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H O M O P U L C H R I T U D U S

Beauty as a Product of Dominant Ideology and it's representations in Film

E v a n g e l i a G e r o n t a k i

Supervisor: Maarten Steenhagen

Abstract

This dissertation approaches the concept of beauty. Looking through the consistent efforts of philosophers and artists over the centuries to define and capture beauty, we come to the conclusion that such a thing is impossible in its entirety. The rules and the standards that measure out the beautiful. By being something that can be defined and measured, I come to the conclusion that beauty and the way we talk about it and recognize it, forms a set of rules that establish a system. This system helps the dominant beholding part of power to maintain its status. Nietzsche, through his genealogical method, managed to prove that perhaps the easiest way to define or try to understand a concept is to examine how it evolved in various historical contexts. Nietzsche realized that distinct historical periods give a variable conceptual results for a certain value. The ones regulating those standards of evaluation, are the relations of power within a society. Foucault, evolving Nietzsche's hypothesis and thought, finds that the respective systems of power are the ones setting the specifics of evaluation that better suit them in order to maintain control. Systems according to Foucault define and set the limits for our actions and thoughts. The respective social value systems set the limits for the beautiful in our case and its definitive characteristics, resulting to a series of variable beauty standards that have been dominant in different historical periods. The most effective tool of the dominator is the creation of regimes of truth. Regimes of truth are historically specific mechanisms that produce discourses which function as true in particular times and places. These systems of truth are being regulated through narratives. In our time screen technology has achieved something unprecedented in the communication chronicles of humanity, the possibility of globalized broadcast. The emergence of cinema has managed to influence and define the standards of beauty with unprecedented results in pop culture.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to look upon the mechanisms and systems that have dominated the narratives about beauty. This dissertation hypothesis is developed in four distinct parts. Upon the start of my quest, in Part I, I look at the problem of defining beauty. I take a note of a certain contradiction. While we seem to be generally eager and quick to call what we perceive around us as beautiful or not, it is with the same exact ease that we stand in awe when we are asked to point out where exactly that beauty relies on and what constitutes its essence. At that moment of question and of evaluation, we perform an act of judgment. This judgment of beauty emerges as an act of attention and not as a statement of preference. This act calls for the observer to identify the aspect of the thing that claims its attention. Following that investigation, what surfaces is that beauty, in order to be defined relies not in a cohesive and inclusive definition but rather is based on a series of personal evaluative judgments that lead up to that result. Starting off with mentioning some variables of the ideal beauty in different eras along with some dominant philosophical takes on the concept, I reach into my main point of discussion which is the fact that relations of virtue and of value have nothing to do with having a common or specific ontological relation. Our ideas about the beautiful are not similar to each of us but yet they share some common characteristics because any correlation of such kind is a product of a particular society which helps in the maintenance of the respective power relations within it. The spirit and the dominant ideology of a certain era dictate and reflect the prevalent view of the beautiful in a specific spatiotemporal environment.

Following that trail of thought in the second part I look at how the varying beauty ideals through history are in a sense reflections of the existing power relations of their time. The rules of evaluation are not set in stone, instead they are implied by the dominant ideology of their time. Even though we think we know what values are. In a certain way, we believe that we hold some part of true knowledge regarding a subject such as beauty in this case, this idea is a falsity. The truth we think we know or discovered, is the truth that the existing power structure allows us to know. The doctrines of those regimes of truth that exist in society are regulated to us through stories. And stories seem to be a very effective mean to exercise control over the masses. Looking at the claims of evolutionary theory, the aetiology behind storytelling, and why this form of communication seems to be the most effective for human beings. Stories are the first form of education and knowledge that we receive to guide us and inform us about the world, how the world is and how should we function and exist in it. Stories graft us with the ideas about what constitutes the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, and so on.

In last part of the paper, I start by explaining how the era that we are living in is an era in which mass media and the culture they promote has reached at an unprecedented zenith of influence upon the masses. The society that these media exist in, operate and form is a society of the spectacle. Cinema has proved to be the most influential storyteller of all time, reflecting the times' cultural ideals while at the same time shaping new ones.

Aims and Methods

The principal aims of this dissertation is to present and respond to the following questions; 1) beauty is a sociocultural product 2) values such as good and evil, beautiful and ugly are not intrinsic but they are shiftable and are molded according to authoritarian relations that develop in each society, 3) the leading elites and governing social classes of each period make different rules for the aforementioned values, promoting their ideology, 4) the dominant ideology is circulated through stories, 5) how stories form a panopticon and 6) how the dominant ideology translates into the big screen and the media culture.

The choice of the topic was made on the basis that it is observed that, despite the considerable progress in many areas in the 21st century, the social phenomenon of oppression that exists scarcely in the most contemporary and advanced Western societies remains timeless, in order to adapt to the various standards of form and behavior, which on the one hand determine our value as individuals, and which on the other hand are for the most part impossible and volatile. The diversity of beauty standards contributes to the view that beauty was never perceived in the same way across the globe. Despite the fact that the model of beauty itself remains a product formed on the basis of relations of dominance that develop in diverse societies. Today, beauty standards show unprecedented homogeneity and that is typically due to the revolution of the moving image and the power of media, which constitute a panoptical enforced value system.

In devising this essay, I drew elements from diverse disciplines of humanities and arts, namely, philosophy, history, anthropology, literary theory and criticism, semiotics, psychology, cinema and visual arts. In my view, the interdisciplinary approach offers a more credible basis for drawing conclusions which is more inclusive and comprehensive and closer to the direction and spirit of contemporary Humanities research.

PART I: *Beauty as a product of society*

I.1

Defining Beauty

“Beauty is the promise of happiness.”

—Stendhal

In modern society we tend to casually attribute the word beauty to many different objects, such as paintings, sounds and ideas, we would say that the word itself suffers from a general overuse. Such a word that seems to play a major role in our lives in western societies, lacks in terms of conceptual compactness, since it is obvious that the term "beautiful" is used in multiple contexts and can be divided into many subcategories. In the history of Western philosophy, many attempts have been made to define beauty and the beautiful. However, no definition seems to address all aspects of the phenomenon or to be able to at least condense and summarize the essence of beauty. When we characterize something as beautiful, we usually explain this product of our judgment in order to justify it. For instance we say that a song is beautiful because it is harmonious, a flower because its color palette is beautifully complimentary, a face because of its complexion or the symmetry of it, a film because it was well shot or visually engaging and so on. If it was for beauty to be understood in a similar universal way, then, probably the relative judgments that we make of it would be of a distinctive kind. We wouldn't have to specify the characteristics that make something to appear beautiful to our eyes, simply because it would be viewed as equally beautiful by everyone else. Beauty, of course, should not be correlated with taste, per example; I can see that Mona Lisa is a nice and by all means exquisite portrait but I would not personally choose to ornament my wall with. To find something beautiful does not imply that the exact same thing is also desirable and vice versa.

My aim in this introductory part is to demonstrate how beauty is perceived in different terms both in everyday life and in art as well as in philosophical thought. While most people know to respond what they consider beautiful, yet this "beautiful" can not be defined in such a way as to incorporate all aspects of the phenomenon because what we've come to describe and recognize as harmonious, elegant and good looking and so on, it is a combination of the culture that we are growing up in as

well as the environment and the time that we are born into. In all paradox, artworks, that are considered of exquisite beauty even to this day, and they have been established in our consciousness as masterpieces of unsurpassed beauty, it is the same works that are inevitably and suffocatingly defined from the period that created them.

Keywords: beauty, Zeitgeist, evaluative systems, standards of beauty

I. 2 Conceptual Definition

Having discussed the previous, we come into the thought of looking upon the etymology of the word. Even if words are organically unrelated to what they represent as Saussure proved, the word tree for example is not related to the tree itself, neither are ontologically, phonetically nor morphologically linked, yet the analysis of the conceptual definition given to a word, reflects in itself a specific evaluative worldview that any particular word carries along with the use and forms of that word within given social contexts. In this case, what etymology tells us about the definition of beauty?

In the early 14c., *bealte* defined "physical attractiveness," while at the same it was also used to indicate "goodness and courtesy,". The word came from the Anglo-French word *beute* while it was created from the old French word "*Beuti*"¹, which means "natural attractiveness, kindness and courtesy". The same word that developed in the Modern French the word *beauté*² that is still used today and which draws its roots from the earlier from the Vulgar Latin **bellitas* which meant "state of being pleasing to the senses" and derives from the classical Latin *bellus* implying the pretty, the handsome, the charming etc.

Veritably these etymologically defined conceptual definitions of beauty do not provide us with a concrete conceptual ontological explanation. For example, if we were to examine the concept of abundance, we would say that it is defined as plurality. Abundance of objects, abundance of feelings, etc., abundance denotes accumulation, saturation, above-average possession, the wealth. However, the concept of beauty as opposed to that of abundance as I described, carries a variety of variable semantic definitions. Because politeness, physical beauty, aesthetically pleasing, charming, refer to numerous things that do not fall into the same category of characteristics as for example the extra with the exuberant in the case of abundance. How we conceptually define a word reflects how we perceive that word in its existing dimension in our world. Therefore, how the Romans or the

¹ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/beauty?q=beauty>(03/08/2021)

² M. Metzner, (2012). *Perceptions of beauty*. Florida: College of Florida Atlantic University Jupiter.

French defined beauty, reflects the way, the form that they perceived it as manifesting event in the word.

Considering the above, It is obvious that the term "beauty" is used in multiple frameworks (cultural and historical) with no specific one that can define it completely, therefore the meaning of term can be divided into several subcategories. Historically, beauty has been distinguished between "inner beauty", which is used to describe the goodness of personality and behavior, and "outer beauty", which refers to the outer appearance, the characteristics of body and face. It has been many times argued philosophically and artistically that these two subsets of beauty are interrelated. That goodness of character is reflected on an individual's good looks.

Beauty in Philosophical Thought

There have been many thinkers who have spent their entire lives trying to classify and define beauty. Many different perceptions have emerged over the centuries. Pythagoreans used mathematical terms to interpret harmony which they believed to lay in the heart of beauty and believed that all phenomena of life were guided by arithmetic causation. Therefore beauty is a product of mathematical relations³. Plato understood and explained beauty from a metaphysical perspective based on his theory of Forms and he elaborated on the problem of beauty in many of his works; in *Hippias Major*⁴, in *Philebus*⁵ and in *Symposium*⁶. Plato argues that beautiful itself does not exist in the world Forms, what we have come to recognize as beautiful in our world is objects that incorporate the properties of proportion, symmetry, harmony and unity. Attempts to formulate a Christian aesthetic were made by two Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Augustine attempted to address various aesthetic issues, but in regards to beauty he concluded that; beauty is an acquaintance of the whole and the concepts of unity, number, equality, proportion and order compose the beautiful. Aquinas argued that the beautiful is an object of cognition, that brings pleasure and contrasted it with the good. The beautiful does not only concern the sense of sight and visual perception and does not limit itself to the perceptible data of the senses, but also includes

3 Beardsley, M. C. (1975). *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present*. Amsterdam University Press.

4. Woodruff, P. (1982). *Plato's Hippias Major* (First Thus ed.). Blackwell Publishers.

5 Dimas, P., Jones, R. E., & Lear, G. R. (2019). *Plato's Philebus*. Oxford University Press.

6 P., & Waterfield, R. (2009). *Symposium (Oxford World's Classics)* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.

spiritual vision⁷. The system of absolute idealism was elaborated in all its aspects by Hegel. In particular, he attributed a newly defined metaphysical role to art and considered the beautiful as an experiential reality.⁸

Through this brief historical review of the various of aesthetic philosophies, one concludes that the approaches varied by the era, depending on the perceptions of each philosopher and his social context.

* I acknowledge the fact that in the previous brief look upon different philosophical takes on beauty that I have not included in that major thinkers that have been extremely influential such as Kant's Aesthetic theory, Schopenhauer's take on beauty and art, the doctrines of the Stoics and so forth. That is a choice made consciously and on the basis that the present dissertation is not about the different philosophical theories about beauty. The brief is given to simply illustrate at a basic level that philosophical perspectives of beauty have been equally divisive.

Beauty; a sociotemporal product

In the antecedent sub-chapter, reference was made to the some philosophical theories that had tried to explain what beauty is or what lays inn its essence. In addition to philosophers, artists have equally contributed and carried out a key role in shaping and capturing what they considered to be beautiful in its ideal form. On a practical level, the various measuring standards are determined by their respective social standards. The ideal human form its a product of its respective culture: religion, the economy, advertising are some of the factors that contribute to that. The definition of beauty is not an innate and objective quality of things, but is rather corresponding to the aesthetic consciousness of the people of a particular period. Beauty and its manifestations are products of *Zeitgeist*. I use the term *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the time) with the conceptual meaning that Hippolyte Taine ascribed to it in his work, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* ⁹(1863-64). In Taine's theory on "race, milieu, et moment," he attempts to exemplify how an aesthetic object is much more of a social product rather than a spontaneous creative expression of genius as the Romantics had implied. The spirit of the time, *Zeitgeist*, is therefore defined as, the particular circumstances that

⁷ Scruton, R. (2009). *Beauty* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.

⁸ Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present*, 225.

⁹ Taine, H. A. (2009). *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise (Complete) (French Edition)*. Library of Alexandria.

distorted or developed the dispositions of certain people of varying social status towards a concept or an idea, in a certain historical time and geographical place.

What is apparent is the beauty and its ideal do exist, the one thing that does not exist is a single form of it or a one dimensional way of comprehending it. If beauty were to be of one kind and uniform for everyone who perceives it, then we would not have had so many conflicting ideals of it, sometimes in complete opposition to each other?

When archaeologist Arthur Evans saw the frescoes of Cretan girls in Knossos, dancing around the bulls in the famous Minoan bullfights, he exclaimed in amazement: "But these are Parisians!". They are mirrored in that quotable phrase of the prominent archaeologist, those perpetual cycles that shape the model and ideal of beauty in the seemingly chaotic world history. From the frescoes of prehistoric times to the modern globalized supermodels, showbiz, cinema and fashion, the concept of beauty remains fluid and dependant upon the needs of our life and time that determine our aesthetic perceptions.

In Ancient Greece from Pericles' age to the years of Alexander's reign, the ideal for feminine beauty was a plump and fair skinned body with luscious hair, but in general, the female body at the time was considered to be lacking in proportion and perfection and to be somehow disfigured in comparison to the male body which embodied the idea of perfection (Eco, 2004)¹⁰. In the years of the Italian Renaissance the beauty ideal was judged by what extent the spouses were reflections of each other. The wife's duty was to reflect her husband's status in both behavior and appearance; replicating the biblical commandment that the woman should behave and exist as a mirror of her counterpart. Superior indicative characteristics of beauty were, fair skin, a full, well-fed body and light-colored hair. These standards can be found and are evident in all renaissance artworks. In Victorian England the asphyxiating corsets that gave a slim waist, dark hair and light pale skin where the indicators of an exquisite beauty in looks. The Golden Age of Hollywood from the 1930s to the 1950s made the iconic now Marilyn Monroe look as the golden standard of beauty. Likewise, the French Nouvelle Vague favored the looks of Brigitte Bardot, full bodied, sensual, unrepentantly sexual with a touch of naivety. Up until recently, the standard of female beauty was for women to be extremely thin with no visible fat thanks to the 90s glorious era of supermodels and of the dominance of the tomboyish female figure in the likes of Kate Moss. With the emergence of "thickness" and the movement of body positivity women today are expected to have a large rear along with large breasts. Kim Kardashian is considered the ideal woman of today, while at the same time the beauty standard for men expects them to come in a shredded, slim but wide body, reflection of the superhero obsessed culture. From the preceding examples it is not difficult to

¹⁰ Eco, U. (2004). *On Beauty*. London: Secker & Warburg.

understand that the notion of beauty has never been singular and unified. This does not imply that today's beauty standards condemn to ugliness those that preceded them but recognizes them as outdated and tied with specific ideologies. For example, the long-standing beauty standard of whiteness is considered to be racially discriminating, a reminiscent of the colonial period and the oppression of people of color. Comprehensively I would say that ***Beauty is a product that reflects the dominant authoritative ideology of its time.***

As Stendhal wrote defining beauty, is that; *beauty is only the promise of happiness*. In this manner Stendhal captured in a way the essence of beauty, which in its heart is elusive. What is beautiful varies and depends upon the individual's take on beauty. We would say that beauty is in essence transcendental. It contains a purely spiritual aspect, a sense of strange fulfillment that comes with its presence. Are we then in position to ever decipher what beauty truly is? On that part, I share what Hegel had once thought about beauty; that the perpetual search for the beautiful probably ends in utopia, where perfection meets.

The fact that beauty is shiftable and differs based on the person who perceives it is not unprecedented. From aphorisms, to ingrained repetitive beliefs such as 'the beauty is in the eye of the beholder', the breadth and variety of perceptions of beauty was already conceived since Homer, who displayed the genius to describe Helen of Troy very elusively, granting the imaginative freedom to the audience to imagine her in their own terms.¹¹ The woman who supposedly even surpassed goddesses in beauty and awed everyone in her way, serves more as vehicle for describing the power and value of beauty, the effect that good looks have, rather than describing what that unmatched beauty consists of and looks like.

The Irresistible Beauty of Helen

Homer (eighth-seventh century BC), The Iliad, III, w. 156-165

*'It's no surprise that the Trojans and the
Achaeans have endured so much suffering:
just look at her and you will see that she looks
terribly like an immortal goddess! Still,
beautiful as she is, let them take her away on a
ship before she causes us and our children
great sorrow/This was what they said: and
Priam summoned Helen to him. 'My child,' he
said, 'take a seat here next to me so that you
may see your former husband, your allies and
your friends. The fault is certainly not yours, it
is the gods who are to blame. They are the
ones that have brought about this awful war
with the Achaeans.'*

11 Lüthi, M. (1975). *Das Volksmärchen als Dichtung: Ästhetik und Anthropologie* (Vol.

1). University of Indiana.

Because Homer had realised, that if he ought to have described Helen's appearance in detail, to contain her allure in a set of specific looks, that would turn to make her looks be inevitably outdated at a given point in the future, or what we would aphoristically conclude as, beauty has an expiration date.

Alexander Nehamas detects that social aspect of beauty in *Only a Promise of Happiness*¹². Like Hume and Kant, though in another register, he considers beauty to have an irreducibly social dimension. Beauty is something we share, or something we want to share, and shared experiences of beauty are particularly intense forms of communication. Thus, the experience of beauty is not primarily within the mind of the one experiencing it, but it is more about what connects observers and objects such as works of art and literature in communities of appreciation. For Eco¹³, the concept of ugliness, as well as of beauty, is intertwined not only with different cultures but also with time. Even if we take for example artworks that are still considered to be of unmatched beauty and which tend to still draw the attention and amazement of contemporary audiences, such as the statue of Venus of Milo, the Parthenon, Rubens' paintings just to name a few. And despite the fact that we still find those beautiful, we would not build our house to the liking of Parthenon or imagine a Rubens girl to walk on a runway, because we already know within ourselves something that happens instantaneously when we gaze at those works. We see reflected on them, the whole culture and time that produced them, making it so, that even the timelessly beautiful objects and works of art are themselves a reflection of their creative sociotemporal beauty ideal.

12 Nehamas, A. (2007). *Only a Promise of Happiness*. Amsterdam University Press.

13 Eco, U., & McEwen, A. (2007). *On Ugliness*. Penguin Random House.

PART II: SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT

Power relations and methods of control

At the end of the first part, I argued that beauty is not an intrinsic value, employing that beauty is defined on the basis of different criteria depending on the historical period and the culture of a certain time and place, therefore we are capable to detect such diametrically opposing features to be considered as models of beauty within distinct historical periods. The standards with which we measure the quality and the kind of beauty existing, formulate a set of rules that constitute a system. The rules remain the ones changing, making it so that the beauty ideal is also transforming in accordance. But who is establishing the rules and decides about the change? What I am focusing on this part, is that the one responsible for the change, is the respective dominant power of the time which circulates this ideology and operates as a system and is in direct control of regulating the truth.

Keywords: *system, genealogy, dominant ideology, domination, panopticon and panopticism*

2.1 What is a system?

According to Merriam Webster ¹⁴, as system we can define; i) a set of things that are connected and operate together, ii) a way of doing things, a form of social, economic or political organization or practice, iii) an organized or established procedure, iv) as a system of classification. Despite the fact that some of the definitions may seem different, they nevertheless condense and encapsulate the basic features of the concept “system”. I therefore define those characteristics that govern a system to be the following; **structure, method, reoccurring patterns, classificatory rules.**

¹⁴ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). System. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved July 28, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/system>

2.2 Nietzsche and Foucault

All starts with Nietzsche, for whom in Gilles Deleuze's words in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*¹⁵ the essential problem was to discover "the value of values, of the evaluation from which their value arises, thus the problem of their creation." Nietzsche tried to explain the creation of values by using the terms of force and of will, thus Deleuze proclaims that Nietzsche was a philosopher of power, and a philosopher who sought the creation and the deepest reasons for the existence of power structures. Nietzsche had the insight to distinguish that values such as beauty, are changing because the power relations within a society change. Those new schemas of power regulate and impose new standards of evaluation. Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morality*¹⁶ set out to explore how popular held conceptions of what is good and what is evil had changed over time. He argues that throughout history, the ideology about what is moral, good, righteous, beautiful and so on, have had been largely constructed in order to celebrate those that were already powerful aka the dominant ideology¹⁷. In this way, the further marginalized the already disempowered securing their rule and control over them. On the preface of his work Nietzsche explains what the genealogist is ought to do;

"The genealogist, he declares, must concern himself, instead, with "that which can be documented, which can actually be confirmed and has actually existed, in short, the whole, long, hard-to-decipher hieroglyphic script of man's moral past."

All values are the result of a defined perceptual utility, aiming at maintaining and strengthening forms of power, control and domination e g, art, state, religion, education, science, etc. The perspective that we have [der Gesichtspunkt] of certain values, is the view of the conditions of conservation and reinforcement for complex forms of relative longevity in the flow of becoming." Value "is essentially the perspective for strengthening or weakening these dominant centers that circulate and are in hold of power. This position implies that values are not in themselves realistically somewhere in the world, but, in a way, are projections and creations of man. Hussain¹⁸ understands this idea through a double prism lens. Based on (a) of the so-called error theory, and (b) on fictionalism. The first view, that of the error theory, points out that, as Nietzsche concludes in *The Twilight of the Idols*¹⁹ that, "there are no moral facts", only moral interpretations, therefore,

15 Deleuze, G., (1980). *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson .New York: Columbia University Press, col 1 .

16 Nietzsche F., (1994). *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

17 May, S. (Ed.). (2011). *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge Critical Guides). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

18 Leiter, B., & Sinhababu, N. (2007). *Nietzsche and Morality*. Clarendon Press.

19 Nietzsche, F. W., & Large, D. (1998). *Twilight of the idols, or, How to philosophize with a hammer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

objectively there is no moral good, no moral evil, etc. And since our evaluative judgments are based on that false belief, that has to imply that all of our evaluative judgments are wrong since the components on which they are based are not in nature as we thought them to be. The second says that values are, after all, imaginary, a kind of our own illusory projections that attempt to give meaning to given phenomena.

Genealogy managed to disturb some long held certainties. People are always under the impression that they know what is good, bad, beautiful or ugly, valuable or not, right or wrong. But Nietzsche disrupted and unmasked this false relation of how we talk, how we understand and measure values by showing the heterogeneity amongst concepts that until that time, were thought to be consistent. Nietzsche's immediate, truly "programmatic" contribution here is, **his perspective**. His radical, though insufficiently theorized, relativism. To this we must add the clear anti-rationalism, the linguistic interpretation of the facts, the denial of objectivity and his view of the subject as something "invented and projected behind what exists", reaching as far as to question the existence of "an interpreter behind the interpretation". These paradoxes are not just confused, but Nietzsche himself had shown no inclination to deny that they remained pending.

But in the 1950s and early 1960s Paris, post structuralists and the later postmodern intellectuals were not disciplined readers of older philosophers and tended to slip into such paradoxes, which often pushed the boundaries of unequivocal contradictions. In fact, they even went in so far as to praise when it was fitting, the necessary "ambiguities" that provoke the so-called "logocentric" thinking of modernity and humanity. The most important of the French post-war philosophers, who appeared as the direct heir of Nietzsche and the most influential in terms of style, was Michel Foucault. Avoiding labeling himself as a postmodernist, he simply stated, shortly before his death in 1984, "I am a Nietzschean" and explicitly condemned, with ironic humor, postmodernism as a passing fad. I focused the interest of the previous paragraphs to the genealogical Nietzsche, because that phase of Nietzsche's work had the most profound impact on the thought and methodology of Foucault. Foucault did not follow blindly in the steps of Nietzsche but went beyond him and evolved his method. He used genealogy as a prototype, on the basis of which he built his own method, the *archaeology*.

Archaeology is the term that Foucault used to describe his own idea and approach when it comes to writing history. For Nietzsche the aetiology behind our moral concepts and values, lays within the will for power. For Foucault on the other hand power relations are not exclusively determined just by the will for dominance and control, but they are rather complex because power is dynamic and multi-leveled. In his own words describing power, Foucault explains about it that, "is exercised

from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations”²⁰. Foucault figures that in order for us to be able to make sense of the present, and write a history of the present, we ought to follow the discursive traces of the evolution of mechanisms and tools of power.

Foucault's view, if led to its logical conclusion, essentially excludes the possibility of any kind of society to exist without **domination**, unless it is a spontaneous mass of individuals who are, in a way, condensed into "functional" bodies. The fact that the arbitrariness of the "actions" of the crowd can undermine the imperatives of organized and rational human behavior seems to have, at best, been theoretically underestimated or, at worst, to have hardly reached the level of conscious formulation. Despite Foucault's anecdotal and microscopic elaboration of the phenomenon of power, his very attempt to indicate that power is ubiquitous makes it too vast and inconceivable. We know the details of power, often very insignificant, but we ignore the conditions and the structure of power and we do not particularly perceive the social relations that underpin it. By considering it merely as an exercise in coercion, power becomes so ubiquitous that it is impossible to deal with it successfully. It is ever present and consistent hence making it difficult to fall into our perception but it can vary in degree or be concentrated by the institutions. These institutions are what Foucault brought forward and examined and tried to make visible, the phenomenally invisible mechanisms that sustain and distribute power and he tries to achieve that by showcasing their multiple effects. Those effect he traces back to the history of discourse, making him, not a philosopher of power but essentially a chronicler of dominance²¹.

2.2 Discourse and Regimes of Truth

Discourse as well as Regimes of Truth, consist key concepts in Foucauldian thought. Explaining them and understand them will paint a clearer picture of what Foucault believed to be the main tools of the system in exercising control and surveillance.

Foucault looked at *discourse*²² as a precursor to understanding systems of representation. In this case discourse would simply mean textual passages that are connected by writing or speech. What Foucault argued is that there are rules and practices that produce meaningful statements and regulate discourse within given historical conditions. Discourse for Foucault, implies that there is a

20 Foucault, M., & Hurley, R. (1978). *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*.

Pantheon Books.

21 19 Foucault, M., & Rabinow, P. (1984). *The Foucault Reader*. Adfo Books

22 Foucault, M., Smith, A. M. S., & Sheridan, A. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge ;And, The Discourse on Language*. Adfo Books.

range of statements that provide a language that represents knowledge about a particular subject matter at a certain historical juncture. Discourse is about both language and practice, making a distinction between what we say, how we talk about ideas and how do we perform them, how we put the ideas into practice.

Discourse in being a specific way, a distinct language we which we use to talk about a specific subject, in this particular case about beauty, define the limits and the ways that a certain regiment of truth claims to hold complete knowledge of. For example the terms in which we described beauty in the middle ages is different than the one we do now, as I illustrated in the first part. Truth in that context is recognized by Foucault as “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements”; it is linked “by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it”.

2.3 Panopticon and systems of surveillance

In Jeremy Bentham’s idea of the Panopticon, Foucault finds his ideal model in the demonstration of which, one can see the ways institutions operate upon. The Panopticon according to Bentham, is an ideal prison. This prison cells are built all around a circle and in the middle of them lays a tower, the panoptic (pan=all; optic=seeing) tower. This all seeing tower has a central watch lodge from the place of which, the inspector is in position to keep surveillance of all the inmates. The prisoners must never know when an inspector is at the watch tower but they have to nonetheless feel that they, at all times might being watched.

Foucault saw the Panopticon as an ideal mirror of how power structures function in the modern society. In his work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*²³, he argues that Panopticon it is not just a design for institutions, but a conceptual machine whose principles of function, mirror the principles of power hierarchies in society at large:

“The Panopticon must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men. No doubt Bentham presents it’s as a particular institution, closed upon in itself... But the Panopticon must be understood as a dream building; it is a diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must

23 Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1977.

be represented as a pure architectural and optical system; it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use."(p.205)

Foucault pointed out that systems not necessarily repress the citizens by implying a certain social order, because the citizens only at seldom understand that they are as well part of the system's fabrication. In the disciplinary society, the Foucauldian analyst knows that there is no escape from the power system, we likewise are products of it, by being born into it we regulate our behaviour and develop our personality in accordance to the customary rules of the system, due to the fact that we, as well are products, reflections of our era. At first we conform the rules of coming into the world, then we submit to our governing system, to the laws of the state, to our school and it's rules and so on. We live inside a panoptic machine, and I quote from *Discipline and Punish* the line about modern societies;

"We are neither in the amphitheater, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism"(p. 217).

"The panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body," Foucault explains; *"its vocation was to become a generalized function"*(p. 207).

Part III: The Power of Narrative Systems

The system is a network of relations of domination, essentially a pecking order pyramid on top of which stand an elite few that hold control over the lives of the vastest part of the population. In order for the current dominant elite to stay in power, it needs the necessary tools for manipulating and making the dependant part, docile and obedient, so that they can remain safely in their place of power. The most efficacious way to do so, is by enforcing its ideology on the dependant part, but to make it in such a way that would be consistent, effective, to almost go unnoticed. And what better means to achieve that than stories. We, humans as a narrative species, we tend to see, interpret and make sense of the world around us through narratives. The system constructs the regime of truth by circulating through narratives the discourse of it.

Keywords: dominant ideology, familiar narratives, mythemes, Binary Opposition Theory

3.1 Why Stories?

There are many questions surrounding our evolution as species and by extension questions that revolve around our nature such as, *what distinguishes us from animals*, or *what brought us on the top of the food chain*. Yuval Harari in his influential work, *Homo Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind*²⁴, answers rejecting the belief shared by many evolutionists, which argues that it was the size of our brains that helped us to tame the nature around us, create social structures and that the tools that we shaped helped us to become the dominant species of planet Earth. Harari points out that the brain of the modern man who has developed AI, managed to set foot on the moon and travel to space, is about 10% smaller in size in comparison to the brain of the Neanderthal and that tools have been used by humans for more than two million years. Therefore, it is neither the brain size or the tools that separated humans, helped them to excel and progress. David Sloan Wilson attributes humankind's domination and adaptability that ensured our survival in our ability to work in teams. Harari describes how scaling beyond the team level developed through time, and for that to happen, cooperation was the key. Human combined effort contributed and was the determining factor that in

²⁴ Harari, Y. N., Purcell, J., & Watzman, H. (2018). *Sapiens: A Brief history of humankind*. First Harper Perennial edition. New York: Harper Perennial.

large scale helped us to evolve. This large-scale unity requires a common code, a shared reference system that will allow the formation of a set of regulations and values that will drive the society and would help the order of law to prevail among the members of it. Stories and most especially the shared fictions proved to be the most effective means due to human mind's ability to comprehend stories with much ease compared to data. The mind is a narrative and not logic processor. Stories are the vehicle made to transmit what matters in a culture and configure out an emotional grammar. Blakey Vermeule in *Why do we care about literary characters*²⁵, points out that we, as humans, tend to prefer social to other kinds of information, a fact that explains why for instance there are so many more human interest stories in the press than, say, detailed analysis of budget deficits and trade imbalances (p.33). Even at the face of great disasters, for instance a violent, destructive earthquake, in next morning papers, it is more likely to find testimonies of the survivor and the affected of the destruction, rather than a detailed catalogue of the losses together with a scientific analysis of the data collected there.

Stories is what brought us together and made us human, as Kerstin Dautenhahn successfully called, the Homo Narratus. We evolved and we live within a web of stories that are built around and about what matters. Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*²⁶ states that a culture's storytelling shapes its politics and moralities (p.141). The chief means of moral education is the telling of stories. If you go back to your first memories, it is bright and clear that the first lessons about how society works, morality, or values, were transmitted to you through stories. Even before us, human beings were able to contemplate on a large scale what justice or goodness means, we get introduced to them as values through the storytelling of our parents and educators. We learn that is not prudent to act violently on someone, later in life that connects to the value of dialogue and the conviction of violence as solution, concluding that litigation is under no circumstances the sensible or civilized solution. The fact that violence itself causes harm to the part that is in the receiving end of it, it labels violence as a form of bad-doing, of immoral behavior. The individual n that acts based on violence is always perceived to be the wicked character and in real life the inconsiderate person, this narrative mirrors a system of thought that is communicated to us consistently.

While Freud viewed the unconscious as a storage room full of repressed desires and emotions, Jung found that the unconscious had a secondary, deeper level, one which is more universal and it is based on a shared memory, common to the whole of human race. He called that the collective

25 Vermeule, B. (2010). *Why do we care about literary characters?*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

26 MacIntyre, A. C. (1984). *After virtue: A study in moral theory*. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press.

unconscious (*kollektives Unbewusstes*²⁷). Since ancient times Jung says, people have always turned to stories to help them interpret and understand the circle of life and the mechanisms of nature. Myths for Jung represent that need. Myths are manifestations of the collective unconscious. Myths use stories to present guidance and advice on the proper ways to behave in society while at the same time offering insight to life's inevitable milestones. Myths are similar across cultures and eras, despite every society having its own stories. They are all grafted with intriguingly **similar patterns** with **recurring elements**.

3.2 How stories are systems (The Structuralists and familiar narratives)

The collective unconscious theory that Jung proposed looking at myths and archetypes as well as the fact that stories were the dominant evolutionary mechanism that is unique to humans and have had and still contribute to the transferring of values from generation to generation. This theory has been looked upon and investigated by many anthropologists, sociologists and philosophers during the 20th century. Structuralists rejected the concept of human freedom and choice. They focused their attention on the way that human experience and behavior is determined by various structures believing that a certain state of existence or view of the world is a result, contains a certain meaning that is produced and reproduced within a culture through differing practices that serve as systems of signification. The structuralist approach claims that by examining these activities and practices from rituals to literary and non-literary texts to forms of entertainment and so on, we can discover the deep structures by which meaning is produced and reproduced within the culture.

Stories are this type of deep structure. They are produced and reproduced and no matter the difference in eras, cultures and language they all entail identical archetypal characters, connecting points and plots. Since stories represent the first vehicle of knowledge and information that is communicated to us, the various interconnections they entail, ultimately shape our view of the world and influence the way we attribute meaning to it.

Levi Strauss started by analyzing the myths of primitive tribes, all the myths that we've known and heard about. Based on his research data, he concluded that, there are certain elements in those fables which are similar to all cultures, those components he named *mythemes*. For example if you look at movies, no matter the genre, whether it is drama, sci-fi, romance, adventure, comedy and so on, they all have a hero/heroine, a seminal figure which guides the plot or that the plot events revolve around. This is a consistent character, a similar element in all sorts of narrative structures. Every mytheme attains its meaning from the position it takes or appears within the structure of the

27 Jung, C. G. (1980). *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

myth plot and from its relation with the other mythemes. For instance, we are never explicitly notified that this is the villain or the hero of a story, but by following the plot, we identify them as such. Levi Strauss constituted another complimentary theory to that of mythemes, the theory called; the *Binary Opposition Theory*. Binary Opposition in its definition refers to the contrast between two. Two ideas that have completely contrasting meanings but they stand as extremes of the same virtue or value. For example we have good and evil as a contrast, bravery and cowardliness, beautiful and ugly, truth and lie, etc. If we take a closer look at these we will realize that the one side of the equation is defined according to the differences of the other. What makes something ugly is what exactly is excluded from what makes something beautiful. For instance we can say that symmetry is beautiful, thus a statue is beautiful because it is symmetrical, that virtue of symmetry is what defines its opposition, the virtue of asymmetry, therefore dissymmetry is promoted to a characteristic that transcends the opposite tendency of beauty, namely ugliness. Levi Strauss advocated that these contrasting relations are the basis of any narrative, myth, movie, novel, fairy tale in larger or smaller scale. For example in *Wuthering Heights* Heathcliff is a poor neglected orphan at the start and Catherine comes from a privileged background (poor vs rich). That is a binary opposition in character virtues, but for instance in the *Harry Potter* books the whole series is based on the binary opposition between good and evil. Even the Bible in large scale is a similar narrative of good up against evil, God opposed to Satan.

That common character and familiarity which underlies beneath all narratives has been after Levi Strauss not only influential but also a constant subject of study among the academic community of various disciplines. Northrop Frye in his work *Anatomy of Criticism*²⁸, theorized that all narratives fall into four categories of mythos (Comedy, Romance, Tragedy, Irony and Satire). Mythos or myths are traditional or re occurring plots and narrative themes, each of them consisting of six phases. The main appeal of narratives, Frye concludes is that connection they have to primitive story formulas. He claims that novels, films and so on, are a sort of misplaced mythology that consistently reverts to similar patterns we see on ancient myths and whether if we are conscious of it or not, we are familiar with them. Vladimir Propp as well, after analyzing a hundred Russian folktales, identified thirty-one functions (structural plot elements) and eight character types typically occurring in all fairy tales. The character types are the ones we still come across with in modern storytelling whether it is in the form of literary plot lines or film narrations. Every so often we can encounter two character types merged in one person but still the character tropes do not consist exceptional cases to the rule of Propp's narrative structuralist theory.

28 Frye, N. (1971). *Anatomy of criticism: Four essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

What is of importance in those structuralistic theories is the fact that, Structuralists by contemplating the bigger picture, by searching for the origins and unificatory elements among all narrative forms, starting with the most primitive one, the myth, and reaching towards all more complicating and evolved forms of storytelling that are far more extensive in length than the myth such as fairytales and novels. By coming up with those models of narration, in a certain way, we could perhaps say that Structuralists, broke down the code of how stories are build since the dawn of humanity, they exemplified that stories represent systems. And they form a system, because as I mentioned in the beginning of the second part, the characteristics that govern whichever structure that is systematic, are; the familiarity of a joint **structure**, **reoccurring patterns** and certain **classificatory rules**.

3.3 How Stories Reproduce the Dominant Ideology

How narratives and stories in literary history serve as vehicles that communicate the dominant ideology of their time is pretty evident if someone takes a closer look. From medieval times and the traditions of the troubadours and of courtly love to F. S. Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* and Nabokov's *Lolita*.

Beginning with the courtly lover, that existed to solemnly serve his lady. As troubadours were patronized by the court which could be a court of a wealthy duke, a count or king's court, they were infinitely grateful to them and their songs and poetry invariably contained the acknowledgment of gratitude to their magnanimous patrons. Accordingly, that clear relation of dependence and power status along with the morality of the time, prohibited the troubadours to ever act on their feeling for the beautiful lady that had captured their heart. And while this lover, that is guided by its passion is already known since Ovid's, *Ars Amatoria*, in the Ovidian case, the innamorato was seeking sensual awards with all this adoration that he displayed for the object of his affection. In the time of troubadours however, the moral standards have changed, and infidelity is considered a mortal sin, and that change is the product of a new age Christian morality²⁹. The classes in power are now Christians, meaning that the virtuous and the beautiful are in close relation. The Christian ideology proclaims that patience, being able to resist and abstain from the temptations of the flesh those were the characteristics that made someone beautiful, because inner beauty and purity supposedly was reflected on someone's looks as I have already mentioned in Part I upon describing the ideal of beauty according to Christian world view. The dominant ideology of the Middle ages was first and foremost being regulated by the church, it was even the church back then that was the one

29 Boase, R. (1977). *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*. Amsterdam University Press.

institution responsible for the education of most people of the time using the Bible as the first and most fundamental book for knowing everything. It was this tradition that brought to life Dante's Beatrice, Gottfried von Strassburg's Isolde, Petrarch's sonnets to Laura and many more.

Later with the sprout of French Revolution, the rise of the bourgeoisie to power and prominence, the standard of beauty translates into the new prototypical archetypes. Those of the insatiable Madame Bovary and the amoral and ambitious Nana. We could perhaps say in parallel that Tolstoy's Anna Karenina is a corresponding Madame Bovary like character, exploring the themes of hypocrisy, jealousy, faith, infidelity, social status and reformation, lust against marital love and the contrast between the life with a connection to land and nature along the ennui of rural life in comparison to the lifestyle of the buzzing metropolitan city.

Except from novels, one of the commonest forms of narrative reproduction of the dominant regime of truth about beauty, is the fairytale. Fairytales most often if not exclusively, praise the beauty and kindness of the pure hearted princess. Most characters in those narratives that are characterised as beautiful are nobles or become nobles in the end by consummating marriage with nobility. Take for instance Cinderella's story. Cinderella is beautiful, pure and well intentioned, obedient and tolerating towards her step mother and step sisters. Her beauty and goodness of character is rewarded at the end by her marriage to prince charming. Even the fairy grandmother transforms her to look like nobility in order to appear at Prince's royal ball.

Today's narratives of beauty have fallen under the influence of the politically correct movement. Political correctness has brought along with it, cancel culture, the rejection of artworks and entertainment that carry some of those older ideological values or remakes them in under a new light that serves that particular new dominant ideology of the modern western world. But I will take a closer look at the mechanics of that phenomenon on the next part.

Part IV- Cinema and Beauty

The Dominion of Mass Media and The Power of Film

“To understand mass media first and important step is to understand communication”.

(Biagi, 1992)

From the time we get up till we go back to bed, we engage if not constantly but at least once with some form of media. The contemporary society is one shaped and modeled by the mass media. Mass media is a form of media which is addressed to large audiences (masses). It can be any form of broadcast such as television or radio, films, print media that targets, and its production revolves around on larger demographic groups. Communication through mass media is known as mass communication. Mass media today play an active role and consist one of the most critical parts of a society. In order to be effective as communicators, mass media should first and foremost understand the culture, the prominent stories and narrative schemes that seem to be aligned with the preferences of the general public audience. The fact that modern mass media bear several similar functions³⁰ to those fulfilled by the traditional media in some ancient societies stands as solid proof and testimony to how Foucault described that the system and it's tools work (Part II). The system is stable, and the power relations never really change completely, what changes is the techniques and tools used for surveillance. In this case, the stories are the same means that circulate the master narratives with the unique difference that the vehicle of the stories now, is more powerful and has the ability to reach a broader demographic. In Thomas Elsaesser's words about the power of the moving picture;

"The mode of perception and attention appropriate to modernity would thus be present in an exemplary form in the cinema, where technology and conditions of production permeate the content and penetrate the representational material even prior to an ideological construction of narrative and the image".

Mass communication is highly effective in fostering attitudes on newly arisen or newly evoked issues and that the point of view first expressed will prevail over later persuasive communication in the country. Media effects have been debated and researched for decades together. The mass media

30. Western modern theorist such as Denis McQuail identified the three major functions of a mass media that is 1) surveillance of environment 2) interpretation of the information and 3) transmission of heritage. But in today's generation mass media's major functions are information, entertainment, advertising and development. (Dennis, 1998)

has become such an essential aspect and an everyday part of the society that many fail to realize the immense impact created by it on the society, aspects such as political, economic and cultural.

Though these may be the functions of mass media it does not necessarily mean that audience will perceive mass media for the same reasons. In the book *The Play Theory of Mass Communication*, William Stephenson argues that fun is both the greatest impact and also the public service of the mass media. So for few mass media might be for time-fillers, for some to fulfill their psychological and social needs, few for information and entertainment. This means that people will perceive media the way they want and according to their likes.

4.1 Movies as a Mirror of Culture

Movies and their storylines are set, unfold and played out within a specific cultural background, therefore movies act as a mirror of that particular culture that they try to recreate but of their time as well. For example if we look at Baz Luhrmann's 2013 *The Great Gatsby*, we see portrayed the beauty standards and the ways of the 1920s but concurrently we are aware that this film is a product of its time because of its production, the way it is shot, the analysis of the picture in high definition even the music soundtrack; elements that make sure to inform us that this is indeed a very current take on a literary classic. Because even if we claim, prove and sometimes declare the timelessness of an artwork, that very judgment is false since every 'art product' cannot help but be a creation of its time, creators are raised within and shaped from the immediate culture of their surroundings. Either way timelessness does not have to do with the lasting impact of a specific form of art depiction but is all about how well the meaning of the artwork can adopt and prove relatable in another era.

One can notice for this purpose in our time a sort of newly founded reformation of classics or pieces of art that are changed and are being rebranded in the market in the fear of being forgettable or even insulting for many different population groups. For example, James Bond films are being boycotted by many, due to elements that are characterised as macho, chauvinistic, promoting white supremacy, oppressive or insulting towards minorities. Under that light and under the pressure of politically correct, because that is the cultural environment in which we live in today, whether we realize it or not, whether we like it or not. Political correct being the dominant ideology of our time, demands from James Bond franchise to modernize and adapt to the new data, otherwise it is doomed to sink into obscurity. For that reason the producers of the infamous, profitable and influential James Bond films, are considering the fact that will revive the adventures of the infamous British spy, to be an African American, as well as including a black female spy lead, that supposedly serves as the feminine alter ego of the favourite character. Indiana Jones is another

victim example of cancel culture that claims that the narrative of Indiana being this genius archaeologist that village in the movie *The Temple of Doom* waits upon to rescue them, vividly bringing to mind memories of colonialisation era while echoing the stereotype of the white technologically advanced man that comes to the save of the poor simple minded indigenous populations. More and more leading characters in today's western film industry are accepting inclusivity and change to a certain degree or even are getting completely reformed. I do not necessarily position myself for or against the neo liberal politically correct ideology; what I want to demonstrate is, the unprecedented power and influence that the dominant ideology possesses over the masses. As I have just previously articulated, you either follow the newest doctrines or you choose to stay on the margins of society.

The process went through the hands of man to those of the Cultural industry. The latter has sorted and cleverly planned everything for him. The consciousness of the cultural industry triumphs over people and becomes their own. At this point, the role of cinema is crucial. Since reproduction, the duplication of everyday perception is the ideal and the guide of production, cinema emerges as the most important pole of the cultural industry. The aim of the cinema camera is for the viewer to be able to identify the outside world with that of the film and vice versa. The bombardment of the images and the requirement to watch the plot make it impossible for the viewer to develop reasoning. The very logic of the medium paralyzes active thinking, imagination and spontaneity, rewarding a kind of intensive attention that has become automatic with addiction. The inactivated and deranged viewer of cinema becomes the ideal consumer of the Cultural industry. In Adorno & Horkheimer's words:

"Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies and Hollywood films are responsible for the stunting of the mass media consumer's power of imagination. The culture industry as a whole has molded men as a type, unfailingly reproduced in every product...not nuanced in any way."

4.2 Narratives of Beauty in Film

Berger and Luckmann, developed a social construction theory of reality, which assumes that humans derive all knowledge, including that of everyday reality, from their social interactions. Learning takes place through the individual's interaction with the social world and through these interactions the individual shapes his own perception of the world. Media play a leading role in the social construction of reality, as they can bring into our awareness, social, cultural and other events that many people do not have the opportunity to experience directly³¹.

31 Metzner M., (2012). *Perceptions of beauty*. Florida: College of Florida Atlantic University Jupiter.

In film the protagonist (male or female) is always attractive, but this feature is not in the forefront of our attention, instead the main focus is placed upon the moral behavior of the character and their personality. On the other hand, profanity, and characters that are aware of their beauty, are portrayed as go-getters and arrivistes, that take advantage on something vain and superficial such as their looks in order to achieve their goals. Most of those characters end up to be victims of their own ambition, showcasing the fact that even if beauty is a compelling asset and seems to be a redeeming quality, for someone to make their way into the world, but ultimately is the character's morality that fails. So the doctrine really points that

4.3 Beauty and Character Tropes

Film tropes consist the vehicles of storytelling that are used to communicate something figurative to an audience. As I described in part III, following the structuralistic theories there are character archetypes (mythemes) that have been reoccurring in narratives since as long as we can trace back to storytelling evidences. These character tropes, deeply rooted in the collective unconscious each time, depending on the place and role they hold in the narrative flow, they compile the characteristics that the dominant ideology appoints as befitting to the ideal image of beauty. By defining the ideal standards for the beautiful, the narrative simultaneously defines its opposition, which is usually expressed by the antagonist. As it was apparent in the Binary Opposition Theory, the what we think, but also the way in which stories are built, is based on an axis of polarity.

The Girl Next Door

Through the decades of film making there is no figure that better encapsulates the time period's particular ideal beauty and standards for moral behavior of the "perfect woman" more than the Girl Next Door. Comforting and yet simultaneously alluring, her personality is fitting to her deeper nature which appears to be down to earth, approachable, empathetic and supportive. The Girl Next Door trope embodies an idealized wholesome perceptual femininity. The narrative of the Girl Next Door implies that her innate modesty is the virtue, a part of what makes her special. Contra to the girls that surround her, friends, enemies, family that they all seemingly try to accomplish whatever as it appears is out of their league, the girl next door presents herself as frugal and self-sufficient who does not seek and desire nothing more than what she already has or what she thinks she can have. Making her a character that leads and behaves according to logic and rarely based on emotional impulses. Since this particular character tends to represent her time period's idea of the perfect woman, in looks as well as in nature, it is within her evolution that we can detect what qualities a changing world or different periods prize the most. During the 40s the trope was

characterized by a deeper sense of humility and self-sacrifice which she doesn't view as sacrifice (Arsenic and Old Lace, Meet me in St. Louis, It's a wonderful life) Dona Reed's, Mary 1946, Wilma in "The Best Years of Our Lives" also embodies the virtue of wanting more than a modest existence, reflecting a Christian moral view of goodness. In the postwar 50's, the Girl Next Door ideal appears now, identified with the iconic Doris Day which that embodied a picture of the all American wholesomeness (By the light of the Silvery moon), it is after all the era of the American Dream blooming, reflecting the dominion and rose of the United States in the global political scene as the incontrovertible superpower.

Punishable Beauty

Excessive beauty is punishable, beauty which is in excess and not the means between lack and excess as Aristotle would view as a virtuous situation. The beautiful Hippolytus is destroyed by his beauty, Narcissus, the Helen of Troy, are themselves victims of their beauty, a beauty destructive for them and of those who are close to them. In Greek and Roman mythology, Aphrodite/Venus, the goddess that bewitched everyone, even the Gods with her beauty, she nevertheless seems to suffer similar misadventures and be the victim of jealousy and competition by goddesses and humans, alike. The beauty of those characters works like a curse and like a self-fulfilling prophecy. This beauty is condemned because it exceeds the measure and grants some sort of an almost divine power to its owner. In medieval works and Shakespearean theater, we do not have characters whose beauty condemns and defines them, in part because of the puritanical Christian morality that demonized charm and excessive beauty, so it could never play protagonists in this model. The heroes were always beautiful but to the extent of the beauty of the time and the imposed morality of their time. The zeitgeist of the Christian western world could never create characters like the Beautiful Helen. However, this model of character with self-destructive beauty continues to survive, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Lady Diana are just a few examples of "cursed beauty". A beauty that because it exactly exceeds the limits set by people for the beautiful and the desired, is destroyed. Therefore the model of beauty favored by the narrative tradition is always kept at a safe balance of mediocracy. Exaggeration even in a virtue was always considered unnatural to be possessed by a single person. A mortal can not compete in a way with limits that have been considered almost divine. Orpheus plays the most beautiful music and yet he loses his favorite while at the same time he meets a martyrical end. On the other hand, Marsyas got excoriated because he triumphing against Apollo in a musical competition. Arachne because he wove better than the goddess Athena and so forth. Although today paganism and myths are not part of our "Ethical education", the same lesson is shared and today simply in another form.

4. 4 Where Societies of Spectacle meet Societies of Surveillance

Foucault thought that spectacle societies, differ completely from those of surveillance, but Jonathan Crary in his work, *Techniques of the observer*³², bridges the difference that Foucault hadn't had realised between Societies of Spectacle and Societies of Surveillance. Despite Foucault finding those two societal models completely alien to each other, he did not pay enough attention to how surveillance is exercised and inspires, conformity, docility and obedience to the masses.

"Foucault's opposition of surveillance and spectacle seems to overlook how the effects of these two regimes of power can coincide. Using Bentham's panopticon as a primary theoretical object, Foucault relentlessly emphasizes the ways in which human subjects become object of observation, in the form of institutional control or scientific and behavioral study; but he neglects the new forms by which vision itself became a kind of discipline or mode of work" ³³

Crary is knowledgeable enough to comprise by tracing down the continuities between strategies of perception by which subjects became the objects of control and systems that established their subjects as onlookers.

In both cases, in the case of the subject watched to be controlled and in the case of the spectator who is dominated by some strategies to attract his attention, there are different tactics, scientific discourses, institutions and technical practices to reduce subjects according to a certain will to submission³⁴

Crary finds that Debord's Spectacle society is an inversion of the Foucauldian use of Panopticon as an example of surveillance. In both cases we have individuals that are on looked without them acknowledging it, whilst having direct perception of what they believe to control them. The prisoner in Bentham's Panopticon model, knows that is being watched but has the illusionary freedom that can know so, because of having a clear view of the central tower. The watcher, in the spectacle society, thinks that has freedom of choice in regard to what he chooses to spectate but in reality there are mechanisms, strategies and limitations that regulate what it can or cannot be perceived. What the individual in the spectacle society is unaware of, is the external gaze. That hyper structure that carefully watches over the individual and accommodates their needs, which in reality is not a freedom of choice, but rather a freedom of selecting between certain choices. And who are those power holders, that regulate our choices in the spectacle society?

32 Crary, J. (1992). *Techniques of the observer*. Massachusetts: October Books.

33 Crary, *Techniques of the observer*, 18.

34 Cárdenas, Juan David. (2017). Cinema as a Foucauldian Dispositif: An Anachronistic and Materialistic Approach. *Palabra Clave*, 20(1), 69-95. <https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2017.20.1.4>

4.5.1 It's a Disney's world

Adorno had once described Walt Disney as, the most dangerous man in the world. Sadly he is not alive today to witness the complete dominance that Disney Company holds over popular culture. In reality only five major companies control the whole entertainment industry, and those are; AT&T, Comcast, Disney, ViacomCbs and Fox. Amongst them, Disney company controls the majority of the biggest film studios. ABC, ESPN, A&E, Hulu, National Geographic, Pixar, LucasFilm, Twentieth Century Fox, 21st Century Fox, Marvel, the Jim Henson Company, the History Channel, Lifetime, Hollywood Records, Fox searchlight pictures and Touchstone Pictures. One board of directors ultimately controls the creation of nearly 40 percent of the visual media industry. Disney today stands as the perfect real life example of the external gaze in the inversed Foucauldian panopticon that is the spectacle society. Disney exercises its power every so often, regulating yours and mine freedom of choice between visual media products. A recent example being the acquisition of Fox properties. With Disney owning the merge of Fox pictures, they decided to put the films of the studio in the vault, meaning that, they virtually never allow screenings or physical re-releases (VHS, DVD, Blu-ray) for popular older films unless the company decides to do specific highly publicized event about them. Alien, The Omen Home Alone The Princess Bride, Moulin Rouge, The Sound of Music, or hundreds of other films are just some of the studios more classic films. By this demonstration of power, Disney is also boycotting you from being able to watch excellent films based on the fact that Fox was the number one producer of Best Picture winners at the Oscars, with 60 movies nominated over its history.

4.5.2 Netflix and Other Platforms

Culture is a system in which all its sectors, the most important of which are radio and cinema, are unanimous internally but also with each other. They are unanimous because they are now industries, hence the name cultural industry, which produce goods and inevitably serve the rhythm and perpetual motion of production. In the context of this production, of course, there are producers and consumers, there are those who own the means of production and those who have only their labor force. It would be misleading to start the analysis from the weak pole and claim that it controls or directs production. On the contrary, the strong ones of the system are the shareholders and the executives of the cultural monopolies. To be complete, the analysis must go a step further and look at the interests of the banking system and heavy industry, on which cultural monopolies depend directly.

And thanks to audiovisual translations, people from all over the world are able to watch movies and understand the cultures of faraway communities. Take Netflix, for instance. Netflix is an online streaming provider that hosts a multitude of movies and programs for viewers from all around the world. Netflix streams movies in different languages, portraying different cultures and traditions that enable viewers from any place in the world to get acquainted with other nations' cultures. In fact, according to Netflix viewing data, nine out of every ten people who watched the German TV series *Dark* lived outside of Germany. Also, further studies reveal that the top shows watched by people in India include *Narcos*, *Stranger Things*, *13 Reasons Why*, *Riverdale*, *Black Mirror* and *Chef's Table*, among others. Because of the effective localization strategies implemented by Netflix, audiences from different parts of the world are able to stream any movie they like with subtitles in a language of their choice or they can choose a dubbed version of the show or movie. We are in position to comprehend that cinema has reached a potential global influence that has never been achieved before with the help of the technology developed. Every movie you wish to see or want to see is never a click more than a click away from your screen.

It is now quite clear that the pandemic is accelerating trends and strengthens pre-existing forces. Five major platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney +, AppleTV, HBO / Warner) emerged from the pandemic as absolute dominators not only of television but also of film production. These platforms are now the big game players of movie making and series in the US but also in Europe, from the initial funding to the promotion algorithms to of course the (tele) viewing experience itself. These five platforms are essentially the reincarnations of the great studios of the golden age of cinema. They concentrate money, talent, physical spaces of the studios as long as the vertical integration (e.g production + distribution + projection) to produce the cinema and television of our time. Even before the pandemic we had started to witness the simultaneous release of films in both theaters and platforms (e.g with Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma*). While screening in a physical theater tends to gradually become a luxury, since in-room distribution is expensive and audiences in the West are spending more and more time in the living room, online platforms do a favor to some directors offering a VIP screening of their film for a short amount of time on their streaming platform so that the films will be able to equally participate in the Oscar and other award races. For the past year and a half, due to the pandemic, films have solemnly premiered on the big online platforms forming now a precedent, a business model and a consuming habit for the public. Big industry players like Jodi Foster admit with some regret, that the social experience of cinema, the darkroom experience, is essentially dead. However, she claims that she does not care if her viewers enjoy her work on their mobile phone instead of the room, as long as the work is good. And the work that the platforms produce can be very, very good. Recent series such as Scott Frank's *The Queen's Gambit* or Ryan Murphy's *Ratched* are unique audiovisual experiences, intersecting in the

most original and sought-after way difficult issues such as mental disorders and societal relations between the dominant and marginal groups, while simultaneously engaging in a creative cinematic dialogue with Hitchcock, Lynch, Tarantino and Neo noir, along with underground and alternative artistic formats such as Punchdrunk experiential theater.

At the same time it would be naive to ignore the fact that this concentration of power and control to these studios raises questions about the freedom of creators, the pluralism of production, and the social role that media plays in society. It is quite obvious, and perhaps quite legitimate, that Netflix promotes a particular ideological-political line of inclusiveness and political correctness. In some cases it does not simply weave a benevolent or fictional version of the story (such as the colored nobility in *Bridgerton's* English aristocratic lounges) or simply by subverting characters and heroes (long dead) creators to send a message of equality (such as e.g. with the caricature of Arthur Conan Doyle's male characters in *Enola Holmes*), but - as in Hollywood series that aspire to follow Ryan Murphy's example, wanting to rewrite history, indirectly judging real historical figures by the laws of today's woke culture, applies the neo Puritan morals of yesterday to today, by creating a picture of the past that is completely inaccurate, to the point that it blurs our understanding of how social change and progress came to be achieved.

Conclusions

With this dissertation, I aspire this text to be a springboard for further research on how ideas and values such as beauty, are constructed and used. Concomitantly, the principal concern in my mind was to try and provide an as clear as possible look at the concept of beauty from a point of view that would be objective towards the historical event and would avoid any meta interpretations, dictated by a political point of view. Whichever theory or example I used, whether Marxist or liberal, was not used to interpret a political system or to identify the methods of control or power exercised on the masses in the light of an economic-political system of government. What I have sought to achieve by drawing upon elements from thinkers who are considered or are Marxists or belong to the wider Left in terms of political beliefs, was to gather the ways in which the cradles of power, large or small, manage to hold control over the masses. The realization that we as individuals are never really free beings with independent thinking is a harsh reality, but it does not cease to apply to all of us. From the stories that nurture us, from the ways of entertainment, from the companies, from the family context in which we live, from the state and our time, we've all been raised and conditioned to live with certain rules and expectations that the system in which we are born into,

builds around us. At the same time, as a lover and admirer of the ninth art, what I wanted to highlight is how much cinema has decisively influenced the development of the ideas of our time. How much the screen, apart from looking like us, has managed to make us want to look like its characters because of our need to identify with the archetypical characters that have long been inscribed into our collective unconscious according to Jung. The typecast film characters have created for us images of beauty and social roles that we, many times struggle to make ourselves fit into while at the same time, they serve as monuments of certain system standards regarding beauty, the society of the time portrayed etc. Finally, by emphasizing and proving the existence of the five leading companies that produce most of the consuming products of visual entertainment in the western world, based on actual data and use of facts, I am not only solemnly confirming the hypothesis about the existence of a dominant ideology and its imposition of ideology on us. Last but not least, I am inviting anyone who will read this dissertation, to think more critically about what they will choose to watch in their own time, maybe you want to reconsider going to the theatre for the next blockbuster hit or for the remake of a cult classic.

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