxie and his friend Michelle. Sketch fantasises about playing the female part, so that she can kiss Maxxie. The kiss is, according to Sketch, 'the magic moment, when everything changes'. It would make Maxxie fall in love with her, despite his homosexual preference. Sketch takes on a masculine appearance by flattening her chest and wearing men's clothing to appeal to Maxxie. Her obsession manifests itself through anonymous gifts, taking pictures of him and hanging them on her wall, and keeping a logbook of his activities. She tries to convince the director and school drama teacher Mr. Gelcart to give her the part of Michelle. When he declines her request, Sketch tells the head teacher that Mr. Gelcart has been touching and kissing her, resulting in Mr. Gelcart being fired. Sketch breaks into Maxxie's apartment building, using a hairpin. She masturbates on his bed, until he arrives home. She hides under his bed during the whole night. The next morning Maxxie discovers her hairpin on the ground and later finds out Sketch is wearing the exact same hairpin. He also sees Sketch carrying around a photo camera, from which he can conclude that Sketch is his stalker. Maxxie goes to Sketch's apartment where he speaks to her mother through the intercom. Here he discovers that Sketch has been telling her mother that he and Sketch are in a relationship. Her mother discovers the truth about Sketch's obsession and realizes she lied about Mr Gelcart too. When she is about to call the head teacher, Sketch ties her mother to her bed. Maxxie is from that moment on aware of the situation and as a sign of rejection closes his window blinds, so that Sketch cannot look through. During the preparation of the musical, the next day, Sketch gives Michelle emetics, resulting in Michelle vomiting and being unable to play in the musical. The only option that remains is letting Sketch play the part, since she knows all the lines. In the first act Maxxie discovers that Sketch has taken over Michelle's part and expresses awe and disgust. Backstage Maxxie confronts her, and she confesses her love to him. After they have kissed in the play, Maxxie finally makes Sketch realise the love is not mutual. She then gets rid of all the manifestations of her obsession, which are the pictures of Maxxie on her wall and her men's clothing. She puts on a low-cut dress, showing cleavage, and after that unties her mother from the bed. Sketch arrives at Anwar's house and has sex with him. While they have sex Sketch stares at a picture of Maxxie, making clear her obsession is not entirely over. The episode ends with a shot of Sketch staring in the camera, breaking the fourth wall.

Scene 1

Shot	Action/object	Camera perspective	Camera angle	Camera movement	Camera distance to person
1	Apartment building	Objective	Low	None	-
2	Apartment building	Objective	Straight on	None	-
3	Apartment building	Objective	Straight on	None	-
4	Photo collage of Maxxie	Objective	Straight on	None	-
5	Sketch looking at Maxxie's window	Objective: Over Sketch's shoulder	Straight on	None	Close-up
6	Maxxie through his window	Objective	Straight on	None	Long shot
7	Sketch (frontal)	Objective	Straight on	None	Medium close-up
8	Maxxie through his window	Subjective: POV of Sketch	Straight on	Handheld	Medium shot
9	Photo collage of Maxxie	Objective	Straight on	Pedestal	-
10	Logbook	Objective	High	Handheld	-
11	Maxxie through his window	Subjective: POV of Sketch	Straight on	Handheld	Medium shot
12	Photo collage of Maxxie	Objective	Straight on	Tilt	-
13	Maxxie through his window	Subjective: POV of Sketch	Straight on	Handheld	Medium shot
14	Maxxie through his window	Subjective: POV of Sketch	Straight on	Handheld	Medium shot
15	Maxxie through his window	Subjective: POV of Sketch	Straight on	Handheld	Medium shot
16	Maxxie through his window	Subjective: POV of Sketch	Straight on	Handheld	Medium shot
17	Maxxie through his window	Subjective: POV of Sketch	Straight on	Handheld	Medium shot
18	Sketch binds chest	Objective	Straight on	None	Close-up
19	Baby phone	Objective	Straight on	None	-
20	Sketch binds chest	Objective	Straight on	None	Close-up
21	Baby phone	Objective	Straight on	None	-
22	Maxxie rides bike on the street	Objective	Straight on	Handheld	Long shot
23	Sketch points camera outside	Objective	Straight on	Pan	Medium close-up
24	Maxxie rides bike on the street, is interrupted	Subjective: Sketch's camera	High	Handheld	Extreme long shot
25	Apartment building	Subjective: POV of Maxxie	Low	None	-



Shot 1, 01:20



Shot 2, 01:25



Shot 3, 01:28



Shot 4, 01:31



Shot 5, 01:33



Shot 6, 01:39



Shot 7, 01:45



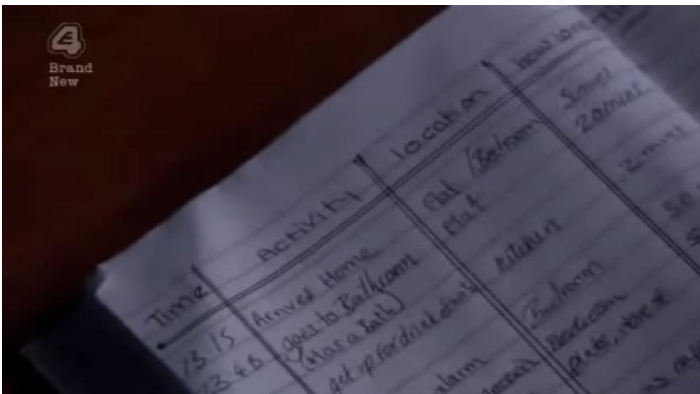
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Shot 8, 01:51



Shot 9, 01:58



Shot 10, 02:02



Shot 11, 02:09



Shot 12, 02:09



02:14



Shot 13, 02:20



Shot 18, 02:25



Shot 19, 02:30



Shot 20, 02:34



Shot 21, 02:39



Shot 22, 02:42



Shot 23, 02:45



Shot 24, 02:48



02:49



Shot 25, 02:52

Scene 3

Shot	Action/object	Camera perspective	Camera angle	Camera distance
1	Maxxie	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
2	Sketch	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
3	Maxxie	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
4	Sketch	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
5	Maxxie	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
6	Sketch	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
7	Naxxie	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
8	Sketch	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
9	Maxxie	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
10	Sketch	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
11	Maxxie and Michelle lean in for kiss	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
13	Maxxie and Michelle kiss	Objective	Straight on	Medium shot
14	Maxxie and Michelle kiss, Sketch in the background	Objective	Low	Long shot
16	Maxxie and Michelle kiss	Subjective: Sketch's POV	High	Long shot
17	Sketch looks down	Objective	Straight on	Medium long shot
43	Sketch looks down	Objective	Straight on	Close-up
51	Maxxie and Michelle kiss, lamp falls down	Subjective	High	Long shot
52	Lamp lands on the ground	Objective	Straight on	-
53	Maxxie and Michelle react to the fall	Objective	Straight on	Medium close-up
54	Audience reacts	Objective	Straight on	Medium long shot
55	Maxxie and Michelle walk away from the lamp	Subjective	High	Long shot
56	Drama teacher looks up	Objective	Straight on	Medium shot
57	Michelle looks up	Objective	Straight on	Medium close-up
58	Audience looks up	Objective	Straight on	Medium long shot
59	Sketch	Subjective	Low	Medium long shot
60	Maxxie	Subjective	High	Medium shot
61	Sketch	Objective	Straight on	Medium close-up



Shot 1, 03:50



Shot 2, 03:54



Shot 3, 04:01



Shot 4, 04:06



Shot 5, 04:09



Shot 6, 04:13



Shot 7, 04:28



Shot 8, 04:31



Shot 9, 04:37



Shot 10, 04:42



Shot 11, 04:43



Shot 11, 04:44



Shot 13, 04:50



Shot 14, 04:52



Shot 16, 04:58



Shot 17, 05:01



Shot 43, 07:12



Shot 51, 07:41



Shot 51, 07:43



Shot 52, 07:44



Shot 53, 07:45



Shot 54, 07:46



Shot 55, 07:47



Shot 56, 07:48



Shot 57, 07:49



Shot 58, 07:52



Shot 59, 07:53



Shot 60, 07:59



Shot 61, 08:03

Scene 25

Shot	Action/object	Distance	Movement
9	Sketch and Maxxie kiss and spin around	Medium shot	Crane shot, up
12	Sketch	Close-up	None
13	Maxxie	Close-up	None
14	Sketch	Close-up	None
15	Sketch hits Maxxie	Medium shot	None
16	Maxxie confronts Sketch	Medium shot	None
17	Maxxie confronts Sketch and walks away	Medium long shot	None
18	Sketch	Close-up	None
19	Audience	-	None
20	Sketch stands in isolation	Long shot > Extreme long shot	Crane shot, up



Shot 9, 40:52



Shot 9, 40:55



Shot 9, 41:00



Shot 9, 41:07



Shot 12, 41:18



Shot 13, 41:25



Shot 14, 41:28



Shot 15, 41:30



Shot 15, 41:32



Shot 15, 41:35



Shot 16, 41:37



Shot 17, 41:40



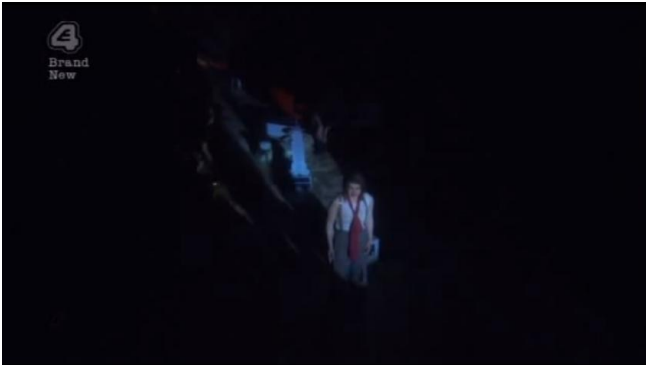
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Shot 19, 41:55



Shot 20, 41:58



Shot 20, 42:09

Scene 27

Shot	Action/object	Distance	Angle
1	Window, light is switched on	-	Low
2	Anwar appears at window	Long shot	Low
3	Sketch	Medium shot	High
4	Anwar	Medium long shot	Low
5	Sketch	Medium long shot	High
6	Anwar objectifies Sketch	Medium shot	Low
7	Sketch notices being objectified	Medium shot	High
8	Anwar	Medium shot	Low
9	Sketch	Medium long shot	High
10	Anwar	Medium shot	Low
11	Sketch	Medium shot	High
12	Anwar	Medium shot	Low
13	Sketch	Medium shot	High
14	Anwar leaves window	Medium shot	Low
15	Sketch walks out of frame	Medium long shot	High



Shot 1, 43:49



Shot 1, 43:52



Shot 2, 43:57



Shot 3, 43:59



Shot 4, 44:02



Shot 5, 44:05



Shot 6, 44:07



Shot 7, 44:09



Shot 8, 44:11



Shot 9, 44:13



Shot 10, 44:16



Shot 11, 44:18



Shot 12, 44:25



Shot 13, 44:29



Shot 14, 44:33



Shot 15, 44:33

Scene 28

Shot	Action/object	Distance
1	Sketch tells Anwar that she is a virgin	Medium shot
2	Anwar	Medium close-up
3	Sketch, with Anwar on top of her	Medium shot
4	Anwar	Medium close-up
5	Sketch, with Anwar on top of her	Medium shot
6	Anwar	Medium close-up
7	Camera zooms in on Sketch, she looks to the left of the frame	Medium close-up > close-up
8	Sketch strokes picture of Maxxie	Extreme close-up
9	Sketch looks at the camera	Close-up



Shot 1, 44:38



Shot 2, 44:46



Shot 3. 44:48



Shot 4, 44:51



Shot 5, 45:03



Shot 6, 45:13



Shot 7, 45:19



Shot 7, 45:30, 45:29



Shot 8, 45:32



Shot 8, 45:37



Shot 9, 45:44