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VINÍCIUS NEVES DE CABRAL

MATERIALIST READINGS OF CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITY

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Tese apresentada ao Programa de Pós-graduação em Educação da Universidade Estadual de Londrina - UEL, como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Doutor.

Orientadores: Profa. Dra. Silvia Márcia Ferreira Meletti e Prof. Dr. Michael Wayne

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BANCA EXAMINADORA

_____

Orientador: Profa. Dra. Silvia Márcia Ferreira Meletti
Universidade Estadual de Londrina - UEL

_____

Prof. Dr. Sérgio Dias Branco
Universidade de Coimbra

_____

Profa. Dra. Mônica de Carvalho Magalhães Kassar
Universidade Federal do Mato Grosso do Sul - UFMS

_____

Profa. Dra. Rosimeire Maria Orlando
Universidade Federal de São Carlos - UFSCAR

_____

Profa. Dra. Fernanda Machado Brener
Universidade Estadual de Londrina - UEL

Londrina, 29 de abril de 2021.

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RESUMO

A pesquisa apresentada tem como objetivo a análise das representações da deficiência nas indústrias cinematográficas dominante e independente. Objetivou-se (1) delinear a estrutura narrativa do gênero drama de normalidade, com base no conceito cunhado por Darke (1998) e nas estratégias narrativas ideológicas elaboradas por Wayne (2020), (2) examinar os impactos das relações de classe social na construção e desenvolvimento das personagens com deficiência e (3) estabelecer conexões entre a apreensão e representação da deficiência nos dramas de normalidade e a condição de classe social das personagens. Justifica-se a relevância do estudo, fundamentado pelos pressupostos teórico-metodológicos do Materialismo Histórico-Cultural, por sua compreensão das relações dialéticas entre dominação material e dominação ideológica. Em oposição às concepções patologizantes, o estudo concebe a deficiência como fenômeno social determinado por condições históricas, econômicas, sociais e culturais. Os resultados das análises dos quatro estudos de caso da indústria cinematográfica dominante corroboram com as proposições de Darke (1998). Os exemplos discutidos elucidam a estrutura narrativa ideológica do drama de normalidade, que visa a reprodução da deficiência como desvio da norma social e como contrária aos pressupostos da Ideologia da Competência. O drama de normalidade é construído a partir de técnicas cinematográficas melodramáticas que apelam à emoção e retratam a deficiência como uma tragédia que deve ser superada com esforço pessoal e dedicação. Sem profundidade, as personagens com deficiência ficam à mercê das opiniões, desejos e caridades daqueles sem-deficiência à sua volta. Como espaço de resistência, a indústria independente oferece, nos dois casos analisados, uma narrativa que retrata a deficiência como construção social e histórica. As personagens com deficiência são retratadas com complexidade e construídas como humanos completos e não como mera expressão de sua deficiência.

Palavras-chave: cinema; deficiência; representação; classe social; drama de normalidade.

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ABSTRACT

The research presented aims to analyse representations of disability in the dominant and in the independent film industries. The objectives were (1) to outline the narrative structure of the genre normality drama, based on the concept coined by Darke (1998) and on the ideological narrative strategies developed by Wayne (2020), (2) to examine the impacts of social class relations on the construction and development of disabled characters and (3) to establish connections between the apprehension and representation of disability in normality dramas and the condition of class of the characters. The relevance of the study is justified, based on the theoretical-methodological framework of Historical and Cultural Materialisms, by its understanding of the dialectical relations between material domination and ideological domination. In opposition to the medical approach, this study conceives disability as a social phenomenon determined by historical, economic, social and cultural conditions. The results of the analyses of the four case studies of the dominant film industry corroborate the propositions of Darke (1998). The examples discussed elucidate the ideological narrative structure of the normality drama, which aims to reproduce disability as a deviation from the social norm and a threat to the stablished assumptions of the Ideology of Competence. The normality drama is built on melodramatic cinematographic techniques that appeal to emotion and portray disability as a tragedy that must be overcome with personal effort and dedication. Without depth, disabled characters are at the mercy of the opinions, desires and charity of those without disabilities around them. As a space of resistance, the independent industry offers, in the two cases analysed, a narrative that portrays disability as a social and historical construction. Disabled characters are portrayed with complexity and constructed as complete humans and not as a mere expression of their impairment.

Key words: cinema; disability; representation; social class; normality drama.

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INTRODUÇÃO

O desenvolvimento da pesquisa apresentada a seguir foi motivado pela combinação de dois fatores principais. Quais sejam, (1) meu interesse acadêmico e pessoal pelo trabalho de crítica de ideologia com base nos fundamentos teórico-metodológicos do Materialismo Cultural e (2) a dedicação de nosso grupo de pesquisa no aprofundamento de uma análise marxista dos fenômenos sociais que envolvem a deficiência. Chamo de análise marxista a aproximação das discussões teóricas acerca da deficiência com conceitos centrais do Materialismo Histórico, em especial, suas concepções de dialética, classe social e história (EAGLETON, 2006; 2016; MCNALLY, 2006; WOOD; 2006).

Mesmo ciente de que não seja obrigatório ser marxista para que se conceba a posição de classe social como elemento da constituição do sujeito (OLIVER, 1990), o Materialismo Histórico-Cultural viabiliza o protagonismo não-determinista de tal aspecto. Em outras palavras, é a partir das condições materiais e históricas que se constitui o ser social (MARX; ENGELS, 1968). As condições materiais dominantes, por sua vez, estabelecem dialeticamente uma complexa rede hegemônica de soberania ideológica que se manifesta em todas as nossas relações sociais. Marx & Engels (1968) concluem que a dominação material se constitui também pela via da dominação das ideias, na proporção de que uma não pode existir sem a outra.

A compreensão da dialética entre dominação material e ideológica abre lacunas para o estudo teórico da estrutura de sustentação do capital. A análise toma como ponto de partida um fenômeno que julgue ser pungente nessa relação. Assim, é ao tomar como pressuposto teórico o fundamento da dialética entre material e ideológico que o Materialismo Cultural justifica o escrutínio das expressões culturais e intelectuais para compreensão das relações sociais no capitalismo.

Como fenômeno social, a deficiência não pode ser compreendida fora de um complexo contexto de interconexão com outros fenômenos. No caso de sua análise na macroestrutura do capitalismo, é elementar sua relação com as condições histórico-culturais de gênero, raça, etnia e, principalmente, classe social (RUSSEL, 2019). O estudo de Santos (2020), por exemplo, a partir das bases do Materialismo Histórico, elucida os impactos dessas variantes nas condições de vida das pessoas com deficiência.

As bases ideológicas do capitalismo, entretanto, descolocam a discussão desses fenômenos para o nível individual. Suas premissas meritocráticas e individualistas

descaracterizam as relações sociais, culturais e econômicas, e seus impactos nos sujeitos, como ontológicas e fundantes da organização do próprio sistema. Isto é, para a sobrevivência, manutenção e reprodução do capital, elas blindam a estrutura econômica a partir de seu alicerce ideológico e desarticulam a crítica do coletivo para a individualidade. A deficiência, nessa direção, é compreendida como tragédia pessoal e não como parte da complexa rede ideológica de sustentação do capitalismo.

Essas imagens ideológicas de representação da deficiência na literatura, no cinema, na pintura, etc., tem sido analisadas em variados trabalhos das áreas de Ciências Humanas e Ciências Sociais[1]. Os estudos contribuem para compreensão das concepções de deficiência em circulação impingidas na sociedade. As imagens veiculadas são tanto produto quanto matéria-prima dessas concepções.

Entre as pesquisas citadas, o trabalho de Paul Darke (1998), *Understanding cinematic representations of disability*, é o que possibilita o passo inicial para o desenvolvimento desta pesquisa. Darke propõe a análise de um conjunto de filmes com personagens com deficiência como protagonistas e conclui que esses filmes possuem uma estrutura narrativa comum. Como resultado de sua discussão, o autor cunha o conceito do gênero de drama de normalidade, um gênero de filme que objetiva validar a não-deficiência como norma.

A partir das bases do Materialismo Histórico-Cultural e do conceito de drama de normalidade, proponho-me a investigar a representação cinematográfica da deficiência e analisar a estrutura narrativa e ideológica de filmes com personagens com deficiência. Em especial, objetivo refletir sobre os impactos das relações de classe social na construção e representação das personagens.

Os objetivos do estudo, portanto, se resumem em (1) delinear a estrutura narrativa do gênero drama de normalidade, com base no conceito cunhado por Darke (1998) e nas estratégias narrativas ideológicas elaboradas por Wayne (2020), (2) examinar os impactos das relações de classe social na construção e desenvolvimento das personagens com deficiência e (3) estabelecer conexões entre a apreensão e representação da deficiência nos dramas de normalidade e a condição de classe social das personagens. Justifica-se a relevância do estudo, fundamentado pelos pressupostos teórico-metodológicos do Materialismo Histórico-Cultural, por sua compreensão das relações dialéticas entre dominação material e dominação ideológica.

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[1] Kriegel (1989), Darke (1998), Lacey (2009), Samuels (2014), Callus (2019), entre outros.

Para tanto, no capítulo 1, debruço-me sobre os conceitos de deficiência e ideologia e suas interconexões no sistema capitalista. No capítulo 2, apresento minhas considerações teórico-metodológicas sobre a crítica de ideologia na área dos Estudos Cinematográficos. O capítulo 3 foi construído em duas partes, quais sejam, (1) uma revisão e análise das pesquisas sobre imagens de representação da deficiência e (2) uma revisão histórica da deficiência no cinema. Nos capítulos 4 e 5, trago para a análise quatro filmes da indústria cinematográfica dominante, como representantes dos dramas de normalidade, e dois filmes da indústria independente, como espaços de resistência às imagens de representação tradicionais da deficiência.

Antes de avançarmos para o primeiro capítulo, gostaria de registrar meus agradecimentos às agências de fomento dessa pesquisa. Para o processo de desenvolvimento desse trabalho foi essencial o apoio financeiro da CAPES[2] e da Fundação Araucária[3] com a bolsa de doutorado. Também indispensável foi o período de doutorado sanduíche (2019-2020), na Brunel University London, viabilizado pela bolsa do Programa de Doutorado-sanduíche no Exterior (PDSE) da CAPES.

Estendo meus agradecimentos aos meus orientadores, Silvia Meletti e Mike Wayne, por me acolherem com amizade e rigor acadêmico. Em especial, à Silvia, por seis anos de trabalhos conjuntos e amizade e, ao Mike, pelo amparo antes, durante e após minha estada em Londres. Sou grato por estarem atentos ao meu trabalho com diligência e zelo e pelos momentos de discussão e debate que foram alicerces para meu desenvolvimento como pesquisador. A pesquisa foi, sem dúvida, enriquecida de forma incomparável por suas contribuições e apontamentos.

[2] Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior.
[3] Fundação Araucária de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico do Estado do Paraná.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the research presented below was motivated by the combination of two main factors. Namely, (1) my academic and personal interest in the work of ideology critique based on the theoretical and methodological foundations of Cultural Materialism and (2) the dedication of our research group to the development of the Marxist understanding of disability as a social phenomenon. I call Marxist analysis the approximation of theoretical discussions about disability with central concepts of Historical Materialism, in particular, its conceptions of dialectics, social class and history (EAGLETON, 2006; 2016; MCNALLY, 2006; WOOD; 2006).

I am aware that it is not mandatory to be a Marxist in order to conceive the position of social class as an element in the constitution of social beings (Oliver, 1990). Nevertheless, Historical-Cultural Materialism enables the non-deterministic protagonism of this aspect in the analyses. In other words, social beings are constituted in the material and historical conditions (MARX; ENGELS, 1968). The dominant material conditions, in turn, dialectically establish a complex hegemonic network of ideological sovereignty that manifests itself in all of our social relations. Marx & Engels (1968) conclude that material domination is also expressed through the domination of ideas, in the proportion that one cannot exist without the other.

The understanding of the dialectic relations between material and ideological domination scaffolds the theoretical study of the capital's organisational and ideological structure. The analysis takes as a starting point a phenomenon that it considers to be poignant in this relationship. Thus, it is in the theoretical assumption of the foundations of the dialectics between material and ideological dominion that Cultural Materialism justifies the scrutiny of cultural and intellectual expressions to understand social relations in capitalism.

As a social phenomenon, disability cannot be understood outside a complex context of interconnection with other social phenomena. In the case of its analysis in the macrostructure of capitalism, its relationship with the historical-cultural conditions of gender, race, ethnicity and, mainly, social class is essential (RUSSEL, 2019). The study conducted by Santos (2020), for example, based on Historical Materialism, elucidates the impacts of these variants on the living conditions of disabled people.

The ideological bases of capitalism, however, shift the discussion of these phenomena to the individual level. Its meritocratic and individualistic pillars mask social,

cultural and economic relations, and their impacts on subjects. They are not understood as ontological and founding elements of the organisation of the system itself. That is, for the survival, maintenance and reproduction of capital, ideology shields the economic structure and dismantles the criticism towards individuality. In this sense, disability is understood as a personal tragedy and not as part of the complex ideological network that supports capitalism.

These ideological images representing disability in literature, cinema, painting, etc., have been analysed in various works and contexts in the areas of Human and Social Sciences[4]. These studies contribute to the understanding of the concepts of disability in circulation in society. The images conveyed are both product and raw material for these conceptions.

The work of Paul Darke (1998), *Understanding cinematic representations of disability*, makes the initial step for the development of this research possible. Darke proposes the analysis of a set of films with disabled characters as protagonists and concludes that these films have a common narrative structure. As a result of his discussion, the author coined the concept of the *normality drama* genre, a film genre that aims to validate the non-disabled body/mind as the norm.

Based on Historical-Cultural Materialism and the concept of normality drama, I intend to investigate the cinematographic representation of disability and to analyse the narrative and ideological structure of films with disabled characters. In particular, the objective is to reflect on the impacts of social class relations on the construction and representation of the characters.

The objectives of the study, therefore, come down to three: (1) to outline the narrative structure of the genre normality drama, based on the concept coined by Darke (1998) and on the ideological narrative strategies developed by Wayne (2020), (2) to examine the impacts of social class relations on the construction and development of disabled characters and (3) to establish connections between the apprehension and representation of disability in normality dramas and the condition of class of the characters. The relevance of the study is justified, based on the theoretical-methodological framework of Historical and Cultural Materialisms, by its understanding of the dialectical relations between material domination and ideological domination.

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[4] Kriegel (1989), Darke (1998), Lacey (2009), Samuels (2014), Callus (2019), among others.

Therefore, in chapter 1, I focus on the concepts of disability and ideology and their interconnections in the capitalist system. In chapter 2, I present my theoretical and methodological considerations on the criticism of ideology in the field of Cinematographic Studies. Chapter 3 was constructed in two parts, (1) a review and analysis of the research published on images representing disability and (2) a historical review of disability in cinema. In chapters 4 and 5 I present to the analysis four films of the dominant film industry, as representatives of dramas of normality, and two films from the independent industry, as spaces of resistance to the traditional representational images of the disability.

Before moving on to the first chapter, I would like to acknowledge the importance of the funding agencies that sponsored this research. The financial support from CAPES and Fundação Araucária was essential. Furthermore, for the record, this research would not have been presented the way it is without my doctoral stay in London (2019-2020), at Brunel University London, which financed by CAPES's Doctoral Sandwich Program (PDSE).

I extend my gratitude to my supervisors, Silvia Meletti and Mike Wayne, for welcoming me with friendship and academic rigor. To Silvia, for six years of joint work and friendship and, to Mike, for the assistance before, during and after my period in London. I am grateful for all your support and for the moments of discussion and debate that were fundamental for my development as a researcher. This research was undoubtedly enriched in an incomparable way by your contributions.

CHAPTER 1 - DISABILITY AND THE DISCOURSE OF INCOMPETENCE

Introduction

In a world driven by dualisms, disability is very much a discourse of contrasts between those called *abled* and the so-called *disabled*, the use*ful* and the use*less*, the competent and the *in*competent. It is my understanding that the concept of disability is constructed upon socio-historical and cultural images that draw on an ideological discourse and neoliberal symbols and practices that regard some individuals as incompetents. My main objective in this chapter is to address and question the usually naturalised discourse of competence as an axiom of capitalist and neoliberal practices. I will therefore explain in detail three necessary considerations surrounding such discourse.

First, the reader should not expect the commonly used inverted commas in words like *normal* and *abnormal* or *normality* and *abnormality*, for they also constitute part of the meanings embedded in a society of dualist antagonisms. In general, my concern about the politically correct is that it aims to change words and concepts and ignores the ideological foundations of capitalist practices. The changes are limited if the world continues to be driven by two antagonistic forces; the *normals* will remain the normals, even if one calls the *other pole* abnormal, not-so-normal, different, special, wonder and so forth. Mostly, I shall apply the concepts of *non-deviant* and *deviant*, which will be defined later in this chapter.

Secondly, my reflections are based on the historical and dialectic convergence of representations that are valid today and that support the idea of competence in capitalism. It means that I will not present a factual study of disability across time, however, some references to the past may appear at times based on studies of other researchers; the same applies to the following chapters.

Lastly, and most importantly, the ideas of competence, incompetence, ableism, and disability are not only products of capitalism as a macro-system, so much as they are also dependent on more localised cultural conventions. Might it be recognised that I do acknowledge these concepts/ideas as cross-cultural concepts, as well as and I am aware of the divergencies that might arise depending on countries and even residual and emergent cultural practices in circulation. However, for this chapter, I shall consider their ontology in the core of the ideologies of capitalism as a macro and dominant structure. More specific traditions will

come into place in chapters four and five, in which I present reflections on cinematic productions and must then examine both macro and micro contexts of production.

Capitalism, Disability and the industrial reserve army

I would like to start by establishing the grounds on which I shall build my reflections. My first and final argument is that disability in capitalism is a social product of the contradictions produced by the clash between forces of exploitation and forces of labour. It is rather important to clarify, perhaps to the despair of postmodern perspectives (Eagleton, 1998; 2016; Harvey, 1990), that I shall focus my considerations on what we could call a materialist universalising view of the body, a body that is expected by capitalism, the *labour body*. The body that is *able* to work, to sell its labour force in the market and from it extract surplus value[5]. The contrast of the abled labour body is the disabled, which "[…] is used to classify persons deemed less exploitable or not exploitable by the owning class who control the means of production in a capitalist economy." (RUSSEL, 2019, p. 42). Those "deemed less exploitable or not exploitable", deviant from the ideal labour body, are many times considered part of what Karl Marx calls a Stagnant Surplus Population, the third category of the Relative Surplus Population (floating, latent, and stagnant) or Industrial Reserve Army (MARX, 1990), discussed in the 25th chapter - *General Law of Capitalist Accumulation* of the first volume of the *Capital*. Although a famous quotation amongst Marxists is commonly used to summarise the author's discussion[6], I would like to linger a little longer on his arguments on the Relative Surplus Population and try to relate this concept to the situation of disabled people in the capitalist society of the 21st century.

Marx understands that there is a relation between the growth and accumulation of capital and the demand for a labour force, as capital expands so does the need

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[5] Due to the limitation of space and the necessity to focus on some concepts rather than on others, I will not explain each and every concept of Marx's analysis of capitalism applied here. To any beginner reader interested in expanding their knowledge on the topic, I recommend Mike Wayne's *Marx's Das Kapital for beginners* (FOR BEGINNERS LLC, 2012) and *Marxism and media studies: key concepts and contemporary trends* (PLUTO PRESS, 2003) and David Harvey's *A companion to Marx's Capital* (VERSO, 2010).

[6] "The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expensive power of capital, also develop the labour power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The more extensive, finally, the pauperized (*sic*) sections of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*." (MARX, 1990, p. 798).

for more workers - "[a]ccumulation of capital is therefore multiplication of the proletariat" (MARX, 1990, p. 764). However, if the number of workers employed increases, so does the price of labour - an increase on wages - which means "a reduction in the unpaid labour the worker has to supply" (MARX, 1990, p. 770). The relation seems to be simple; it is nevertheless more complex than it appears to be.

For starters, it should not be forgotten that the sole aim of the capitalist is to produce profit[7]. When wages rise, they become an obstacle between capitalists and the maximum amount of profit that can be extracted. Other elements will then come into place, among others, the intensification of the exploitation of the work force and the use of technology to increase productivity and profitability (HARVEY, 2010; 2011).

One example that may be useful to illustrate such an abstract relation is that of bank workers in Brazil in the last 30 years. In the 1990s, bank employees in Brazil created influential labour unions to exert pressure on banks, therefore demanding higher quality jobs - higher salaries, less working hours, more job places, amongst others. When going on strikes, until the early 2000s, those unions would still have some influence in the decision-making process in the organisation of banks. In 2020, the widespread use of the new technology, which allows users to solve most of their needs using their smartphones, has caused demands for higher productivity, wage drops, more working hours, and an increase in unemployment in the sector - industrial reserve army. While strikes of the sector in the 1990s were catastrophic (crowds of employees on the streets, freezing of banks, very little or no money available, the support of the population), a strike in 2020 gathers a few dozen with signs in the streets that are usually ignored by most passerby, looking down at their smartphones.

Leading us then to an important hallmark of capitalist labour exploitation practices: The Industrial Reserve Army as a regulator of the tensions between the exploiters and the exploited. As capital multiplies and grows, it also tends to follow two internal movements, namely concentration and centralisation. Respectively, the augmentation of capital and control of this capital in the hands of fewer people. At the other pole, it also produces "a relatively redundant working population, i.e., a population which is superfluous to capital's average requirements for its own valorization (*sic*), and is therefore a surplus population." (MARX, 1990, p. 782). This surplus population forms an army of workers who may at times

[7] "The aim of the buyer is the valorisation of his capital, the production of commodities which contain more labour than he paid for, and therefore contain a portion of value which cost him nothing and is nevertheless realised [*realisiert*] through the sale of those commodities." (MARX, 1990, p. 769.)

be absorbed or rejected by the capital, according to the capital's own needs (variation in the number of workers in a certain area), requirements (level of education, expertise, and/or experience), rules (wages, working hours, holidays, health insurance). In the case of Brazilian bank clerks, the introduction of new technological machinery, as Marx calls it, allowed banks to dispose of thousands of employees and change the rules of the game, it now has new needs and requirements.

The first category of the relative surplus population characterises workers that are "[…] sometimes repelled, sometimes attracted again in greater masses […]" by the job markets (MARX, 1990, p. 794). A modern example may be the situation of engineering workers in Brazil - when the economy is growing, they are the first ones to be absorbed and to get higher salaries and better conditions of work. However, as the economy slows, they are repelled by the companies and will be unemployed again.

The latent category represents those with potential to be part of the capitalist labour force but are in agricultural areas still struggling to survive with their own practices against massive capitalist companies; it is the representation of the death of a rural lifestyle. As cities and companies grow, they swallow small family farms and ranches, leaving those families with no other option but to sell their properties to the big companies, move to the cities, and sell their labour force. It is a situation portrayed by Theodore Dreiser in *The Lost Phoebe* (1918), by Graciliano Ramos in *Vidas Secas* (1938), and more recently in the American sitcom *The Ranch* (2016-2020).

The last category, the stagnant, is formed by those who must subject themselves to the lowest conditions of work, to the most irregular forms of employment, and to "[…] a maximum of working time and a minimum of wages." (MARX, 1990, p. 796) - a sediment of the working class that lives in the poorest conditions of life.

We should remember that when Marx is discussing the three forms of relative surplus population, he is categorising *workers*, in other words, those who are forced to sell their workforce because they do not own any means of production. At the same time, they are those who are *able* to sell their workforce; those who are at their full capacity in body and mind to create surplus value at the lowest cost, with the lowest adaptation possible. In contrast, when dealing with disability, we are considering those who have been labelled as disabled, unproductive, and as a burden to the rest of the working class. Thus, we are *not* dealing with labour bodies and minds, rather with the sphere of pauperism - or the lowest, poorest, most degrading conditions of life.

Labelled as irrelevant and disposable to the political and economic structure, disabled people may be allocated in Stagnant category of the Relative Surplus Population. In fact, even they are absorbed by the system in times of need or forced by affirmative action, those in Stagnant category "[…] can be rendered superfluous at the slightest downturn of the business cycle." (RUSSEL, 2019, p. 76).

Marx (1990, p.797) enumerates three categories of those who dwell in pauperism - "the lowest sediment of the relative surplus population", (1) those who are able to work but who are not working; (2) orphans and pauper children; and, finally, (3) "the demoralized (*sic*), the ragged, and those **unable** to work, chiefly people who succumb to their incapacity for adaptation, an incapacity which results from the division of labour […]". Note that *here* he is dealing with the incapacity of adaptation.

To clarify, pauperism is

> The hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army. Its production is included in that of the relative surplus population, its necessity is implied by their necessity; along with the surplus population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth. It forms part of the *faux frais* of capitalist production: but capital usually knows how to transfer these from its own shoulders to those of the working-class and the petty bourgeoisie. (MARX, 1990, p. 797).

It seems to be implied that he differentiates *the surplus population* and *pauperism*. They are both conditioned to the ontological structure of the capitalist system and its ongoing wealth-making process. When Marx brings them together, he binds them, stating that one will be responsible for the other (the dead weight of the industrial reserve army), he is providing arguments against the traditional categorisation of disability as a personal and individual problem. Leaving aside the other elements that form the sphere of pauperism and focusing exclusively on the disabled; disability is a social, historical, and class-related issue.

Barnes (1992, p. 55) defines disability as "[…] a diverse system of social constraints imposed on people with impairments by a highly discriminatory society — to be a disabled person means to be discriminated against." A social approach to disability, therefore, does not deny the impairment, but understands that there is a socio-historical difference between *impairment, disability, and disabled.* The impairment is biological, the disability is social, and disabled is the end result of disabling a person with a disability. Vygotsky (1993, p. 36) argues that "[i]n the final analysis, what decides the fate of a personality is not the defect [impairment in today's terminology] itself, but its social consequences." And it is this socio-psychological

realisation that may or may not be a disabling one. In their development, disabled children will only require processes that will stimulate them in other ways rather than those traditionally applied at home, school, and any other social situation.

As deviants of patterns of normality, however, disabled people are many times completely or partially deprived of social participation. Deviant bodies and minds are expected to either follow the stabilised rules of society or not be part of it at all. In a scene in Jack Nicholson's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, his character, Randle P. McMurphy, is in the swimming pool of a total institution for those considered mentally ill and/or intellectually disabled and tells one of guards that within six days he is going to leave the institution. To his surprise, according to the guard, he will only leave the institution when allowed to, when the doctors and nurses consider that he is *able* to adjust to social order. Randle is pretending to dodge prison, but to many of his companions it means never, because according to the rules, requirements, and needs of the capital they have already been deemed deviant and disposable.

Social class, one's position in the economic and political structure of capitalism, will have a direct impact on the limits imposed and possibilities opened up to individuals. That is, humans make their history, but they are determined by socio-historical forces beyond their control (MARX; ENGELS, 1968). Therefore, a materialist reading of disability may largely contribute to deepen and expand the scientific knowledge around the disabling phenomena. Social class, albeit a commonly forgotten category in the analyses of disability, is an essential aspect of it. There are complex divergencies between facing an impairment in the higher classes, in the middle-classes, or in the lower-classes[8].

Wright (1998) argues that *exploitation* is a grounding concept when it comes to class analysis because it creates a fissure between the higher classes (the owners of the capital, land, and means of production), who exploit, and the rest who are exploited. The development of capitalist relations, however, engendered new classes, a class that originates from the social and technical divisions of labour (WAYNE, 2020; WRIGHT, 1998). The middle-classes are constituted by those in the working class who perform jobs that require more complex skills in contrast to those who are working in manual jobs - and thus tendentiously share contrasting interests with them. These are also called in sociological works *primary and secondary sector jobs*, which respectively represent "[…] those with high wages, high skill levels, good working conditions, job security, and ample opportunities for promotion" in

[8] I prefer to use these categories in the plural because it seems to express their complexity and plurality.

contrast to "[…] low wages, low skill levels, poor working conditions, little job security, and few if any possibilities for advancement." (BARNES, 1992b, p. 57).

Wayne (2020, p. 5) keenly highlights that

> The social division of labour is linked to class formation because across the various branches of productive activity designed to meet variable social needs, the same social types in control of those branches have more in common with each other than they do with their immediate workers, who have the least control, least power and lowest remuneration in the production process.

The maintenance of class structure and the inducement of competition and individualism in the working-classes is a fundamental trait to the ontological continuation of capitalism. The social division of labour focuses on the formation of an un-critical, individualist, and indebted working-middle class with no sense of unity or class consciousness (MARX & ENGELS 2008; MÉSZÁROS, 2008; 2011). The spread of meritocratic values amongst the professional and managerial strata of the working-class gives them a glamorous look and the false impression that they are closer to the top than to the bottom, that they share more with those in power than those in classes below them.

The relevance of the definition of middle-class lies on the preeminent role that this class has conquered in the film industry. Not only behind but also in front of the cameras. The middle-class is usually portrayed "[…] as the *norm* to which people can and should aspire to." (WAYNE, p. 9, author's highlight). Secondly, because disability, the connections between disability and poverty, and disability and secondary sector jobs, or manual jobs, have been recurrently emphasised[9]. Lastly, because the first two will come together as contradictions when analysing cinematographic representations of disability. We see these contrasts in the portraits of Raymond (*Rain Main*) and the master boy (*Two-legged horse*) - higher classes; Carla and Daniel (*The Other Sister*), Gaby (*Gaby, a true story*) and Laila (*Margarita with a straw*) – middle classes; and Giah (*Two-legged horse*), Lennie (*Of Mice and Men*), Nathaniel (*The soloist*), Elisa (*The shape of Water*), and Radio (*Radio*) - lower classes.

Disability in the working-class demands the absence of one of the non-disabled members of the family from the labour market to provide care for the disabled member (See, for instance, *My Left Foot*). This care may also be relegated to a philanthropic special

[9] Barnes, 1992; Daunt, 1992; Grech, 2009; Hughes & Avoke, 2010; Mitra, Posarac & Vick, 2013.

institution - in the latter, allowing all working members of the families to be absorbed by the capital (examples may be *The Other Sister*, *Radio*, *Rain Man*, and *The Eighth Day*).

It may be argued, however, that the concepts and definitions of what it means to be able to work are variable (STONE, 1984). Indeed they are, but those are regulated by the State, and they vary not only influenced directly by pressures of society, but by the demands of the capital. In other words, it means to say that their jobs and the place they occupy are both part of a regulatory system of the capital, as Russel (2019) argues, and a special kind of charity - in either case the workforce is easily disposable. We shall see that, for instance, in the cases of Sam (*I am Sam*), Daniel (*The Other Sister*), and even Elisa (*The Shape of Water*).

Proof of that have also been the recent changes in the Brazilian legislation regarding the regulations for the mandatory employment of disabled people. Advancements in laws and legal regulations are indeed an important part of the struggles of the working class, but they "are 'solutions' which promote conflict between groups of disadvantaged workers, rather than making it a right of every citizen to have a living-wage job and health care." (RUSSEL, 2019, p. 77). They are part of what Mészáros (2008; 2011) regards as corrections in the structure of the capital. They play a fundamental role in the ontological conservation of capital when softening the tensions between the owners of the capital and the working class.

Barnes, back in 1992, advocated in favour of anti-discrimination legislation as a solution to improve the participation of disabled workers in the labour market. No one would deny that even within the limits of the capital one should *always* fight against discrimination, prejudice, and deprivation. Notwithstanding, the market finds its ways to "dodge" the legislation. When it comes to disabled workers that usually happens through what Samuels (2014) calls *biocertification*.

It is the process companies and industries use to certify that a new employee will follow their not-so-secret internal rules, using medical reports, exams, and tests. By means of biocertification processes individuals are reduced to their biological characteristics and are erased as social subjects, "[b]iocertification materializes the modern belief that only science can reliably determine the truths of identity and generally claims to offer a simple, verifiable, and concrete solution to questions of identity." (SAMUELS, 2014, P. 122).

Despite their limitations, what Wayne calls (following Gramsci) *passive revolution*[10], these seem to represent a possibility to improve the lives of those who are *now* in

[10] "[…] the paradox of massive change *within* the social relations of capitalism: change without real change." (WAYNE, 2020 p. 39, author's *highlight*)

need, not only focusing on people with disabilities, but also on other forms of discrimination as well. My favourite and paramount argument in that regard is that:

> Every reasonable and reasoned action proposed in an attempt to accelerate the social and political inclusion of the poor in the process of economic development in order to bring equality to social development is historically welcomed. As much within the scope of the State and its public policies as within civil society. It would be equally wicked to deny the diversity of the aspirations and intervention actions in the problematic reality. (MARTINS, 2012, p. 1[11]).

Nonetheless, we should not be satisfied with them, for they do not interrupt the flow and the logics of the capital. This is my focus in the following subtopic.

Disability and the Ideology of Competence

As stated, I am not going to analyse the disabling phenomena beyond the sphere of capitalism, but rather to understand them as part of the complex system of ontological maintenance of the capital. One way to do that is to approach, from a materialist perspective, the ideological discourse of competence. It unveils not only what one expects from a society but also what is to be discarded. *Competence* is a concept that is dialectically founded on the projection of the *ideal individual* in capitalism.

The structure of capital and its relations of material and cultural production, distribution, and exchange convey ideological models of individuals, social relations, and patterns of social behaviour that must be assimilated to guarantee the right to active participation in everyday life, from the most trivial activities to the most complex forms of social participation. The representations will revolve around the notions of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, and, in the case of the working classes, labour skills. These representations carry labels of *non-deviant* and *deviant*. The archetype of an ideal individual is linked to the project of society:

> Hence, the oppression that disabled people face is rooted in the economic and social structures of capitalism. And this oppression is structured by racism, sexism,

[11] My translation of "Tudo de sensato e fundamentado que se fizer e propuser no sentido de acelerar a inclusão social e política das populações pobres no processo de desenvolvimento econômico para com ele compatibilizar o ritmo do desenvolvimento social será historicamente bem-vindo. Tanto no âmbito do Estado e das políticas públicas quanto no âmbito da sociedade civil. Seria igualmente perverso recusar a diversidade das inspirações e das ações de intervenção na realidade problemática.".

> homophobia, ageism, and disablism, which is endemic to all capitalist societies and cannot be explained away as a universal cognitive process. (OLIVER, 1990, p. 165).

Oliver is arguing that the foundations of prejudice are in fact part of the ideological structure of capitalism. Wayne (2020, p. 136, author's *highlight*) defines ideology "as working through culture but as ideas, values, belief systems, habits and practices that defend and legitimise the interests of groups *at the expense of other groups in relationships of inequality*". Hence, it is important here to clarify my understanding of five concepts that are usually present in discussions of inequality, prejudice, and disability: *oppression, segregation, exploitation,* and *inclusion/exclusion.*

It is my understanding that, from a materialist perspective, they are all class-related issues. *Oppression* derives from the idea that due to one or more deviant characteristics one is deprived from access to some or all material, cultural, and social conditions that would allow them to carry on a fulfilling life or, as Erik O. Wright (2019) calls it, a flourishing life. Oppression represents an image of someone being crushed, smashed, held (socially) against their own will, and despite their own efforts to change. Oppression is a product of ideologies embedded in the social structure of capitalism and it is related to inequality.

Segregation revolves around marginalisation. The social process in which those who are unable to follow one or more social expectations are centrifuged, sent to the borders of society. They are not welcomed to participate in everyday life. Segregation comes as an alternative to the idea of social exclusion, as we shall see below.

Exploitation, in turn, is the essential concept that sustains capital every day. The act of extracting surplus value out of those who own nothing else but their labour power (MARX, 2012). Stripped of all properties and material conditions, workers have no way to sustain life other than by selling their labour power to those who own those material conditions. Modern capitalism, however, is a bit more complex than it used to be when Marx's wrote *Das Kapital* (WRIGHT, 2019). In order to guarantee its own survival, the structure of class conditions was reshaped based on the social and technical divisions of labour. Different class interests will clash between those who own the capital, those in positions that require higher qualification and more sophisticated skills (the modern middle-classes), and the ones performing jobs that are socially characterised as lower jobs (WAYNE, 2020). I will analyse these concepts' relations to a class approach before working with *inclusion* and *exclusion*.

A material approach to these concepts understands that the condition of class will determine - imposing starting points, limits, and ends, as Williams (1988) and Wright

(2019) define it - their extensions and impacts on an individual's life. It means to say that one may be segregated but not so much oppressed - this contrast is very much apparent in the cases of Carla (*The Other Sister*), Raymond (*Rain Man*), Lennie (*Of Mice and* Men) and Radio (*Radio*) that will be analysed in the following paragraphs.

Carla and Raymond are both sent to special institutions which promise to educate, take care, and prepare them to be part of society. These institutions supposedly adhere to educational and psychological practices that aim to develop an individual's potential and enhance their capacities. I am not here addressing the axiological foundation of total institutions[12], but that Carla's and Raymond's access to these institutions or rejection of them, is determined by their material conditions. What I mean is that this option is not available to Lennie and Radio. Lennie has no other option but to sell his labour power, his survival depends on the exploitation of it. As for Radio, he can count on nothing else but charity. So, the extent of the processes of oppression, segregation, and exploitation is class-determined. This seems to be a simple idea but in the structure of the system it becomes a rather complex one, and we shall now see why.

Going back to Wayne's definition of ideology, he understands that:

> […] there is capitalism itself which has a built-in cultural tendency to decontextualise social phenomena, individualise social phenomena and de-historicise social phenomena. We may also add that capitalism prematurely or falsely universalises capitalist culture and value systems (e.g., the only way to live). (WAYNE, 2020, p. 137).

Therefore, there is a paramount comprehension of capitalist practices when it comes to the analysis of the disabling phenomena. When we look at Marx's exposition of the sphere of pauperism, we were in fact targeting how this process of decontextualisation, individualisation, and de-historicisation affect those who are considered unable to adapt. Traditionally, disability has been treated as a personal, individual tragedy, which is brought out of context and history, in an attempt to exempt society from any obligations it might have. Against this, Russel (2019, p. 51) argues that:

> Our institutions (particularly medical and social welfare institutions) have historically held disablement to be an individual problem, not the result of economic or social forces. They have equated disability with physiological, anatomical, or mental "defects" and hegemonically held these conditions responsible for the disabled

[12] I shall go back to this below. For now, it is sufficient to say that I share Goffman's (1963) perspective on the subject.

> person's lack of full participation in the economic life of our society. This approach presumed a biological inferiority of disabled persons.

Their deviation from social models of adaptation to everyday life and productivity in the cycle of the capital, established by social standards of normality, promotes processes of social marginalisation, from institutionalising policies of discrimination to deprivation of social participation (BARNES, 2012; BUENO, 2001; FERREIRA, 1994; VYGOTSKI, 2004). It is in and from everyday life that the concepts, values and norms that represent, regulate and organise a concrete social formation are executed (Heller, 2016). Daily life is the expression of the real life of the subjects that are part of it, it is the immediate unity of action and thought and expression of concepts, values and norms formed from the hegemonic ideology conveyed and foisted upon individuals (CHAUÍ, 2014; HELLER, 2016).

Everyday life is nothing more than ordinary thinking, common sense, and the expression of uncritical thinking. It is the embodiment of common man's life and it is from it that he expresses his truth, builds his beliefs and guides his life (HELLER, 2016). Everyday thought, the common sense, is based on experience in the complex ideological network that maintains the socio-metabolic functioning of capital and aims at the "orientation towards stability and relatively quiet social reproduction" (MÉSZÁROS, 2004, pp. 486-487).

The process of stigmatisation in the case of people with disabilities permeates the complex social construction of everyday life. The distancing of adaptation to the patterns of normality established in everyday life crystallises the stigma and removes from the person with an impairment the condition of the human and projects it socially as the non-human. The representation of the stigma occurs by a reduction of the subject to only one of its characteristics - usually that which is downgraded or socially overvalued.

The possible overcoming of these conditions, or even the performance of more basic daily actions, can raise the stigmatised subject to the condition of superhuman, keeping them still in a non-human status. A stigmatised person may, however, reformulate the rules when they reach a position a social prestige. They are taken to the level of representation of their group and will be considered the example of self-determination, meritocracy, and success (GOFFMAN, 1963; MCNAMEE; MILLER, 2009).

The decades after 1990 have been marked by various events and political and social reviews on the role and place of persons with disabilities in society (JANNUZZI, 2004). However, the system of justification and ideological reproduction of stereotypes in the categorisation of the socially conceived human body, the *labour body and mind*, as perfect

permeates concrete social relationships in everyday life and triggers processes of stigmatisation of the deviants (SAMUELS, 2014; STONE; 1981). Stigma is thus very much in constant relation to the ideologies that are working through culture.

Competence, structured by bourgeois ideological pillars, conveyed by the media and absorbed by the cultural industry, sells signs and images of youth, health and happiness (CHAUÍ, 2014). The social process of constructing the discourse of the competent produces its dialectical counterpart, the incompetent. The social and ideological role of the competent, valued by the social power of science, as an unquestionable source of knowledge, underlies and justifies the domination and economic exploitation of one class, considered superior in material and cultural capital, over the other, expropriated from the whole (CHAUÍ, 2014; SAMUELS, 2014).

The analysis of perfection, based on a neoliberal ideology, established mainly after the 1980s (HARVEY, 2011), subjugates disability mainly to spaces of pauperism, marginalisation and segregation and is marked by the socio-political order and the power of science. The ideological projection of the perfection of productivity, sociability, independence, meritocracy characterises in the opposite pole the lack and the insufficiency, emphasising the defect and erasing the subject beyond his disability and making the construction of his social relations unfeasible (BARNES, 2012; HELLER, 2016; SOLDATIC; MEEKOSHA, 2012A; 2012B; VYGOTSKI, 1993).

The naturalising element of capital is propagated and foisted upon individuals that reproduce the social structure through complex ideological systems of conservation, keeping individuals locked in the relationships of everyday life. Everyday life is, therefore, the life of every social subject, without being able to be totally out of it or completely trapped by it. It is in everyday life that the dominant metabolic ideological processes are emptied and reified as absolute and natural truths (HELLER, 2016; MÉSZÁROS, 2004; 2016).

Most of the population is conditioned by the ideological standards set by the ruling class. Its ideological structure is:

> a logical, systematic, and coherent set of representations (ideas and values) and norms or rules (of conduct) that indicate and prescribe to the members of a society what they should think and how they should think about it, what they should value and how they

> should value it, what they should feel and how they should feel it, what they should do and how they should do it.[13] (CHAUÍ, 2014, p. 53).

The dominating force of ideology lies in pacification, naturalisation of the hegemonic social organisation and unity of interests, although they are clearly conflicting (MÉSZÁROS, 2008, WAYNE, 2020). Ideology, in its hegemonic sense, structures life lived and represents "[…] a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives." (WILLIAMS, 1980, p. 38).

Everyday life executes the ideological patterns of normality. Heller (2016, p. 37) indicates that "[t]he maturation of man means, in any society, that the individual acquires all the essential skills for the daily life of the society (social layer) in question. It is an adult who is able to live his daily life for himself." Ideological patterns of normality are socially established attributes and characteristics and given as natural and ordinary that categorise subjects as normal and abnormal deviant. Stigma disqualifies the subject for an individual characteristic that deviates from the ideological norms and standards imposed and determines the limits of their social participation.

Lastly, I would like to go back to inclusion. Inclusion is part of the ideological process of self-correctness and self-preservation of the bourgeois society. It is an attempt to lessen the weight of structural injustices, inequalities, segregations (exclusions) that are part of the ontological foundations of the capital. Marx's thought elucidates how contradictory the concept is:

> when analysing the production of relative surplus-value, that within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker; that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; […]. (MARX, 1990, p. 799).

Some lines below, he famously concludes that:

> […] Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product as capital. (MARX, 1990, p. 799).

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[13] My translation of: "[…] um conjunto lógico, sistemático e coerente de representações (ideias e valores) e de normas ou regras (de conduta) que indicam e prescrevem aos membros de uma sociedade o que devem pensar e como devem pensar, o que devem valorizar e como devem valorizar, o que devem sentir e como devem sentir, o que devem fazer e como devem fazer".

Inclusion, therefore, is the movement of opening opportunities to share material and cultural capital with (some of) those who were deprived from access to them. It does so without questioning or challenging the very essence of the society that created deprivation in the first place.

Inclusion and exclusion are part of the same dialects. One is the dialectical inversion of the other. The need to include only exists because of a society that engenders exclusion. Thus, as I suggested, exclusion might not be a real thing, in immediate cultural and material access perhaps it does, but not as part of the structure of the system itself, i.e., the individual is not *excluded* from the system, they are a product of it.

Inclusion and exclusion were adopted by all postmodern studies of identity, and Inclusion became the new flag to be fought for - as Wayne suggested, “change without real change”. In other words, these changes are constrained within the limits of capitalism and do not represent a threat to the structure of the system. Notwithstanding its core contradictions it is to be fought for. If within the limits and contradictions of the capital this is the only possibility - or the closest possibility - some individuals will have to access a flourishing life - meaning access to education, health, cultural expressions, housing, food - then until the whole system changes, perhaps it is what one should fight for. In the case of disabled people, it applies even to the access or opportunity of access to be exploited; that is what inclusion for people with disabilities is fighting for. In that sense, “[b]asic changes must be made in the economic, social, and political structure in order to advance economic solutions that reach beyond capitalism’s instability. The reserve army, itself, must be made a disposable concept.” (RUSSEL, 2019, p. 77).

CHAPTER 2 - FILMS AS SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the connections between film and the concepts approached in Chapter 1. I shall start with a broader reflection of the Marxist concepts of culture and ideology, consider the dialectic relations between base and superstructure, and then focus on more specific aspects of film as a cultural and political manifestation.

Cinema is soaked in the ideological meanings, practices, and symbols of our cultures. Through cinematic techniques, camera lenses capture the apparent simple reflection of reality and then create a poetry of everyday life, standing before us as a pure and unique representation of the world. It is, however, a specific and peculiar configuration of it and is open to interpretations.

That the cinematographic industry was revolutionised repeatedly since the first screenings of motion pictures seems to be a common understanding in the area of Film Studies (NELMES, 2003; PRAMAGGIORE; WALLIS, 2011). From the Lumière brothers and the first special effects of Méliès to the highest-grossing feature films of all time, films have told and retold thousands of stories and attracted audiences of different backgrounds and ages. Despite - or perhaps due to - the ongoing changes in terms of technology and technique, films have stabilised themselves as a complex combination of cultural commodities, sources of entertainment, and artistic manifestations. A Marxist reading of the dialectics of the economic and cultural phenomena revolving around *films* indicate that they are "[…] both base and superstructure in that sense and as the cultural industries have grown in importance, both their economic power and cultural reach have fused together." (WAYNE, 2020, p.16).

As cultural practices, they preserve nuances from the past and participate actively in the process of shaping the future (WILLIAMS, 1983). Either blockbusters or art films, every cinematographic production conveys infinite representations, meanings, and symbols that are ideologically oriented - as we shall see in the analyses of the films proposed. Film as a social, intellectual, political, and cultural practice incorporates multiple meaning-making systems and applies a set of narrative conventions to tell a story (WAYNE, 1998).

For these reasons, we shall first explore the meanings and uses of culture and ideology in Marxist Cultural Theory and consider how forms and contents are shaped, reshaped, and absorbed in the film industry.

Culture and ideology

The complexity of culture as a concept entangles contrasting meanings at different times and places. Beyond its limited representations as a similar word to *art, civilisation, music, poetry,* lies the understanding of culture as a combination of meanings, practices, and symbols that shape our daily lives (WILLIAMS, 1985). In Marxism, such an approach evokes the metaphor of the *base* and the *superstructure*.

In the history of Marxist thought, the metaphor base and superstructure has been analysed, compared, contrasted, criticised, adopted, and rejected by a variety of authors in different areas of study; to mention a few, Voloshinov (1986) approaches it from the perspective of the philosophy of language and the social psychology; Williams (1977; 1980) discusses its uses in the Marxist analysis of culture and literature; Eagleton (1989) sharpens it to literary criticism; Wayne (2003; 2020) brings it to the study of film.

All the authors above have also discussed how the complexity of the metaphor has many times blurred its true meanings and objectives in Marx's thought. When applied from vulgar and mechanical materialisms it produces rather determinist analyses (Wood, 1995). It is nevertheless a fundamental notion to be discussed in any "Marxist theory of culture" (Williams, 1980, p. 31) - or in this case, to the understanding of the relations between disability and film as socio-cultural practices.

The idea of the dialectical relationship of the basis and the superstructure is suggested by Marx in three situations: in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1983), in *The German Ideology* (MARX; ENGELS, 1996), and in *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (2003). It is an indication of the thinker's conception that the *whole* of the productive relationships *affects and is affected* by the legal and political, and religious, aesthetic, and philosophic superstructure, in Williams' words, "[w]hat it primarily expresses is the important sense of a visible and formal 'superstructure 'which might be analysed on its own, but which cannot be understood without seeing that it rests on a 'foundation'." (WILLIAMS, 1977, p. 77). It seems to be clear here why Wayne (2020, p. 16) indicates that film is both base and superstructure at the same time - it comprises all political, aesthetic, philosophic aspects and it is also part of a specific economic system.

My objective here is not to adhere to or deny the concepts, but rather to highlight the importance of understanding how cultural manifestations mediate and are

mediated in a single unity with the material forces that produce, distribute, and surround them. A quote from Wayne's *Marxism goes to the movies* (2020, p. 14) applies perfectly here:

> The distinction between the economic structure of society and the superstructure is for analytical purposes only. No society is really divided into a separate 'base' and 'superstructure' any more than we can really divide material life from consciousness.

Perhaps such a relationship might be more productively examined here in the ideas of culture and mediation (WILLIAMS, 1977; 1980).

When it comes to culture, in a later work, *The Long Revolution* (1992), Williams points out three approaches to the study of culture - *the ideal, the documentary, and the social* - and we shall look at them into more detail in an attempt to define, compare, and contrast them, pondering their advantages and disadvantages.

An *ideal* approach to culture understands it as "as state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values" (WILLIAMS, 1992, p. 41). This perspective attempts to analyse, in a body of work, concepts that may be applied as universal human values, such as: ethics, peace, violence, and so on. For instance, how the works of Dostoevsky have been associated with courage and mercy or how one could be intrigued to question the fundamentals of morality following the thoughts of Ivan Fyodorovich Karamazov in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov.*

The *documentary* category is related to the idea that practices, symbols, and meanings are documented in cultural manifestations. It is usually identified with the works of traditional criticism, "by which the nature of the thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention in which these are active, are described and valued" (WILLIAMS, 1992, p. 41). It is therefore much related to the categorisation used in literary criticism. It can be perceived in how Machado de Assis and George Elliot are considered eminent and influential writers of, respectively, Brazilian and British realism, due to their styles, forms, themes, and plots. Also, how Liev Tolstoi depicts Russian society during the invasions of the Napoleonic army in 1812 or the images created by T. S. Eliot in his poems to represent the transformations undergone by Western society at the dawn of the 20th century.

Williams proposes in the *social* category a method of cultural analysis that accesses the whole of life in a certain time and place and takes into consideration in the analyses the systems and institutions of decision, maintenance, learning, and communication, represented respectively by politics, economics, educational institutions, and by the media and the arts. The totality of the lives of individuals and their relationships in these systems represent

what is called a society and their positions in the process of production in this society will determine their social class.

These three categories have deeply influenced the study of culture, but when studied separated from one another, they present some fundamental and controversial problems. For instance, the fact that the first two are usually associated with a more conservative thought and are inclined to elect the works of white, bourgeoise men as the most important, influential, and as carrying the highest values. Ignoring varieties of time, space, meanings and practices, they tend to name, categorise, and value artistic manifestations according to the so called universal human values. One example of how the study of these approaches may problematic when they are considered in isolation from one another is to be found in Laura Bohannan's *Shakespeare in the Bush* (1966). When visiting a Tiv tribe in Nigeria, Laura is asked to share a story from her people and, to her surprise and bewilderment, they presented a rather distinct interpretation of *Hamlet* after she told them Shakespeare's story of the Prince of Denmark.

The last statement of the chief of the tribe is very clarifying of this:

> "Sometime," concluded the old man, gathering his ragged toga about him, "you must tell us some more stories of your country. We, who are elders, will instruct you in their true meaning, so that when you return to your own land your elders will see that you have not been sitting in the bush, but among those who know things and who have taught you wisdom". (BOHANNAN, 1966, p. 4).

The traditional interpretation of *Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark* was questioned and reinterpreted by a cultural formation that has divergent values from those usually in circulation in the Western. A theory of culture should consider a combination of all three approaches, addressing the importance of social and particular embodiment in a variety of cultural manifestations in relation to macrostructural elements of the capitalist society (WILLIAMS, 1992).

As social creatures, our lives are produced and reproduced in the idiosyncrasies of everyday life - which is shaped by both macro- and micro-structural elements. It is an indication that even our simplest actions tend to be hegemonically, socially, and historically driven. Daily, humans are flooded with signs, symbols, and practices that convey meanings and shape the way we think, and that will be present and reproduced or denied in our every action (MARX; ENGELS, 1996).

From a materialist perspective, the social structure is subjected to material relations of production and distribution. For consciousness is conditioned to the real existence

of men in the economic structure, their material conditions will impose limits on their real existence (MARX, 1990; MARX; ENGELS, 1996; WILLIAMS, 1985). That is:

> […] you start from the activities of production and trading, and increasingly those are seen as the essential purposes of the society, in terms of which other activities must submit to be judged. All forms of human organization (*sic*), from the family and the community to the educational system, must be reshaped in the light of this dominant economic activity. (WILLIAMS, 1992, p. 105).

Marx (1968) establishes the dominant characteristic of the economic system when scrutinising the relations between the hegemony, ideology, and political and social practices. In a Marxist perspective, ideology is not just a mere imposition of rules, laws, and morals and notions that can be simply ignored or cancelled, Williams (1980, p. 38, *my italics*) argues that the hegemonic system in fact "[…] constitutes a sense of *reality* for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of society to move […]". In other words, as many Marxists understand it, the core ideology of capitalism is to be seen, lived, accepted as the only and natural form of social organisation (HELLER, 2016; WAYNE, 2020; WILLIAMS, 1977; 1980; 1989; 1992).

As social and political beings, the core to revealing the practices of men, in their attempt to guarantee their survival and reproduction as both a species and a society, is in the scrutiny of their material activity, for "[…] the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men […]." (MARX; ENGELS, 1996, p. 47). Marx and Engels are indicating that our consciousness embodies the dominant ideologies that forge our society. Ideologies that are unconsciously lived and reproduced and aim to sustain and guarantee the continuity of the dominant system. They are dominant because the ideas, values and practices of a concrete social organisation will be those of the class that exerts material and economic power. In other words, the ruling economic class will be the ruling intellectual and ideological class.

Although powerful, the economic conditions *are not* to be an end in themselves, but they are the base, the starting point, from them the institutions of decision, learning, and communication will come together as a hegemonic unity of social and material reproduction. The totality of our social existence is the essence of hegemony as life organised, lived, reproduced, and reinforced every day (WILLIAMS, 1980). Culture is the central concept that brings all our practices together and represents the "[…] true interaction, between patterns learned and created in the mind and patterns communicated and made active in relationships, conventions, and institutions" (WILLIAMS, 1992, p. 72).

How the subordination to this system affects us will very much be subjected to how individuals relate to and see themselves in the society in which they live. Williams (1992), in contrast to the vulgar duality of just *conformity* and *non-conformity* categories of analysis, pro or against the system, suggests six categories: *member*, *subject* and *servant*, *rebel*, *exile*, and *vagrant.*

A *member* is an active individual that fully lives the principles, signs, symbols, and meanings of that concrete social formation - mostly represented by those in positions of power. *Subjects*, in contrast, are forced to do so, they have no other option but to conform with the social organisation - the working class, either aware or not of their position. *Servants*, very much like subjects, are constrained to social boundaries, but they are led to live a life of illusions, believing that they are closer to the top than to the bottom in the social hierarchy. It is a position usually held by the conservative middle-class in modern capitalism, which tends to mimic the behaviour of the dominant classes and ignore the fact that it is part of a working-class itself.

These are examples that:

> Society will obviously be more stable if alienated individuals accept some conception of themselves which *encourages them to think either that their lives do affirm and fulfil their humanity*, or else that their feelings of frustration and emptiness are due to the finitude of the human condition as such, and not to the transitory system of social relations in which they are entangled. (WOOD, 2004, p. 14, *my italics*).

On the other hand, *rebels*, *exiles*, and *vagrant* are in opposition of society. *Rebels* fight against the status quo and aim to reform and change it. While critics and reformers seem to expect a change inside the current social system, *rebels* seek to change and create a new society. *Exiles* are also in disagreement with society, but they do not want to struggle to change it, they remain in (self-)exile, waiting for a social formation that conforms to their beliefs. *Vagrants*, for their part, see no meaning in life, they do not conform with the meanings and practices of the society in which they live.

In his own words, Williams (1992, p. 92) suggests that:

> […] to the member, society is his own community; the members of other communities may be beyond his recognition or sympathy. To the servant, society is an establishment, in which he finds his place. To the subject society is an imposed system, in which his place is determined. To the rebel, a particular society is a tyranny; the alternative for which he fights is a new and better society. To the exile, society is beyond him, but may change. To the vagrant, society is a name for other people, who are in his way or who can be used. […] these are all forms of active organization (*sic*), of action, and interaction.

The level of subordination varies because the forms of culture in circulation can range around the dominant, the residual, and the emergent (WILLIAMS, 1980). That means to say that not all cultural production will be servant of the dominant ideology, some might, others will carry aspects of a previous dominant structure (for instance, the images of monarchy and religion in current capitalist society), and some may arise in defiance of the status quo. We might even take the example of the understanding of disability in the Western culture to illustrate this.

As an *emergent* political force, the social movements for the characterisation of disability as a socio-historical attribute of the biological impairment seeks to breach out of the disabling ideologies of capitalism and pathologising perspectives that view disability as a personal tragedy and that focus on meritocratic values as a way to overcome barriers that were in fact created by this very same society.

On one hand, the movement might seem to have risen to create "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships" around the disability (WILLIAMS, 1977, p. 123). On the other hand, the response of the system, generating "what Williams calls *novelties*, which are new but already fully integrated into the dominant social order" (WAYNE, 2020, p. 189), still focuses on personal struggle, fight against the odds, and positive thinking. As Stella Young (2014, s.p.) arguments:

> No amount of smiling at a flight of stairs has ever made it turn into a ramp. Never. Smiling at a television screen isn't going to make closed captions appear for people who are deaf. No amount of standing in the middle of a bookshop and radiating a positive attitude is going to turn all those books into braille. It's just not going to happen.

The social changes required to reshape the current cultural practices around the impairment - the disabling phenomena - might begin with artistic expressions that rethink the disability and present themselves as "[o]ppositional political and cultural forces" that aim to "[…] transform the dominant system" (WAYNE, 2020, p. 189). Thus, we will now look at films as socio-cultural practices that, with their own peculiar portrait of social life, might be part of such forces.

Films as cultural practices

In this context, that is in different positions in the structure of society, humans produce and consume artistic manifestations. Through art and language, we tell stories to represent reality. Storytelling in the form of art is present in a variety of social organisations and it is nowadays understood as a universal trait in humanity. Humans tell stories not only to represent the world, but also as means to shape it, reproduce it, and understand it. Narratives rise as a demand for deeper and more comprehensive ways to perceive and portray the world (TURNER, 1999) - Laura Bohannan's experience in *Shakespeare in the bush*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the witty plays of Oscar Wilde or the cruelty of the drought in the Northeast of Brazil in the works of Raquel de Queiroz; Ariano Suassuna, and Graciliano Ramos are exceptional examples of that.

As a representation of life as whole, of our habits, customs, symbols, practices, and meanings, culture produces art that is more than a mirror of reality. It does not seek to only reflect that social concrete organisation, but to be a product of it, born in the core of its social relationships as an artistic representation of the dialectics between the human psyche and the social structures around it - as a mediation between the abstract structures of the system and our cultures, feelings and emotions, materialised in the form of art.

Mediation, as a never-ending meaning-making process, offers a more dynamic, dialectic understanding of the role of art in society (WILLIAMS, 1977; VYGOTSKY; KORNBLUH, 2019; WAYNE; 2020). Never- ending because "Even when a sculpture or a film is 'finished' it can circulate in new contexts, new times and places, and occasion new interpretations which reveal additional facets of the original work." (KORNBLUH, 2019, p. 60) - we shall look deeper into those aspects when discussing the reception of the films proposed.

When it comes to film, its power lies in the image, movement, and representation of everyday life. By capturing and reproducing the image, the voyeur is enraptured in the feeling of reality and a process of reflection that may adhere to or question those same practices and symbols and meanings - a mediation between the ideas that "[…] uphold the ruling class, and [the] ideas [that] critique the ruling class" (KORNBLUH, 2019, p. 57). Films are sociocultural productions and should be considered in accordance with their political and ideological spheres.

In that sense, Wayne (2020, p. 186) indicates that "[f]ilm can play a modest role in helping us with that, by, for example, staging scenarios that explore characters struggling to break with their iterative habits and adjust their consciousness to the real circumstances and

experiences they are having" - that happens to be a rather strong attribute in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern times* (1936) or Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and perhaps also present in the cases of the women portrayed in *The Other Sister* (1999), *Margarita with a Straw* (2014), and *37 seconds* (2020).

If the ruling ideas reproduced socially are those of the ruling material class, then art is a socially and historically constructed element that both reproduce and reshape the ideologies in force in a specific concrete social formation (MARX, 2003; MARX; ENGELS, 1996; WILLIAMS, 1983.). Ideology, whether pro or against, will always find its ways in, so it also depends on both artists and consumers whether to reproduce and reinforce or question and criticise it. In general, it is wisely noted by Wayne (2020, p. 154) "[…] much of the ideological work of film is achieved by negotiating the gaps, absences and lacks which constitute the social and historical experiences of the audience and promising satisfactions that seem to resolve those lacks within terms that do not challenge capitalism". This may be exemplified in the analysis of *inclusion* as a solution to *exclusion*, which is in fact engendered in the core of capitalist relations of production, distribution and consumption, in the social and technical division of labour, and in the social division of classes. The social movement for *inclusion* is one of those "[…] solutions which capitalism can happily live with" (WAYNE, 2020, p. 154).

In fact, when we are analysing and discussing film, "[…] we may as well take the plunge and say that one criterion of a 'good' film is that it explores to some degree of complexity, cultural conflict and cultural contradiction as a dialogic process. *How* this is done of course would always be part of such evaluative judgements as well." (WAYNE, 2020, p. 187). To mention a few examples of how cultural conflicts and contradictions may be represented in different levels complexity, I could name a few of Jim Carrey's films, such as *The Truman Show* (PETER WEIR, 1998), *Fun with Dick and Jane* (DEAN PARISOT, 2005), *Yes Man* (PEYTON REED, 2008), *I Love You Phillip Morris* (JOHN REQUA; GLENN FICARRA, 2009). Despite their limitations in terms of their degree of complexity, all these comedies of the mainstream film industry shed some light on socio-cultural conflicts and contradictions, ranging from the power and influence of the media, social media, financial markets and speculative capital to class-related conflicts, middle-class hypocrisy, and even self-help gurus.

Disability, however, both in the mainstream film industry and in more independent filmmaking, is most of the time a problem solved by simple personal solutions. In Chapter 3, I discuss, with examples, how images - such as how love conquers all and changes

the bitter disabled or how perseverance, charity, and courage are projected as simple problem-solving strategies - scaffold and guide our perceptions and conceptions of disability, the impairment, and the disabled person. As opposed to these, Samira Makhmalbaf's *Two-legged horse* (2008) seems to explore the contradictions revolving around disability and its socio-cultural conflicts with mastery, not only in terms of content but also form, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

"In addition to their obvious economic importance, motion pictures are ideological products and thus are socially and politically significant as well." (WASCO, 2003, p. 224). As a cultural industry, films are part of a complex socio-cultural institution that influences varied areas of our society; as a commodity, they mobilise relations of power and profit, and a wide variety of other commodities that range from petroleum to theme parks, and involve a sophisticated hegemonic system of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception (BEHLIL, 2016; TURNER, 1999; WASKO, 2003; WAYNE, 1998; 2003).

In their use of narrative story-telling conventions, films embed and reproduce sociohistorical ideologies that tend to be those hegemonically established. Those are not clearly exposed in the narrative and, as we shall see, will vary greatly depending not only on a multitude of narrative elements and on "[…] the discourses employed - the images, myths, conventions, and visual styles." (TURNER, 1999, p. 173), but also on their social, political, and ideological purposes. Whether or not these aspects are constrained in Hollywood (as a place), the hegemonic filmmaking system of Hollywood (as an ideology) has roots and influences productions all over the planet, this is a trait I would like to explore now.

Hollywood has lost its quality as a mere location, a place, and it has become a conglomeration of companies in many countries, in a constant movement of shaping and reshaping (BEHLIL, 2016; KING, 2002; WASKO, 2003; WAYNE, 2020). It is "[…] a brand, and it does not matter which country it belongs to as long as it is making a profit." (BEHLIL, 2016, p. 35). Hollywood and global markets have established Hollywood as an intricate multinational system that rules the cinematographic industry. Hence, based on the works of King (2002), Wayne (2003), Wasko (2003) and Behlil (2016), I will approach Hollywood not as place or a country, but as an established ideology-driven system of reproduction of hegemonic capitalist practices, symbols, and meanings.

Literature suggests that US mainstream industry is basically "[…] mass-produced, thus it is not created by public preference but by industrial intentions.". They will be strongly ideologically-capitalist driven and "[…] produced and distributed within specific

industrial parameters that privilege profit over other goals such as artistic merit or public enlightenment." (WASKO, 2003, p. 224).

In *Political Film*, Wayne (2001) indicates that films operate politically in different ways, and in order to analyse disability in cinema I shall take that as a far-reaching statement. He works with three categories of cinema: *first, second,* and *third*. *First cinema* representing mainstream, dominant production, *Second* dealing with more artistic, independent cinema, and *Third*, a cinema that follows a socialist perspective, that seeks emancipation from capital through art.

The works of King (2002; 2005) also suggest independent productions, developed alongside US mainstream industry, but *New* Hollywood does not mean a completely independent form of filmmaking - it does accept some new traits but within the limits of Hollywood. These are usually related to changes in narrative film style, industry, and socio-cultural contexts of production. They have different degrees of relationship with the US filmmaking system, sometimes closer to general blockbuster organisation, still with a very low budget, the *Indiewood,* and other times even further away from the studio system, the *Indies.* They usually differ from big productions mainly due to their low-budget, aesthetic choices, and their approach to socio-cultural and political issues. King (2014, p. 260) argues that despite the general criticism that Indiewood and Indie are dead, these productions are still there, he uses *indie* "[…] in an exclusive sense, to embrace films ranging from very-low and modestly budgeted features to some that have one foot in the camp of Indiewood, as primarily constituted by the realm of the studio speciality divisions, and many that lie in between.".

They seem to be the possibility of criticism in the system, in which some of the nuances of the system are judged, reflected upon, but only corrections in the structure of the system maybe suggested (MÉSZÁROS, 2011). That can be perceived in King's (2005, p. 199) indication that "[i]ndependent cinema is certainly not immune to implication in the reinforcement of dominant ideologies (including patriarchy, capitalism and racism) - [and the politics of ableism, as we shall see], and is far from being a single entity in this as any of the other respects considered so far" - this claim reiterates the arguments posed in the beginning of this section.

I could summarise the approaches above as (1) *dominant Hollywood;* (2) *Indiewood, Independent US productions and art films,* and (3) *third cinema.* From them, in my analyses of disability and class in films, I will look at films in three categories: (1) *US mainstream industry;* (2) *US independent industry, independent international filmmaking, and*

art film (English dominant) - both in Chapter 4*;* (3) and *International filmmaking* - with (3.1) dominant structure and a (3.2) more independent antagonistic structure, in Chapter 5. I have designed these categories considering my understandings of the works of Jowett and Linton (1980), King (2002; 2005; 2009; 2014), and Wasko (2003) and Wayne (2001; 2003; 2020), and my own perceptions of how the ideologies of ableism flow in the cinematographic context in terms of plots, themes, casting, narrative conventions, and approaches to the disabling phenomena (such as work, education, family, friends, love, etc).

I have considered *US mainstream industry* those regarded as characteristic products of Hollywood. The *Indiewood, Independent US productions and art films* are those produced in the US or outside the US, that might have a certain ideological influence of Hollywoodian producers, but which seem to represent an artistic side of that, usually with a rather distinct aesthetic approach and deeper themes and narratives, sometimes use actors and actresses outside the stardom industry (KING, 2002; 2005). The same applies to international filmmaking in English outside the US. I have given two categories to US filmmaking industry, since it seems to be a quintessential representation of capitalist values, practices, symbols, and meanings. In contrast to those, I have also acknowledged films produced outside the US, in other languages rather than English, but which follow dominant practices, symbols, narrative conventions, ideologies, and so on. Lastly, those that are artistic manifestations that rise in defiance of the status quo which I called *antagonistic*.

At first, these categories are not to be used from a hierarchical aesthetic perspective. It is important to stress that they are rather to be examined in ideological terms and in their relations to hegemonic capitalist ideologies, and that is why they are essential to the development of this work. Behind the categories lies Wayne's idea that all films are political, even if they are so in different ways (WAYNE, 2003) and that is how I am approaching film here.

The meanings produced by the understandings of a certain cinematic production will diverge depending on its audiences and their contexts, knowledges, and experiences. Producers will guide the meaning-making process, but they cannot control it (PRAMAGGIORE; WALLIS, 2011). So, the process of understanding a film will incite in audiences all kinds of social practices and meanings that are volatile (TURNER, 1999). Again, they may either uphold or challenge the ideas in circulation and their readings are never limited. Hence, the "study of ideology in film provides an insight into the meaning system of the culture

and into the ways in which such systems are inscribed into all kinds of social practice" (Turner, 1999, p. 177).

When choosing a film, audiences will already apply a multitude of expectations based on previous experiences such as, but not limited to, the plot, the actors and actresses involved, the genre, the director, and the origin of the film (WAYNE, 1998). One example is how audiences expect to see dark images, heavy make-up, Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter, and a bewildering plot in the films directed by Tim Burton.

The story-telling structure designed throughout the years echoes back even to the earliest pieces of literature (ALTMAN, 1999). The recurrent model of telling a story in films follows a very similar format, in which a protagonist struggles with a problem and triggers - or at least suggests - feelings of empathy within the audience (Rowe; Wells, 2003). This system is supplied by sequential series of cause and effect and provokes the hero - the protagonist - to find the equilibrium of the story line that has been disturbed.

Wayne, when analysing ideological value systems, lists six "[…] narrative strategies that have been discussed as ideological strategies" (WAYNE, 2020, p. 139), they are *binary oppositions and their reconciliation, displacement, individualisation, redemption arcs., focalisation,* and *closure.* I would like to explore them a little since they seem to thoroughly represent ideological story-telling strategies mainly in US mainstream and independent industry in films that portray the disability.

Binary oppositions and their reconciliation is the use of characters to represent two opposing ideas, or representations of ideas or groups, that may start in a conflict but that find reconciliation towards the end of the film - we shall see that, for instance, in *The Other Sister* (1999) and *The Shape of Water* (2017), but it can also be perceived in films such as *The Mighty* (1998), *Rain Man* (1989), *Me Before You* (2016) and in the Indian film industry in *Zero* (2018).

Displacement may be a strategy applied in films such as *My Left foot* (1989) *Gaby, a true story* (1987) and again *The Other Sister* (1999), as it "[…] describes how problems can be relocated from one thing which it is difficult to acknowledge or do anything about […] onto something or someone else" (Wayne, 2020, p. 140). In the three cases mentioned, how the social problems and barriers generated around the disability by the system are transferred to charity and to the individual - which leads us to the next category.

Individualisation, as the name suggests, is "[…] how problems and solutions to problems are dealt with at the level of individual protagonists, with their broader implications

or consequences bracketed off from the viewing audience" (Wayne, 2020, p. 140). Examples of this may be fund in Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931), in which he solves the financial problems of the blind girl and even gathers money to send her to Austria to be *cured*.

The cases of Raymond's brother in *Rain Man*, Carla's mother in *The Other Sister*, the protective mother of *37 seconds* (2020), illustrate examples of *redemption narrative arc* - when a character's initial actions or thoughts are portrayed as morally or ethically questionable but who throughout the narrative go through life-changing experiences.

Focalisation is a more complex concept to be analysed in relation to the disability. Focalisation is the point of view of the story, whose life events the reader or viewer is following. According to Wayne (2020, p. 140):

> What makes focalisation potentially ideological is that typically we spend most of our time next to the characters (following characters) who are drawn from the dominant sectors (male, white, middle class, professional, western, [and I would like to add, *able*] or at least working in and for the power-bloc, such as the police).

It is true that, in general, one would argue that the disability is not at all in the dominant sector. However, here the social class discussion of Chapter 1 finds its way in again. Unquestionably, we are not dealing with dominant male, white, and able in *The Other Sister* (1999) but it is the upper-class. The slightly same applies to Raymond (*Rain Man*, 1989) - who, by the way, seems to be a lot richer than Carla.

Wayne moves on to state that:

> Such proximity would be less of a problem if it was not also coupled with strong cues that encourage us to sympathise, identify and feel allegiance with these characters and their moral world-views. So, the real problem is focalisation plus (a more or less) uncritical identification. (WAYNE, 2020, p. 140).

On one hand, I am not sure a film about disability seeks to trigger self-identification feelings in the audience, that is, one might not at all identify with the disabled. It seems to me that they are rather more interested in provoking and unfolding feelings of pity and mercy and charity - and that is particularly true in *I am Sam* (2001), *Rain Man* (1989), *Me before You* (2016) and the Indian *Dhanak - Rainbow* (2015). On the other hand, that does not negate Wayne's claims. In truth, a deeper critical analysis may reveal that those values and moral world-views of the dominant classes are still conveyed there, for those ideas of charity as a trait of the dominant ideologies of bourgeoise have been flowing since the 17th century (Williams, 1985). Amongst others, this is one reason why Werner Herzog's *Even Dwarfs Started Small*

(1970) and Samira Makhmalbaf's *Two-legged horse* (2008), albeit completely different in content and form, are so thought-provoking, so disturbing, painful, and at times sinister - and that is why I left Makhmalbaf's to the end.

Closure "[…] refers to the way films usually try and wrap everything up, so that all the problems which the film has explored seem resolved and all the main goals of the characters we have been invited to identify with, have been achieved." (WAYNE, 2020, p. 141). As evidence of that I might point out *City Lights* (1931) - the blind poor girl undergoes a surgery and now owns a flower shop (blindness equals poor; vision equals possibilities); *The Other Sister* (1999) - a girl with intellectual disability leaves the total institution, goes to school, gets her own apartment, and finds love; *I am Sam* (2001) - against all odds man gets the legal right to raise his daughter; *The shape of water* (2017) - mute working-class woman finds love in the arms of a fish-like mystical creature and turns her into a mermaid.

Another possible way of looking at story-telling in film studies is known as three-act model, it involves (1) the introduction of characters, situations, and goals; (2) the presentation of the conflict that leads to climax; and (3) the resolution (Pramaggiore; Wallis, 2001). Kristin Thompson (1999, p. 28), however, suggests that the narrative structure actually has four parts "the setup, the complicating action, the development, and the climax. A short epilogue usually follows the climax." - which would actually make it the five-act model.

Thompson (1999) argues that there might be more than one turning point in the story, as part of both the *complicating action* and the *development* - which seems to be proved true in the Hollywood narrative productions. The numerous failed attempts to re-establish the order and equilibrium of the story, that are usually treated as just any other part of the story, are given special attention in Thompson's four-(five)-part model. What needs to be clear now is that classical models of story-telling have been adopted and reshaped by the film industry and may serve along with other narrative conventions as agencies of incorporation of dominant and ruling ideas, symbols, practices, ideologies, and meanings.

In summary, we could suggest that traditional narrative practices will follow a line of events that leads the main character (the hero) to the solution of the problem posed or to the reestablishment of the peace that has been disturbed. These events might (1) follow an ever-rising narrative structure until it reaches the climax (the top) - as we may perceive in *Rain Man* (1989) in which Charlie Babbitt finds out that his father passed and that he has a brother with autism that inherited his father's money and Babbitt wants to get half of the money. The narrative structure in this case, follows Charlie's attempts to have access to the money through

his brother. Despite all the extra disturbances in the narrative, it never settles down, it does not give the viewer a break from its main objective. The narrative may also have (2) multiple complicating actions that disturb and re-establish the order, like a rollercoaster (King, 2002). In the case of *The Other Sister* (1999) the constant altercations and make-peace moments with the mother, the being accepted in a school, meeting a guy, starting a relationship might all be considered as these moments of disturbance and re-establishment of the narrative structure.

I have covered three ways of looking at the narrative (WAYNE, 2020; THOMPSON, 1999; KING, 2002) and it is important to point out that they do not seem to deny one another but rather to work as complementary. Alongside the structure of the narrative, other elements will also scaffold the story, such as genres, audiences, stars, and directors.

As I mentioned, genres are also part of this system, they are contract-like structures that establish expectations between films and audiences. They are a complex structure of interwoven traditional codes and visual designs that will prepare audiences for their cinematic experience (TUDOR, 2012; TURNER, 1999; WAYNE, 1998). Altman (1999) approaches them from both semantics and syntax, respectively considering the elements and the organisation of these elements in the film. For instance, a *Western* carries a number of elements to be categorised as such: cowboys, ladies in danger, a town in despair under the menace of a bad cowboy, they will be organised in scenes in the desert, in a specific period of time, and will tell a similar narrative.

A genre might be understood as a body of films that share a set of narrative conventions to tell a story. They usually reveal a lot about context and culture where they are produced, distributed, and consumed. It is unclear if they are a product of commercial, political or audience interest, but their uses seem to embrace all the three (ALTMAN, 1999; TUDOR, 2012).

The elements taken into consideration in a genre are used to connect the formal elements (setting, plot, cast, attitude, tone, purpose) and make the film intelligible, thus, providing “a framework within which the story can be told.” (BUSCOMBE, 2012, p. 16).

Buscombe (2012) begins by questioning the idea of genres in film theory to conclude that genres establish not just a relation between *auteurs* and *their pieces of art*, but they also reproduce a tradition; an expectation on the audience to see a set of narrative and visual conventions on the screen. In general, although “the major defining characteristics of genre [in films] will be visual” one must not ignore other narrative elements that scaffold the genre, such as sound, camera position, plot, and even casting (BUSCOMBE, 2012, p. 20).

Themes and archetypes may also be considered, but "what we need is a way of looking at a genre that can make clear what is distinctive about it and how its outer and inner forms relate" (BUSCOMBE, 2012, p. 20).

Audiences play one imperative role in the filmmaking process; a story cannot truly happen without audiences. For that reason, Buscombe (2012, p. 22) argues that "anyone who is at all concerned with education must be worried at the distance between much of the criticism now written and the way the average audience reacts to a film". It means to say that "[t]he pleasure of genre film spectatorship thus derives more from reaffirmation than from novelty. People go to genre films to participate in events that somehow seem familiar" (Altman, 1999, p. 25).

For the moment, I would like to highlight the importance of understanding and critically looking at genres and how they related to the disability in the dominant filmmaking industry. As a genre, the *disability film* does not exist in the audiences' repertoire, but as an agency of incorporation of capitalist practices, meanings, and symbols revolving around the disability, it does. The representation of the impairment in traditional film narratives "provides a simplistic answer to a socially complex issue in a rarefied world where problematic nuances are erased in favour of obdurate simplicity" (DARKE, 1998, p. 190).

The traditional *disability film* will (1) create a narrative structure that unfolds feelings of pity, mercy, charity, images of one person who overcomes all problems despite being disabled (*The Other Sister*, *I am Sam*); or will (2) cause a sense of uneasiness regarding the conditions, limits, and possibilities for the human body (*Freaks*, *The Elephant Man*); it traditionally (3) concentrates on the impairment as a pathology (*City Lights* and *Charly*) and (4) as a personal tragedy (*My left foot*, *Gaby, a true story*, and *The Shape of Water*).

In fact, "[w]hat is at stake in films that have, superficially, impairment or disability as their central theme is not the impairment or the abnormality but the degree to which it can either define or validate its opposite: normality." (DARKE, 1998, p. 187). Thus, films that are built around a main character with an impairment traditionally reproduce images of normality, or what Darke calls a *normality drama* - which is a genre "[…] that specifically uses abnormal - impaired - characters to deal with a perceived threat to the dominant social hegemony of normality." (DARKE, p. 184). It "revolves, narratively speaking around a central or key character with an impairment and their experience, and that of those around them, of that impairment." (DARKE, p. 185).

Genres may be also linked to a certain human figure, known as a star. A *star* is an actress or an actor that has achieved a high level of recognition in mainstream cinema, their performances are categorised as *impersonation, personification,* and *technical acting* (KING, 2002; WASCO, 2003; PRAMAGGIORE AND WALLIS, 2011).

Impersonation is the ability of the actor to disappear in the character, a skill recognised in many award-winning actors and actresses. They may be invited to play any character and their presence in the film is already a suggestion of economic success. Meryl Streep, Sean Penn (*I am Sam*), Robert De Niro, and Juliane Moore are known to be impersonating actors. *Personification*, on the other hand, is the creation of a persona, which will be associated with a specific genre, such as the masculine figures of George Clooney and Clint Eastwood and the images of western spaghetti of Terence Hill and Bud Spencer. In what concerns *technical acting,* we are dealing with the mastering of external elements to build characters (accents, physical traits), many times seen in Jim Carrey's performances.

Further, the image of a star is also sold as a commodity, something to either *have* (a sexual appeal) or *to be* (as symbols of beauty, glamour, and/or status). The *Avengers* franchise has certainly benefited from the sexual masculine images that revolve around Chris Hemsworth as Thor and Chris Evans as Capitan American. While many blockbusters have attracted mostly young male audiences (KING, 2002), they managed to create new symbols of masculinity that would lure female audiences to the cinema theatres. The stardom industry and the images of representation they project will play a fundamental role in my considerations below, concerning the ideological contrasts between the abled and the disabled.

When it comes to the normality drama a star plays a controversial role because it is expected of them to be reminiscent of the traits of that character. The first problem relates to the fact that non-disabled actors are given roles of people with disabilities. "It is a fallacy to argue that there is a 'true' way in which certain images can represent impairment and disability; apart from the fact that there is no universally 'true 'way anything can be represented […]" (DARKE, p. 183).

The practice ignores that there are actors and actresses that could play these roles, as proven by the performances of Mei Kayama in *37 seconds* and Marlee Matlin *in Children of a Lesser God*, the various characters played by Jamie Brewer in the TV series *American Horror Story*, and RJ Mitte's character in *Breaking Bad*, to mention a few.

In contrast with the authentical performance of disabled actors and actresses, the non-disabled actor must convince the audiences that it is disabled enough, yet never too

disabled in the case of intellectual disability (CALLUS, 2019). Which leads us to the second problem. In Hollywood, if one star wants to win the Oscar, one should not perform the intellectual disability to its full (CALLUS, 2019). The examples in Anne-Marie Callus's article are *Rain Man* (Dustin Hoffman, Best Actor 1988) and *Forrest Gump* (Tom Hanks, Best Actor 1994) in contrast to Sean Penn's *Sam*, that is considered to be a more accurate portrait of a person with intellectual disability. Another example, to add to those indicated by Callus, is *Charly* (Cliff Robertson, Best Actor 1968) - a man with intellectual disability that is temporally cured, portrayed in a convincing but not too realist way - in contrast to John Hurt who was nominated but did not win for his role as John Merrick in David Lynch's *The Elephant Man*.

Directors will also, in many ways, attract audiences to see a film. In mainstream productions, they are given more or less power and independence depending on the relations between the expenses and profits of their films. The power of influence held by James Cameron, Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, and Woody Allen varies greatly and it thus affects their independence in productions. They might also be tied to an area of filmmaking that is more independent in US industry, like Jim Jarmusch, Alejandro González Iñárritu or even Guillermo Del Toro. Other directors, in contrast, may be of interest of very specific audiences due to the art-status they might have, like Mohsen and Samira Makhmalbaf from Iran, Ingmar Bergman from Sweden, Werner Herzog from Germany, Federico Fellini from Italy, and Jean-Luc Godard from France. In both cases, one expects that when these art-house directors or independent directors produce a film with images of the disability they will consider going beyond the sphere of everyday life and common thought.

That seems to be true in the cases of Samira Makhmalbaf's *Two-legged horse* and Herzog's *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970), up to a certain extent in Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) - Rinko Kikuchi plays a girl with hearing impairment -, and *perhaps* not so true, in Del Toro's controversial *The Shape of Water* - as we shall see in Chapter 4.

Our perceptions of the images of disability are greatly dependant on the various forms taken by the media - newspapers, television, literature, films, and so on. Images matter because they project and reveal to their audience truths about the human condition.

I want to consider two of these perceptions in cinematic representations - the *types* and the *stereotypes* - since they will be fundamental to my further discussions of disability and cinema. In summary, we could say that types are ideological representations of *ideas and phenomena* whereas stereotypes are ideological representations of *individuals or groups of individuals* (LACEY, 2009).

Both types and stereotypes are embedded and shaped based on meanings and symbols of everyday life. However, *types* are the embodiment of ideas in the screen - that is, of the good, the evil, the needs-to-be-saved, friendship, family, and so forth - and stereotypes are the general personifications of prejudice, conditioned by dominant ideologies. “The media, in its various forms, is one of the main sources of information and it is very likely that it is a crucial influence in stereotyping.” (LACEY, 2009, p. 155).

Insofar as the mainstream media conveys ideas and representations of the world and of society, and it is in general ruled by white, rich, middle-aged men, some social groups might not feel (fairly) represented in it, a concept named *under-representation* (LACEY, 2009). A US mainstream production is likely to work with images that revolve around white, rich or middle-class, men and heterosexual sex and/or romance led by a star (WAYNE, 2020).

The dialectic process of making meaning out of a film - or a book, or a painting - is for the majority of people an unconscious one. Nevertheless, it does not mean that it is a passive procedure. Of course, more trained audiences will recognise aesthetic patterns and use them, as well as other cultural elements, to form a critical opinion of a certain artistic expression. In general, however, aesthetic practices are not clearly identified, so meaning is many times vastly a product of previous experiences triggered when being in contact with that cultural manifestation.

A film, in this case, conveys certain ideological meanings, practices, and symbols within its own cultural context, according to the objectives it has set for itself. They will be processed by audiences in countless ways, in consonance to their own social practices and will respond to them, either as they were originally intended or not. In doing so, *they* will influence and be influenced by it, it is an inevitable two-way road.

So, it is on these images of representation of disability that I will focus now on Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3 - DISABILITY AND REPRESENTATION

Introduction

The guiding-question of this chapter is "what are the images of representation that have been usually conveyed when portraying disability and what do the analyses of those images reveal about them?". I have designed this chapter in two sections. First, I refer to works that have analysed disabling imagery in the area of Disability Studies and relate them to the area of Film Studies. My main focuses are the works of Kriegel (1987), Longmore (1987), and Barnes (1992), though they will be related to other relevant studies throughout the analysis. Next, I would like to explore the history of disability in cinema, based on previous academic works and on my own research to present films that have portrayed disabled characters throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive overview of disability films, I will discuss a select sample of films that help me illustrate the issues I am approaching.

PART I - (Disabling) Images of representation

In this section, I would like to refer to key academic works that have scrutinised the images of representation of the disabled body or mind in works of literature and cinema. I have decided to highlight the works of Kriegel, Longmore, and Barnes because they appear to have been able to capture the quintessential images of disability in cultural practices and expressions and this is what I would like to discuss first. In the same light, relevant academic productions will be given special attention during this chapter.

In spite of their key academic differences in terms of nomenclature and number of images identified, their ideas seem to mingle, i.e., one image in Kriegel or Longmore may represent two or more images in Barnes, for he seems to be a lot more specific. For instance, Kriegel's *demonic cripple* is Longmore's *disability and criminality* - sometimes even *disability and adjustments* - and Barnes's *The Disabled Person as an Object of Violence, The Disabled Person as Sinister and Evil, The Disabled Person as Atmosphere or Curio* (Table 1). Due to these resemblances, I will examine them all together.

Table 1 - Images of representation of the disability in the works of Kriegel (1987), Longmore (1987) and Barnes (1992)

Author	Images
Kriegel (1987)	Demonic cripple Charity cripple Realistic cripple Survivor cripple
Longmore (1987)	Disability and Criminality Disability and Adjustments Disability and Sexuality
Barnes (1992)	The Disabled Person as Pitiable and Pathetic The Disabled Person as an Object of Violence The Disabled Person as Sinister and Evil The Disabled Person as Atmosphere or Curio The Disabled Person as Super Cripple The Disabled Person as an Object of Ridicule The Disabled Person as Their Own Worst and Only Enemy The Disabled Person as Burden The Disabled Person as Sexually Abnormal The Disabled Person as Incapable of Participating Fully in Community Life The Disabled Person as Normal

Source: designed by the author based on the works of Kriegel (1987), Longmore (1987), and Barnes (1992).

The previous table summarises the images identified by Leonard Kriegel (1987) in literature and by Paul K. Longmore (1987) in television and motion pictures in *Images of the disabled, disabling images* - a book, organised by Alan Gartner and Tom Joe, which attempts to discuss disabling images in everyday life. Additionally, the work of Colin Barnes (1992) arguably is viewed to be a thorough analysis of disabling imagery - no doubt a work that is a prerequisite for anyone interested in the topic. Alongside these, several other works have also explored the representation of disability in their analyses[14]. With that being said, many scholars have been actively working on these images demonstrates the ongoing interest of the academy in highlighting that images matter and that they support our conceptions of the world we live in and, in the case of disability, they have an impact on our notions of belonging and on seeing the human that lies beyond the discourses surrounding those images. Kriegel (1987), analysing literature, identifies four major images of the *cripple* which he defines as "[…] the creature who has been deprived of his ability to create a self" (KRIEGEL, 1987, p. 33). Those

[14] To mention a few, Kent (1987), Klobas (1988), Morris (1991), Evans (1992), Hevey (1992), Cumberbatch and Negrine (1992), Darke (1994; 1998), Norden (1995), Garland and Thompson (1996; 1997), Ellis (2005), Chemers (2007), Markotić (2008; 2012), Benshoff and Griffin (2009), Orestano (2016), Diffrient (2017), Kurnia (2017), Callus (2019).

images project a certain social representation which will then be used by the viewer as a reference. In addition to the literary examples given in the text, I have also indicated cinematic and television examples which I will further explore (Table 2).

Table 2 - Images of representation of the cripple in Kriegel (1987) examples from the text and further examples

Image	Representation	Examples in the text	Cinematic / Television examples
Demonic cripple	Evilness; focus on the impairment; grumpiness.	Shakespeare's Richard III; Melville's Ahab	Ephialtes in *300* (2007); Hades in *Clash of Titans* (2010); Addie in *American Horror Story* (2011).
Charity cripple	The victim; needs salvation.	Melville's Black Guineau; Dickens's Tiny Tim	Christy Brown in *My Left Foot* (1989); Gaby in *Gaby, a true story* (1987); Radio in *Radio* (2003).
Realistic cripple	The impairment is just part of their lives	Tennessee Williams's Laura; Howells's Berthold Lindau	Chieko Wataya in *Babel* (2006); David in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994) Nan in *American Horror Story* (2013); Walter White Jr. in *Breaking Bad* (2008).
Survivor cripple	Manages to fight against the misfortune that has befallen upon them and survive	Saul Bellow's William Einhorn	Brad Cohen in Front of the Class (2008); Phillipe in *The Intouchables* (2011); Auggie Pullman in *Wonder* (2017); Phillip in *The Upside* (2017).

Source: designed by the author based on the work of Kriegel (1987)

The demonic cripple is the representation of evil, the idea that disability produces a feeling of rage, of vengeance against those in the world of the normals, that is, they "[…] nurture and perpetuate the unfounded belief that appearance is inextricably linked to a person's moral character and value." (BARNES, 1992, p. 8). Melville's Ahab projects his hatred on the whale, but, in fact, it was engendered in his feeling of insufficiency in a world that values physical and intellectual perfection. In cinematic representations, I may point towards Ephialtes and Hades, who were portrayed as disabled and evil in their representations of the history and myths of Greek civilisation.

300 (Zack Snyder, 2007) is a compendium of explicit images, techniques and ideas from other (much better) films. In addition, it is a laughable and unintelligent

representation of the Greeks and an ignorant representation of the body. In this case, not only the disabled body, but also any other body which is not 1.90 meter tall, muscular, steroid-built, white, bearded, and wearing jockstraps. The contrast to all these is Ephialtes, who is brought to the audience as a hunchbacked and deformed man. He is the one who escaped death as a new-born and returned home (to Sparta) to fight alongside his equals. Little did he know that the Spartans were not his equals at all, they seek, inhale, and exhale perfection, strength, and beauty, whereas he is the embodiment of imperfection, weakness, and ugliness. In a vengeful act, he becomes the traitor. He is not only portrayed as the evil, the one who threatens the world of perfection of the normals, but also helps to create the atmosphere and set the tone of movie. The use of this "[…] 'overly attractive' models perpetuate the cultural obsession with physical perfection and the 'body beautiful'" (BARNES, 1992, p. 5), a Platonic model followed by Western civilisation in search for perfection (MARKS, 1999)

Michael Chemers (2007, n.p.), in his review of *300*, indicates that:

> This is not mere ableism: this is anti-disability. There is nothing in Herodotus to indicate that Ephialtes exhibited any deformities nor disabilities, nor that he was a Spartan, so the entire Ephialtes subplot in *300* can have only one purpose: to explicitly justify the practice of murdering inferior babies, who have no role to play in a democracy that must fight to stay alive, and in any event they will only grow up to betray us. The stripped-down democracy that the film advocates thus associates disability with everything else it considers "weakness"; mysticism, tyranny, sexual deviance of all sorts, effeminacy, and, well, being foreign.

If there was nothing in Herodotus that indicated that Ephialtes was disabled, perhaps the same may be said about Hades. Certainly not even close to being the best of Ralph Fiennes's characters, in *Clash of Titans* (LOUIS LETERRIER, 2010). Hades is, for some unknown reason, depicted as a hobbler with a weak voice, who also threatens to destroy the world of the perfect - in this case not humanity alone, but mainly his brother, Zeus (Liam Neeson) and the gods of Olympus, the representation of perfection.

These two films may also be used as examples of the disabled person as an *Object of Violence*, as *Sinister and Evil*, and to set an *Atmosphere or Curio* in the study conducted by Barnes (1992). Even if historical facts indicate that the Greeks, and specially the Spartans, were indeed sadistic, merciless eugenicists (BARNES, 1992; MARKS, 1999; CHEMERS, 2007), which is already a portrait of the disabled as an object of violence, the idea of depicting a disabled person as an opposing force, only reinforces negative stereotypes and associates disability with evilness and revenge.

The image of the disabled body is frequently used to embody the foe, as if the impairment triggered in the person a feeling of destruction, of hatred for humanity and the desire to eliminate the normals. Longmore (1987, p. 67) approaches the idea of *Disability and Criminality* indicating that "[…] disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their "fate"; disabled people resent the nondisabled and would, if they could, destroy them.". Further examples that would endorse our arguments are Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, Victor Von Doom in *The Fantastic Four*, Bane, the Joker and Two-face in *Batman*, and even Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* film series. Please note that the analysis goes beyond what would usually be called a disability, I am here referring to images of deformed characters and attempting to highlight how and why they matter - the association of the deformed body to evilness triggers its counterpart, that is, the socially constructed understanding that to be beautiful means to be good and pure of heart. Additionally, these images tend to promote the idea that the only possible solution to the *problem* of disability is death, as indicated by all of the cases of the evil figures above, and also in the stories of so-called victims of disability, such as Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* (1992) or Will Traynor in *Me Before You* (2016), as we shall see with more detail below.

On television, one example of how the disabled person may be used to create a mysterious or thrilling atmosphere is the case of Addie (Jamie Brewer) in the TV series *American Horror Story*. The establishing shot of the first scene of the first episode of season one portrays Adelaide, a child with Down syndrome, in front of an abandoned hunted house. As the camera cuts back and forth from close-ups of the details of the house to Addie, the audience is introduced to two boys who walk towards the house. When she sees them, Addie warns them several times: "you're gonna regret it, you're gonna regret it, you're gonna regret it" - her voice fades and is blended with the background creeping sounds.

As the story develops, Addie is shown as one of the only two people the ghosts actually allow in the house - the other one being her mother, Constance (Jessica Lange). The fact that grown-up Addie is safe from the evilness that lives in the house reproduces the idea that she is an object that deserves pity or a source of that evil herself - either way a reproduction of stereotypical images of disability. Furthermore, her connection to the house assigns her "[…] superhuman almost magical abilities." (BARNES, 1992, p. 8) - The Disabled Person as Super Cripple.

Barnes's (1992) example of this category is Daniel Day-Lewis's Christy Brown in *My left foot* (1989). In contrast to Addie, who is played by an actress *with* Down

syndrome, opening up the doors of the career to disabled professionals, Brown was interpreted by a non-disabled actor. The film depicts the life of the Irish poet, painter, and writer Christy Brown as he "[…] overcomes both impairment and the poverty of working-class life in Dublin in the 1930's […]" (BARNES, 1992, p. 8). Furthermore, he is not only a super cripple, but also a charity cripple. In Kriegel's analysis, the charity cripple is "[…] intended to draw out the charitable impulses of a middle-class audience. They enthral because they relieve both guilt and the need to look directly at the other." (KRIEGEL, 1987, p. 36). Both Christy and Gaby (Rachel Chagall in *Gaby, a true story*), for instance, strongly portray "[…] disabled people's achievements [as] largely dependent on the benevolence of others." (BARNES, 1992, p. 9). One may argue that they are indeed dependant, and I am not sure I would disagree with that at first, my argument against these representations lies on the practices that are adopted to do so, in other words, *how* they are done.

Another real-story-based example is *Radio* (MICHAEL TOLLIN, 2004). James Robert "Radio" Kennedy (Cuba Gooding Jr.) is a man who pushes a supermarket trolley around the American football field of a school. The coach of the team, Harold Jones (Ed Harris), realises that the man seems to be interested in what is happening in the field and, with time, gains his trust and brings him to be part of the school staff, helping him perform his tasks as coach. Despite the difficulties faced, they manage to guarantee Radio a place in the team. On one hand, Radio does get a new meaning for his life, which was previously summarised to walking around the town pushing the trolley. On the other hand, his image is then associated to that of a team mascot.

Christy, Gaby, and Radio, all depend on the benevolence of others. There is, however, a contrast in their stories, Christy and Radio come from poor working-class environments, whereas Gaby is part of a rich Jewish family who lives in Mexico. William Traynor (Sam Claflin) in *Me Before You* (THEA SHARROCK, 2016) is also a representative of this contrast. We shall look at *Me before you* into more detail in chapter 4, but for now the class contrasts, in terms of the charity cripple category, may be summarise as follows. Christy and Radio are from a poor working-class family; hence, their dependence relies upon charity and the benevolence of others; Will comes from a billionaire family, he buys one's time to look after him - and so does Gaby.

To Kriegel (1987) the images built around the charity cripple are similar to those used by philanthropy today when using disabled children as stars of a *freak show* to attract money. The most important aspect is that they do not threaten the world of the normals, they

are in fact used to "[…] to support the grandiosity of non-disabled people, who speak 'for' disabled people and present disabled people in demeaning ways." (MARKS, 1999, pp. 163-164). In contrast to the demonic, they may trigger feelings of pity, but they are never the source of destruction. In a Christian world, they are the perfect way to check the box of charity and piety in the checklist to heaven.

The stories and films mentioned reproduce the stereotype of disability as a tragedy in life, as something to be overcome by the individual and not as a socio-historical element that requires the whole structure of society to change. They tend to reinforce meritocratic and individualistic ideals, promoting images of struggle, fight, and victory of a few selected individuals, and ignoring the lives and everyday experiences of ordinary people. In case one does not succeed, perhaps life is not worth living in a disabled body, as *The Elephant Man* (David Lynch, 1980) and *Me Before You* (2017) seem to suggest.

There have been also examples of images that represent disability as an ordinary and regular part of a person's life. Regarding the *Realistic Cripple*, Leonard Kriegel (1987, p. 37) points out that the impairment is usually portrayed as simply being there and the story does not revolve around it, in his words:

> […] Society cannot view him as the object of its fear or the object of its charity. It will not turn from him in disgust and bewilderment, for he is neither approved nor condemned. If he possesses a centre it is not a centre then can be defined in terms of his wound. The fact that he is crippled is never allowed to be the chief element in his fate.

One of the examples I mentioned in Chapter 2 was the case of David (DAVID BOWER), Charle's brother in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (MIKE NEWELL, 1994). There are a couple of interesting facts about David's role in this film. First, David Bower is himself deaf, so, like Marlee Matlin in *Children of a Lesser God* (1986) and Jamie Brewer in *American Horror Story*, we could say that he *simply* acts. In other words, in contrast to the roles of Dustin Hoffman (*Rain Man*), Cuba Gooding Jr. (*Radio*), Sean Penn (*I am Sam*), Kalki Koechlin (*Margarita with a Straw*) and so many others, they do not act *more* or *less* disabled, they act, and their impairment is simply there.

Secondly, it is intriguing to note that David's inclusion in the *gang*, formed by Charles's friends, is at the same time an expression of exclusion. It is not just in one scene that we may perceive how everyone is talking, laughing, telling jokes and teasing each other, while David is also there, sometimes at the corner of the scene, in the background, and other times curiously laughing at their jokes even if nobody translates them to sign language. David

is an example of what Martin Norden (1995) calls *Cinema of Isolation* - when disabled characters appear in the screen they are usually isolated by cinematographic techniques, such as "[…] framing, editing, lighting, set design elements (e.g., fences, windows, staircase, banisters) - to suggest a physical or symbolic separation of disabled characters from the rest of society." (NORDEN, 1995, p. 6).

So, it is important to represent disability beyond the curse and the individual tragedy. Disability must be understood as a characteristic to be socially accommodated, in David's case with sign language, and when it is accommodated, mediated by tools, signs, and symbols, it does not prevent an individual from chasing a flourishing life - pursuing a career, finding a job and a partner, having friends, going out, going to the movies and performing so many other simple and ordinary everyday activities.

In the same manner, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) presents the teenager Chieko (Rinko Kikuchi, nominated for an Oscar for *Best Supporting Actress*). In a turmoil of emotions that range from her mother's recent suicidal death to her flourishing sexuality, Rinko manages to deliver to the audience a character that seems to harbour many of the conflicts of any teenage girl - sometimes enhanced by the conditions and limitations imposed by her impairment - in fact, her problems were portrayed "[..] as it portrayed the rest of humanity. [Her problems] were neither singular nor symbolic. Rather, they were viewed as human problems. And if there were solutions available, they were human solutions." (KRIEGEL, p. 37). Even so, perhaps, one the most disappointing aspects of *Babel* to whoever is interested in the representations of disability in films is, albeit her excellent performance, the fact that a non-disabled actress was casted for the role.

Iñárritu apparently occupies that niche in film industry between Hollywood, art, and independent cinema. His productions (*Birdman*, 2014; *The Revenant*, 2015; *Amores Perros*, 2001) have attracted the attention of both the ordinary public, the critics, and various cinema-related professionals, and have either won or been nominated to many awards (*Oscar, BAFTA, Golden Globe, Leone d'Oro*). So, it should be expected from a director that occupies a certain *art-like* status in the eyes of audiences to cast a deaf actress for the role of a deaf character. However, despite the original idea, Kikuchi, after one year auditioning for the role, was chosen due to her *convincing* performance as disabled and her ability to use sign language (O'NEILL, 2007; SHOJI, 2007; TIME, 2007). Their interviews make me wonder if it is possible that amongst the more than 1,000 candidates there was not a single deaf actress who could perform the disabled in a convincing and satisfactory way.

I do not think, and many seem to adhere to the same position, that in the 21st century it is still acceptable to have a non-disabled actor/actress in the role of a disabled character (Marks, 1999). If we turn to Barnes (1992, p. 17), he indicates that "[…] As it is no longer acceptable for white actors to play black people or men to play women, it should also be unacceptable for non-disabled actors to play disabled characters." It is a recurrent element, and it must be questioned.

That many actors and actresses with different disabilities have been casted to many different roles - the already mentioned, Marlee Matlin, David Bower, Jamie Brewer, R.J. Mitte, and to indicate others, Lauren Potter (*Glee*), Katie Leclerc (*Veronica Mars, The Big Bang Theory*), Pascal Duquenne (*Le Huitième Jour,* 1996), Russell Harvard (*There Will Be Blood,* 2017) - only seems to highlight and reinforce the argument that, despite their acclaimed performances, it is offensive to have Dustin Hoffman, Daniel Day-Lewis, Sean Penn, Sam Claflin, Rinko Kikuchi and others in the roles of disabled characters. In fact, between the first to win, Cliff Robertson for the role of Charly Gordon in 1968 (Ralph Nelson, *Charly*, 1968) and the last one, Eddie Redmayne for Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything* (JAMES MARSH, 2014), five other actors won the Oscar for Best Actor in roles of disabled characters and other two were nominated - let alone the other dozens that do not get to the festivals.

Before we discuss the last of Kriegel's categories - The Survivor Cripple - I would like to go back to Kikuchi's Chieko to approach one of the most recurrent taboos in stereotypical representations of disability - *Disability and Sexuality*.

Sex is itself many times a delicate subject, but when it comes to disability, the characters are usually portrayed as asexual or sexual perverts. Let us take Quasimodo as an example. In *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* he "[…] rescues and tenderly cares for a woman with whom he has obviously fallen in love. But there is always an undertone of sexual tension, or sexual danger. We are never quite sure what he might do to her." (LONGMORE, 1987, p. 72). In the Disney animation (1996), there is a certain tone of romance that, in the end, is redirected towards friendship and Esmeralda falls for the blond, tall, and handsome Capitaine Phœbus de Châteaupers.

Chieko, in *Babel*, on the other hand, apparently depicts a teenage girl with sexual interests that are not directly influenced by the fact that she is deaf. The same applies to Gaby (*Gaby, a true story*, 1987), Carla (*The Other Sister,* 1999), Addie and Nan (both interpreted by Jamie Brewer in *American Horror Story,* 2011/2013), Laila (*Margarita with a Straw*, 2014), and Yuma (*37 seconds,* 2020). They are portrayed as women with sexual desires

and the fact that they have a disability, albeit at times a limitation in terms of experiences, is not a reason to depict them as sexual perverts or asexual. Male examples would be Sam (*I am Sam*, Jessie Nelson, 2002), who even has a daughter with a prostitute, George in *Le Huitième Jour* (JACO VAN DORMAEL, 1996), and Eddie Redmayne's Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything* (JAMES MARSH, 2014).

Two contrasts, in terms of sexual perversion and completely erased sexuality, are respectively, Ephialtes and Lennie. Ephialtes is not only portrayed as a disabled traitor and source of menace, as we have discussed, but also as a sexual degenerate; while Lennie, along with Radio, seems to lack any kind of sexual desire.

Barnes (1992, p. 12) summarises his analysis of the *Disabled Person as Sexually Abnormal* stating that:

> The message is clear; disabled people are sexually dead and therefore their lives are not worth living. Apart from the obvious dangers this is inaccurate. While some impairments may inhibit 'normal' sexual intercourse sexual behaviour is not confined to specific forms of physical activity. This is a point only now being appreciated due to the sex education programme to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS. Indeed, this stereotype says more about the able- bodied world's ignorance of sex than it does about its knowledge of disability.

We are going to investigate this relationship a little bit deeper when we discuss the films in Chapters 4 and 5, for now I would just like to reinforce the importance of the depiction of the disabled persons as having sexual interests as any other human; it highlights their humanity and is an aid against images of the disabled as evil or as an eternal asexual child. The disabled person portrayed as having natural sexual and romantic interests is indeed a step taken towards a more democratic and respectful representation.

The last of Kriegel's categories "[…] is the man who endures and, in his endurance, discovers survival as a cause in itself […]. His endurance is attractive, both to himself and to the audience, for it is constructed around his understanding of the limitations it has imposed on him." (KRIEGEL, 1987, p. 38). The *survivor cripple* is the counterpart of the disabled person as a pitiable and pathetic, as an object of pity, it is the representation of meritocratic values - the one who fights against all odds and thrives.

Not only was this category the last one in Kriegel's text, but I also purposefully left it to last. Mainly because, as my analysis aims to demonstrate in Chapters 4

and 5, the connection between class conditions and the idea of a (disabled)[15] survivor is very much connected because meritocratic ideals seem to be reproduced in the image of the survivor, both in the lower and middle classes, as I will explore further in the next chapters. Furthermore, the image of the disabled person has been used as a motivational strategy, to trigger feelings of determination, and has been associated with struggle and the power to overcome difficulties - it usually comes with the question "What is your excuse?" - as an exercise, search this question on the images section of your internet browser.

In the case of the survivor, it is more common to have real-life based stories as they may imprint more credibility and cause more effect on the audiences. The Survivor Cripple makes the impairment a tragedy and overcoming it the objective. The use of disability in motivational campaigns and films projects the disabled person as an object of ridicule and as their own worst and only enemy - "if they wanted, they could.". I could refer again to the biographical films based on the lives of Christy Brown, Gabriela Brimmer, and Stephen Hawking, as examples used towards this objective, along with the fictional *The Other Sister*, *The Shape of Water*, and *I am Sam*. Besides these examples, we could also mention *The Intouchables* (OLIVIER NAKACE; ÉRIC TOLEDANO, 2011) - and its Hollywoodian version *The Upside* (NEIL BURGER, 2017), *Front of the Class* (PETER WERNER, 2008), and *Wonder* (STEPHEN CHBOSKY, 2017).

The discussion is reminiscent to a term coined by activist and comedian, Stella Young. Stella advocated that the use of disability as a tragedy to be overcome or a disadvantage foisted upon the individual to inspire non-disabled people is a social phenomenon called *inspiration porn*. Since she coined the concept, it has been widely spread amongst scholars and activists in the disabilities studies area around the world (GRUE, 2016; MCSKILL, 2016).

In the same way pornography uses the body, the naked body, and explicit sexual intercourse, the film industry and the advertising media project the disabled body as product to sell inspirational and motivational meritocratic discourses. Pornography sells sex and profits from the idea that (1) the audiences see themselves in the place of actors and (2) that it brings them pleasure and satisfaction. The same may be applied to inspiration porn, in the sense that it sells the disability as a disgrace that has befallen upon the person but that it may

[15] I used the last disabled in brackets because the argument seems to apply to both disabled and non-disabled characters.

be overcome, so (1) used as model of perseverance and (2) bringing moments of motivational satisfaction.

These images are also connected to Longmore's *Disability and Adjustment* (LONGMORE, 1987, p. 70). A representation of the disabled person as a source of bitterness, someone no one wants to be around, except those who have no other option but to do so. In a way, they also reflect the disabled person as *Their Own Worst and Only Enemy* and as *Burden*, categories created by Barnes (1992).

Longmore (1987, p. 70) indicates that "[…] The stories climax in a confrontation scene in which a nondisabled (*sic*) character gives the disabled individual an emotional 'slap in the face' and tells him or her to stop feeling sorry for themselves" - a trait of the already mentioned *My Left Foot, Gaby, a true story, Wonder*, and also, *Scent of a Woman* (Martin Brest,1993). As their own worst and only enemies, it is their own responsibility to stand-up for themselves and thrive. Other examples, according to Barnes (1992, pp. 10-11), are "Both *Coming Home* and *Born on the Fourth of July* [that] are essentially anti-war films which use disability as a metaphor for dependence and vulnerability.". In both cases, the two main male characters have their masculinities affected by disability and undergo life-changing sexual experiences. Disability also seems to be the disgrace in the case of the blind girl in Chaplin's *City Lights.* After being cured by a European doctor, she manages to open her own shop and be a successful entrepreneur.

At the same time, they might represent a burden to fellow characters - as appears to be the case of Christy, Gaby, Radio, and Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx in *The Soloist,* JOE WRIGHT, 2009). In Gaby's, Nathaniel's and Radio's cases, the carers or non-disabled people who come to *rescue* them arguably appear to be driven by a divine force and Christian feeling of self-sacrifice. I am not denying that certain disabilities may indeed require higher or lower levels of support, but this portrait should not indicate a sense of martyrdom by the side of the non-disabled who is offering support. Yuma's case in Hikari's *37 seconds* demonstrates, as we shall see in Chapter 5, that due to the nature of her disability, she does benefit from the assistance of non-disabled people but that should not prevent her or the carer from living a thorough a life. Her image, as a working woman, also contrasts the recurrent image of the disabled as incapable of participating fully in community life, the last image of representation we are going to analyse here.

When depicted as a burden, disabled people are usually also represented as unemployed, so they are fully dependent upon a non-disabled. They may also commonly be

found performing jobs of lower social status and rarely seen in jobs such as Yuma's or Aafia Yusufzai Bhinder's, who is a scientist with cerebral palsy working at a fictionalised depiction of NASA, in the Bollywoodian film *Zero* (AANAND L. RAI, 2018).

This category is particularly important here since my main interest is to bring these images closer to an analysis of class condition and disability. So, going back to our discussion of the first chapter, when we are dealing with the disability in the working class, we may be surprised at how often the images reinforce a perspective of ableism and focus on the impairment as a counterpart to the ideology of competence.

These images of representation designed by the Kriegel, Longmore, and Barnes are part of traditional approaches to the disabled person in literature, cinema, and television. I have here provided further modern examples of how these images are still in circulation, however, now I wish to look to the past to guide my reader in the process of understanding how these images were built in the history of cinema and how they are part of a dialectical perspective of disability, so we can later comprehend the ways in which they still influence filmmaking in the 21st century. Some repetition of films and ideas may appear but that only highlights the crucial role they play in the representation of the disabled body or mind.

PART II - Disability and Film History

In this section of Chapter 3, I would like to invite my reader to go on a historical journey. My objective is, on the grounds of a Marxist conception of history (MARX; ENGELS, 1996, pp. 82-87) and a Materialist perspective of culture and cultural production (WILLIAMS, 1992; 1977), to reflect upon the various appearances of impairments in the history of Western cinema, mainly focusing on American and British productions, though at times, referring to other countries and their productions. The images we have discussed in Part I will reappear at times in other forms, but I will provide a summary of those in the end of Part II.

My goal is not to catalogue all films with disabled characters but to demonstrate how cultural productions, represented by the film industry, influence and are influenced by the sociocultural conception of what it means to have an impairment and how material conditions will determine the ways impairments are approached. Ultimately, the goal is to demonstrate, through this historical approach, how images of representation flow into our

consciousness and trigger conscious and unconscious processes of reaction to disabled people (VYGOTSKY, 1971).

We shall start by looking at the Silent Film period (Table 3).

Table 3 - Disability in the Silent Film Period (1898-1931)

Year	Film	Director	Country	Disability type	Genre	Disabled Actor/Actress
1898	The Fake Beggar	Unknown (produced by *Edison Manufacturing Company*)	USA	(Fake) Blindess and physical disability	Short film / Comedy	-
	The Fraudulent Beggar	James Williamson	UK	(Fake) Blindess and deafness	Short film / Comedy	-
1900	The Beggar's Deceit	Cecil Hepworth	UK	(Fake) Blindess	Short film / Comedy	-
1902	Deaf Mute Girl Reciting "Star Spangled Banner"	Arthur Marvin	USA	Deafness	Documentary	-
1905	The Fake Blind Man	Charles Raymond	UK	(Fake) Blindess	Short film / Comedy	-
1909	Two Ladies and a Beggar	Léon Gaumont	France	(Fake) Blindess	Short film / Comedy	-
1907	The Near-Sighted Cyclist	Unknown (produced by *Société Générale des Cinématographes Éclipse*)	France	Visual Impairment	Comedy	-
1909	Near-Sighted Mary	Unknown	USA	Visual Impairment	Comedy	-
1920	The Penalty	Wallace Worsley	USA	Physical Disability	Crime / Drama	

Year	Film	Director	Country	Disability type	Genre	Disabled Actor/Actress
1923	The Hunchback of Notre Dame	Wallace Worsley	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / Horror / Romance	Lon Chaney (although not a disabled actor, he played many disabled characters)
1925	The Phantom of the Opera	Lon Chaney	USA	Physical Disability	Horror	
1927	The Unknown	Tod Browning	USA	(Fake) Physical Disability	Thriller	
1931	City Lights	Charlie Chaplin	USA	Blindness	Comedy	-

Source: designed by the author based on works of Norden (1994) and Benshoff and Griffin (2009).

The first period we are going to discuss is between 1898 and 1931. According to the literature, the first silent film to portray a disabled person was *The Fake Beggar* in 1898 and the last was *City Lights* in 1931, even after the development of sound and voice in films.

The early short films produced are marked by the idea of a *fake disabled* - a person that pretends to be disabled to beg and provoke feelings of pity in others and get money (1898-1909). Although all the short films in Table 3.3 portray this false disabled person in a humorous way - begging, being discovered as a crook, and then being chased by the police - they seem to depict a serious social situation, the fact that some people ought to fake an impairment and beg in order to be able to survive. It is a moment in film history that highlights the bonds between class condition, disability, and charity.

As a record, there is also a documentation[16] of a deaf student at Gallaudet Institute, in Washington D.C., reciting *Star-Spangled Banner*, the national anthem of the United States. The Gallaudet Institute was the first school for deaf students in the United States and was established in 1857. The film lasts only 45 seconds and is recorded with the camera in a fixed position. In the background is the flag of the United States.

Moreover, a second wave of films with disabled characters arrived. They were also comedies but no longer portraying fake disabled beggars, rather they meant to provoke laughter projecting disabled people as clumsy and in comical situations. They are part of what is called the *Silent-era slapstick. Slapstick* is the concept which describes the use of exaggerated forms of violence to provoke laughter and entertain, it is commonly used by Charlie Chaplin, The Three Stooges, Laurel & Hardy, and Marcel Pérez. In his first film, *The*

[16] Though I will not catalog documentaries here, I would just like to mention this specific film since it part of the history of early cinema.

Near-Sighted Cyclist, Marcel Pérez plays a character with visual impairment (short-sighted) in all sorts of supposedly hilarious situations, falling, stumbling, tumbling. *Near-Sighted Mary* is another example. Mary starts a new job as a secretary, but she is portrayed as practically incapable of performing the job, since she spills liquids on people, drops and breaks things, and is finally fired.

Both films reproduce a historical fact and start a tradition in filmmaking, respectively, that disabled people can be used to amuse and entertain non-disabled people and the idea that being disabled can be funny. They are, in fact, not at all different from the famous traditional freak shows, that used disabled and people with deformities as entertainment. They influence later 20th century productions such as *See no Evil, Hear no Evil* (ARTHUR HILLER, 1989), *Mr. Magoo,* and *Dumb & Dumber* (PETER FARRELLY, 1995; 2003; 2014).

See no Evil, Hear no Evil is a quintessential example of the genre. Wallace Karue (Richard Pryor), a blind man, and Dave Lyons (Gene Wilder), a deaf man, are involved in a murder. They are taken to the police station first as witnesses but, being unable to identify the murderer, they are accused of the crime. They can only point out that it was a woman with beautiful legs, according to Dave, and that she smelled a specific kind of perfume, according to Wallace. Besides the main theme of the plot, the fact that they are involved in the murder and must find the murderer to prove that they are innocent, they are constantly involved in situations that are beyond the bizarre and disrespectful. Wallace constantly denies the fact that he is blind by refusing to use a white cane, attempting to drive, playing darts, getting involved in fights in bars, etc. Dave, when asked if he is deaf, denies it by saying that there have been *rumours* that he is deaf.

The third state introduces what I would point out as the second most influential image of representation of disabled people, the relationship between impairment and evil. Using the images we have discussed: the demonic cripple in Kriegel and The Disabled Person as an Object of Violence, as Sinister and Evil, and as Atmosphere or Curio in Barnes, also what Benshoff and Griffin (2009) call the **Obsessive Avenger**.

One of the most well-known actors of horror and terror silent film, Lon Chaney, was the son of deaf parents, a fact which is considered to have influenced his skills as a silent film actor. His films explore disabled characters as representations of two categories: criminals and monsters. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Phantom of the Opera* bring from literature to cinema the idea that, perhaps, not all evil is disabled, but all disabled is evil. They will influence later the images of disability in *Son of Frankenstein*, *House of Horror*, *The*

Brute Man, *Mystery of the Wax Museum*, the foes in the James Bond series, and following the tradition, both films which we have already discussed, *300* and *Clash of Titans*. In fact, "[…] these villains 'physical abnormalities are used to signify their moral corruption, as well as underscore the heroic status of James Bond as the epitome of able-bodied white heterosexual masculinity." (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009, p. 766), an aspect that I approached when I discussed *300*.

On the other hand, we could say that Chaney's character Blizzard in *The Penalty* is a contrast to the monster. He is indeed a criminal, driven sometimes by vengeance, but at the same time he incorporates, to some extent, Kriegel's *realistic cripple*. That because his impairment does not seem to be treated as a limitation or as characteristic that makes him automatically evil or pure of heart.

In *The Unknown*, Chaney's character is Alonzo, the armless, a knife thrower - he throws knives with his foot - who falls in love with the ringmaster's daughter, Nanon Zanzi (Joan Crawford). The viewer, however, finds out later that Alonzo is a criminal and that he does have both arms and hands. Malabar, the mighty, interpreted by Norman Kerry, is also in love with Nanon, and the two fight for her love. Nanon is repulsed by the idea of being touched by a man, so she drives Malabar away, despite being attracted to him. She feels safe near Alonzo because he is armless and would not be able to touch her. The final climax of the film is when Alonzo plots the death of Malabar but ends up dead instead.

> So…
> for Alonzo there was an
> end to Hate called Death…
> and for Nanon, an end to
> Hate… called Love.
> (*The Unknown*, 48min33s)

Despite the fact that Alonzo was actually faking his impairment[17], and that he is an obsessive avenger (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009, p. 746), we identify in *The Unknown*, mainly **in Nanon's attitude** towards Alonzo, the social understanding of the disabled person as harmless, asexual, and pure of heart, an element that will accompany disability all the way to the present. The characters, however, both Alonzo and his assistant Cojo, interpreted by the little person John George are far from sweet. This conception, of the disabled person as a **Sweet**

[17] At some point in the story, as part of one of the climaxes, Alonzo convinces a surgeon to remove one of arms, believing that Nanon would forgive him for lying that he had one arm. That would also solve the problem that his hand bore a mark that could be identified by the police and by Nanon for the murder of her father, Zanin.

Innocent[18] (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009), appears to have started in film history in Chaplin's *City Lights*.

The next period we are going to look at ranges from 1931 to 1950 (Table 4) and brings to evidence the contrasts between a biblical model of disability as sinful, as a source of evil, and the influence of the medical model of disability (OLIVER, 1990; BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009).

Table 4 - Disability in Film between 1931-1950

Year	Film	Director	Country	Disability type	Genre	Disabled Actor/Actress
1932	Freaks	Tod Browning	USA	Various	Dark comedy	Actors and actresses with different disabilities
1933	Gold Diggers of 1933	Busby Berkeley and Mervyn LeRoy	USA	Little person	Musical / comedy	Billy Barty
	Mystery of the Wax Museum	Michael Curtiz	USA	Physical disfiguration	Horror	-
1935	Bride of Frankenstein	James Whale	USA	Blindness	Horror / sci-fi	
1938	The Terror of Tiny Town	Sam Newfield	USA	Little people	Western / comedy	Little people
	The Wizard of Oz	Victor Fleming	USA	Little people	Fantasy / musical	Little people
	The Hunchback of Notre Dame	William Dieterle	USA	Physical Disability	Romance / Drama	-
1939	Of Mice and Men	Lewis Milestone	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-

[18] Another version of Kriegel's *Charity Cripple*. The Sweet Innocent exists "[…] so that middle-class audiences could shed an easy tear over them rather than feel accosted and/or uncomfortable." (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009, p. 754).

	Son of Frankenstein	Rowland V. Lee	USA	Physical Disability	Horror	-
	The Light That Failed	William A. Wellman	USA	Blindness	Drama	-
1941	Spooks Run Wild	Phil Rosen	USA	Little person	Dark comedy	-
1942	The Corpse Vanishes	Wallace Fox	USA	Little person	Horror	-
	And Now Tomorrow	Irving Pichel	USA	Deafness	Drama	-
1944	Since You Went Away	John Cromwell	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
	Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo	Mervyn LeRoy	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
1945	Pride of the Marines	Delmer Daves	USA	Blindness	War	-
	House of Horror	Jean Yarbrough	USA	Physical Disability	Horror	Rondo Hatton
	La symphonie pastorale	Jean Delannoy	France	Blindness	Drama	-
	The Brute Man	Jean Yarbrough	USA	Physical Disability	Thriller	Rondo Hatton
1946	Till the End of Time	Edward Dmytryk	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
	The Best Years of Our Lives	William Wyler	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	Harold Russel
1948	Johnny Belinda	Jean Negulesco	USA	Deafness	Drama	-
	Home of the Brave	Mark Robson	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
1949	The Stratton Story	Sam Wood	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / Biography	-
1950	The Men	Stanley Kramer	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-

Source: designed by the author with contributions from the works of Norden (1994) and Benshoff and Griffin (2009).

Tod Browning's *Freaks* is a mix of horror and comedy. Hans (Harry Earles) falls in love with the trapeze artist, Cleopatra. They get married and she starts to slowly poison him to inherit his money. The other artists of the circus finds out and attacks her, cutting off her limbs. The movie was rejected by the studio, MGM, and "[…] banned for years by the BBFC

on the grounds that it ‘exploited for commercial reasons the deformed people that it claimed to dignify’” (KERMODE, *The Guardian*, 2015). Nowadays, however, according to Benshoff and Griffin (2009, p.749),

> *Freaks* has been both condemned and celebrated in relation to its depiction of people with disabilities. While clearly the film exploits its disabled performers as *Obsessive Avengers*, the film also presents them as fairly well-developed human beings with their own feelings and desires, as opposed to simply repellant monsters.

So, there is a certain ambiguity in *Freaks* that ranges from demonic to realistic representations. Even so, their images are used to create the atmosphere or to project an idea. Other uses of disabled people in the period are of little people to act as children, side-by-side with mad doctors or other characters, or creatures from another world, as in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), where they play the Munchkins. Other examples are John George in *The Unknown*, Angelo Rosito in *Spooks Run Wild*, *The Corpse Vanishes*, *Dracula Versus Frankenstein*, Billy Barty in *Masters of the Universe* and *Willow*, and Warwick Davis in the *Leprechaun* series, appearances in the *Star Wars* and in the Harry Potter series and more recently as Lickspittle in *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* (2019), coincidently or not, most of these performances are associated, in way or another, to some form of evil doing in the films.

The paradigm shift from disabled people as monstrous and evil to their understanding on the grounds of the medical model may be also perceived in representations of disabled characters in the films, a tradition that starts with Chaplin’s *City Lights. The Blind Girl* is the first representation of **Sweet Innocents,** those who “[…] were almost implausibly humble, gentle, and perpetually cheerful despite having a disability.” (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009, p. 754). They are usually represented by children, women, and sometimes in conditions of poverty. The Sweet Innocent is usually surrounded by a strong male character, sometimes a saviour, such as the Tramp in *City Lights*, the men surrounding Susy Hendrix (Audrey Hepburn) in *Wait Until Dark*, Gordon Ralfe (Sidney Poitier) in *A Patch of Blue*, or the monster in *The Shape of Water*, as we are going to see in Chapter 4, and other times as threatening their lives, such as the character Reba (Emily Watson) in *Red Dragon* (2002). Reba may also be somehow perceived as a saintly sage, in the sense that her sweetness and pureness of heart shields her from Francis Dolarhyde’s madness (Ralph Fiennes).

The female representation as weak and in need of a man to cure and save her is opposed to the usual male version of **Saintly Sages** (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009 p. 756).

Disability provides the character with special abilities, wisdom, and super-powers. Benshoff and Griffin's example is *Bride of Frankenstein.* According to the authors:

> […] when the monster stumbles into the hut of a blind hermit. Since he cannot see the monster and thus pre-judge him, the hermit welcomes the creature into his home, feeding him and befriending him. The film's visual style makes the hermit almost saint-like – his long robe, white beard, and kindly demeanor set him apart from the film's sighted characters, who are all too ready to persecute the sympathetic monster. (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009 p. 756).

We could also point out to other examples, such as Zatoichi (Shintaro Katsu) in his series of films about a blind masseur and master swordsman, Denzel Washington's Eli in *The Book of Eli* (2010), Professor Charles Xavier in the *X-men* series, the *Daredevil* (2003), and the South Korean *Blind* (2011). It is interesting to note that blindness has long been associated with wisdom. Searching for blind characters in operas, for example, Aydin et al (2017) found out 55 blind characters in 38 different operas, mainly dated from the 18th and 19th centuries. The authors indicate that:

> Blindness in certain characters is associated with wisdom and sometimes with abilities that are atypical, conferring a mystical aura to the person. Similarly, group blindness is used as a metaphorical reflection on the demise of leadership and the groping for knowledge in a changing world; knowledge requires strength of character, not the fearful reactions of the blind. (AYDIN ET AL., 2017, p. 11).

The same appears to be true for some films, as we saw above. The image that rises alongside the saintly sages is that of the **Noble Warriors.** They first appear as victims of the atrocities of the World War II, but they will continue appearing with the Vietnam war, and the US invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq, and other conflicts. The Noble Warrior may also appear in the form of a Tragic Victim, which "[…] began to be used more in the post-war years, and can also be found in more recent anti-war movies that figure disability as the tragic consequence of unchecked militarism." (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009 p. 758).

One example of how the war affected the lives of veterans can be seen in the Oscar-winning *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) - it won seven Oscars (*Best Picture*, *Best Actor*, *Best Director*, *Best Supporting Actor*, *Best Adapted Screenplay*, *Best Film Editing*, *Best Music*, *Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture*). The Oscar for *Best Supporting Actor* was

awarded to Harold Russell, who had had both hands amputated due to an accident in the army[19]. Russell worked in just two other films, *Inside Moves* (1980), which portrays a group of disabled characters who get together at a bar, and *Dogtown* (1997). *Inside Moves* not only portrays a beautiful female actress as a supporting figure in the life of a disabled character but it is also one the first examples of the use of disabled characters as life-inspiration gurus for other disabled or non-disabled characters, an aspect I have already discussed and which is strongly criticised by both academics (BARNES, 1992; DARKE, 1994; MARKS, 1999) and activists, such as Stella Young (the creator of the concept of *Inspirational Porn*). *The Men* (1950), which employed 45 disabled veterans, is another example of the struggles to readapt to society as a disabled person,

> films about disabled veterans bring to light how disability can and often does relate to issues of gender. To be masculine in Western culture is to be in control: to be dominant, forceful, useful, and productive. Thus, the crises in many of these postwar social problem films center on how disabled men can still be men – that is, how they can still earn a living, make love to a woman, and provide for a family. (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009, p. 759).

The **Noble Warrior** is the opposite pole of the **Sweet Innocent**, mainly in terms of gender, the latter is associated with the fragility of females and the former with the rage and nobility of males. They both reproduce patriarchal values, in that sense. At the same time, they reinforce an ableist perspective when disabled characters are usually lost, seeking redemption, or looking to re-establish the order in the story, as we discussed in Chapter 2. They are, at times, not so noble, but rather bitter and unhappy, as Delmer Daves's *Pride of the Marines* and Al Pacino's performance as Frank in *Scent of a Woman* seem to indicate. Non-disabled characters will then come into place and be part of that process of redemption and/or reestablishment of the order. This is the case, for example, of the two films mentioned above and of *A Patch of Blue* (1965), *Inside Moves* (1980), more recently *Me Before You* (2017) and even James Cameron's blockbuster *Avatar* (2009).

The horrors of war and their impacts on the lives of veterans become the plot of many of the films portraying the Noble Warrior, as the examples above suggest. The film industry arguably absorbs and projects characters and ideas of disability as humanised, as they

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[19] "After basic training, he volunteered to become a paratrooper, and he learned that skill as well as demolition. The United States Army made him an instructor. On June 6, 1944, while some of the men he trained were involved in the D-Day landing, Mr. Russell was teaching demolition work at Camp Mackall in North Carolina and a defective fuse detonated TNT that he was holding. The next day what was left of his hands were amputated three inches above the wrists." Retrieved from <<https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/01/arts/harold-russell-dies-at-88-veteran-and-oscar-winner.html>> on April 13th 2020.

move from the exclusive monstrous image of disabled people to more complex characters. In a way, they reinforce the importance of state and family support for those who have risked their lives to go to wars (GERBER, 2018). They are also a way to criticise the absence of such care and give them more visibility, creating characters who embrace their emotions and move beyond the stereotype of the bitter veteran, such as the characters in *Coming Home* (1978), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), the South Korean *Obaltan* (1960), and *Avatar* (2009) and in the sitcom *One day at a Time* (2017-) seem to suggest.

Another influence of the pathological (or medical) perspective of disability in cinema is perceived in characters that somehow indicate that life is not worth living if one is disabled. It might be identified in William A. Wellman's *The Light That Failed* (1939) in which the character prefers to die rather than become fully blind. While some may argue that such as perspective has remained in the past, *Me Before You* (2017) is a strong evidence of the opposite, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

The period between 1951 and 1979 embraces the contradictions of the models and reproduces aspects we have already discussed (Table 5).

Table 5 - Disability in Film between 1951-1979

Year	Film	Director	Country	Disability type	Genre	Disabled Actor/Actress
1951	Million Dollar Mermaid	Meryn Leroy	USA	Physical Disability	Drama	-
	Bright Victory	Mark Robson	USA	Blindness	Drama / War	-
1953	House of Wax	André De Toth	USA	Physical disfiguration	Horror	-
1955	Bad Day at Black Rock	John Sturges	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
1956	Moby Dick	John Huston	USA	Physical Disability	Adventure / Drama	-
1959	The Tingler	William Castle	USA	Deafness	Thriller	-
1960	Obaltan (The Aimless Bullet / The Stray Bullet)	Yu Hyun-mok	South Korea	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-

1962	What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?	Robert Aldrich	USA	Physical Disability	Thriller	-
	The Miracle Worker	Arthur Penn	USA	Blindness / Deafness	Drama / Biography	-
	The light in the Piazza	Guy Green	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama / Romance	-
	Dr No	Terence Young	USA	Physical Disability	Action	-
1963	A child is Waiting	John Cassavetes	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
1964	Dr Strangelove	Stanley Kubrick	USA	Physical Disability	Comedy / War	-
1965	Thunderball	Terence Young	USA	Physical Disability	Action	-
	A Patch of Blue	Guy Green	USA	Blindness	Drama / Romance	-
	Ship of Fools	Stanley Kramer	USA	Little person	Drama / Romance	Michael Dunn (first little person to be nominated for an Oscar, for his role as Glocken in this film.)
1966	L'uomo che ride	Sergio Corbucci	France / Italy	Physical disfiguration	Drama	-
1967	You Only Live Twice	Lewis Gilbert	USA	Physical disfiguration	Action	-
1967	Wait Until Dark	Terence Young	USA	Blindness	Thriller	-
1968	Charly	Ralph Nelson	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama / Sci-fi	-
1970	The Walking Stick	Eric Till	UK	Physical Disability	Drama	-
	Even Dwarfs Started Small	Werner Herzog	Germany	Little person	Drama	-
1971	Johnny got his Gun	Dalton Trumbo	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
1972	Butterflies are free	Milton Katselas	USA	Blindness	Drama	-

	Los Amigos	Paolo Cavara	USA / Italy	Deafness	Western	-
1974	The Man with the Golden Gun	Guy Hamilton	USA	Little person	Action	Hervé Villechaize
1975	The Other side of the Mountain	Larry Peerce	USA	Physical Disability	Drama	-
1977	Looking for Mr. Goodbar	Richard Brooks	USA	Deafness	Drama	-
	Coming Home	Hal Ashby	USA	Physical Disability	Drama	-
	Ice Castles	Donald Wrye	USA	Blindness	Drama	-
1978	The Deer Hunter	Michael Cimino	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
	Höstsonaten	Ingmar Bergman	Sweeden	Cerebral Palsy	Drama	-
1979	Voices	Robert Markowitz	USA	Deafness	Drama	-
1979	And Your Name is Jonah	Richard Michaels	USA	Deafness	Drama	Jeffrey Bravin
1979	Son-Rise: a Miracle of Love	Glenn Jordan	USA	Autism	Drama	-

Source: designed by the author with contributions from the works of Norden (1994) and Benshoff and Griffin (2009).

The period explores in the thriller and horror films and the James Bond series the association of impairment, deformity, and evil doing. It is also a representative of war-related disability. *Charly* (1968), the film which gave Cliff Robertson an Oscar award for *Best Actor*, is this period's representation of the scientific attempt to *cure* impairments.

Charly is a 30 year-old man who works as an assistant in a bakery during the day, and studies in the evening. Charly's intellectual disability is the source of mockery at work, where his colleagues not only make fun but also take advantage of him. Charly is then invited to take part in an experiment to improve his intellectual capacities, which, according to the film, are lower than the rat's Algernon. After the procedures, Charly becomes a genius but is unable to deal with the emotions created by his new intellect. Towards the end, he discovers that the effects of the procedures are temporary, so they will soon be reverted.

Charly explores for the first time in film history the idea that science be able to cure intellectual disability. It had already approached the cure for blindness, in *City Lights*, for deafness, in *La Symphonie Pastorale* (1946), and will reappear in *Molly* (1999), depicting

attempts to cure autism. *Charly* also brings to evidence the influences of experimental and medical models of psychology, which impacted not only the way we conceive disability but emotions, intelligence, development, and all differing aspects of the human psyche. I will not go into depth in this topic here, but Maria Helena Souza Patto (2000) approaches the epistemological, social, cultural, and psychological problems of this perspective in her book *Mutações do Cativeiro* [no translation to English]. In summary, Patto manages to associate the characterisation of intelligence with a perspective of social class and to point out the fundamental problems in the roots of intelligence quotient tests, also an idea she had already discussed in an earlier book when analysing the Brazilian Educational System (Patto, *A produção do fracasso escolar*, 1987).

According to Benshoff and Griffin (2009), both *A Patch of Blue* and Audrey Hepburn's *Wait Until Dark* also seem to have explored more emotionally complex characters and less dependent upon other non-disabled characters. A woman that struggles against a criminal that breaks into her house is also the plot of the thriller *Hush* (2016), in which a deaf writer moves to a cabin in the woods of a small town to reconnect with herself and be able to write but is attacked by a sociopath who wants to kill her.

Lastly, this period (1951-1979) arguably introduces a new element of the relationship between filmmaking and disability, the biographical film. *The Miracle Worker* (1969), Hellen Keller's life story, is the first film in my list that is based on a real-life story of a disabled person. This will be a recurring element in filmmaking from thenceforth.

The last three decades of the 20th century are marked by changes in the way disabled people are conceived in the law, in civil society, and in cultural manifestations (SHAKESPEARE, 2010). There was a global movement of activists in civil society, perhaps in the Gramscian sense of organic intellectuals (MÉSZÁROS, 2016), academics, and politicians struggling in favour of the rights of disabled people. With time, under the influence of the Social Model of Disability[20] and pressures from activists for the rights of disabled people, we may perceive changes in the way disabled characters are portrayed and introduced in the period between 1980 and 1999 (Table 6).

Table 6 - Disability in Film between 1980-1999

Year	Film	Director	Country	Disability type	Genre	Disabled Actor/Actress

[20] A term coined by Michael Oliver and associated with the works of L. S. Vygotsky (1993 [1920-1930]) and academics in the 1970's onwards (Abberley, 1987; Oliver, 1990; 1991; 1998; 2009; Oliver & Sapey, 2006; Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

	Inside Moves	Richard Donner	USA	Various	Drama	Harold Russell
1980	Touched by Love	Gus Trikonis	USA	Cerebral Palsy	Drama / Biography	-
	The Elephant Man	David Lynch	USA	Physical Disfiguration	Drama	-
1983	The Terry Fox Story	Ralph L. Thomas	USA / Canada	Physical Disability	Drama / Biography	-
1984	A Test of Love	Maciej Adamek	Poland	Cerebral Palsy	Drama	-
	Annie's Coming Out	Gil Brealey	Australia	Cerebral Palsy	Drama / Biography	-
1985	Mask	PeterBogdanovich	Russia	Physical Disfiguration	Drama	-
1986	Children of a Lesser God	Randa Haines	USA	Deafness	Drama	Marlee Matlin
1987	Feliz Ano Velho	Roberto Gervitz	Brazil	Physical Disability	Drama	-
	Eye on the Sparrow	John Korty	USA	Blindness	Drama	-
	Gaby: A True Story	Luis Mandoki	USA / Mexico	Cerebral Palsy	Drama / Biography	-
1988	Dominick and Eugene	Robert M. Young	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
	Rain Man	Barry Levinson	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
	Willow	Ron Howard	USA	Little person	Fantasy / Adventure	Billy Barty; Warwick Davis
	See No Evil, Hear No Evi	Arthur Hiller	USA	Blindness / Deafness	Comedy	-
1989	My Left Foot	Jim Sheridan	Ireland	Cerebral Palsy	Drama / Biography	-
	Born on the fourth of July	Oliver Stone	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
	Little Man Tate	Jodie Foster	USA	High intellectual abilities	Drama	-
	Toto le héros	Jaco Van Dormael	Belgium	Down Syndrome	Comedy / Drama	Pascal Duquenne
1991	Wild Hearts Can’t be Broken	Steve Miner	USA	Blindness	Drama	-

	The Waterdance	Neal Jimenez, Michael Steinberg	USA	Physical Disability	Drama	-
	Once a Thief	John Woo	China	Physical Disability	Comedy / Action	-
1992	Scent of a Woman	Martin Brest	USA	Blindness	Drama	-
	Jennifer 8	Bruce Robinson	USA	Blindness	Drama	-
	Bitter Moon	Roman Polanski	France	Physical Disability	Drama / Romance	-
	Of Mice and Men	Gary Sinise	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
	What's Eating Gilbert Grape?	Lasse Hallström	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
	Blindsided	Tom Donnelly	USA	Blindness	Drama	-
1993	Leprechaun (series)	Various	Ireland/ USA	Little person	Horror	Warwick Davis (also known for his roles in the Star Wars series, in the Harry Potter series, and in *Maleficent: mistress of Evil* (2019).
	No Child of Mine	Michael Katieman	USA	Down Syndrome	Drama	-
	Sopyonje	Im Kwon-taek	South Korea	Blindness	Drama / Musical	-
	House of Cards	Michael Lessac	USA	Autism	Drama	-
	The Piano	Jane Campion	Austria / France	Muteness	Drama	-
1993	Hear no Evil	Robert Greenwald	USA	Deafness	Thriller	-
1994	David's mother	Robert Allan Ackerman	USA	Autism	Drama	-
	Forrest Gump	Robert Zemeckis	USA	Intellectual Disability	Comedy Drama	-
	Blink	Michael Apted	USA	Blindness	Thriller	-
	Rise & Walk: The Dennis Byrd Story	Michael Dinner	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / Biography	-

1994	Relative Fear	Robert Allan Ackerman	Canada	Autism	Thriller	-
	Four Weddings and a Funeral	Mike Newell	UK	Deafness	Romantic Comedy	David Bower
1995	Silent Fall	Bruce Beresford	USA	Autism	Thriller	-
	Mr. Holland's Opus	Stephen Herek	USA	Deafness	Drama	-
	In the Name of Love: A Texas Tragedy	Bill D'Elia	USA	Physical Disability	Drama	-
	Bad Day at Black Rock	John Sturges	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / War	-
	A Long Way Home	Roberto Bangura	UK	Cerebral Palsy	Drama	-
	Le Huitième Jour	Jaco Van Dormael	Belgium	Down Syndrome	Comedy / Drama	Pascal Duquenne
	All She Ever Wanted	Michael Scott	USA	Deafness	Drama	-
1996	Jenseits der Stille	Caroline Link	Germany	Deafness	Drama	Emmanuelle Laborit / Howie Seago
	Under the Piano	Stefan Scaini	Canada	Autism	Drama	-
	Good Luck	Richard Labrie	USA	Physical Disability / Blindness	Comedy	-
	The People Vs. Larry Flynt	Milos Forman	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / Biography	-
	Carne Trêmula	Pedro Almodóvar	Spain	Physical Disability	Drama	-
1997	Cop Land	James Mangold	USA	Hearing Impairment	Cop	-
	Dogtown	Catherine Hardwicke	USA	Physical Disability	Drama	Harold Russell
	Amy	Nadia Tass	Australia	Deafness	Drama	-
	The Mighty	Peter Chelsom	USA	Physical / Intellectual Disabilities	Drama	-

1998	The Apple	Samira Makhmalbaf	Iran	Blindness / Intellectual Disability	Drama / Biography / Documentary	Yes (names not available)
	Zyklus von Kleinigkeiten (Cycle of Trifles)	Ana Torfs	Belgium	Deafness	Drama / Biography	-
1998	Rang-e khoda	Majid Majidi	Iran	Blindness	Drama	Mohsen Ramezani
	At First Sight	Irwin Winkler	USA	Blindness	Drama	-
	Simon Birch	Mark Steven Johnson	USA	Little person	Drama	Ian Michael Smith (Little person)
	Mercury Rising	Harold Becker	USA	Autism	Drama / Cop	-
	Anya's Bell	Tom McLoughlin	USA	Blindness	Drama	-
1999	Dancer in the Dark	Lars von Trier	Netherlands	Blindness	Drama / Musical	-
	The Bonne Colector	Phillip Noyce	USA	Physical Disability	Thriller	-
	Molly	John Duigan	USA	Autism	Comedy Drama	-
	The Other Sister	Garry Marshall	USA	Intellectual Disability	Comedy Drama	-

Source: designed by the author.

As I mentioned above, this period is one of many biographical films. They are, on one hand, images of disabled people as real humans, who love, hate, study, work, suffer, have sex, and have family problems, which is no doubt an advancement in comparison to the limited images portrayed hitherto. On the other hand, many of them were absorbed by a meritocratic neoliberal ideology and had their life stories turned into a source of inspiration - "if they did it, so can you".

I would like to highlight here an aspect of disability that I have already discussed above, but which is, nevertheless, worth going back to - the image of the superhuman disabled. If at first the impairment was associated with a certain image of evil, usually in creatures that resemble human characteristics, but which are not regarded as such, the motivational guru is at the opposite pole. It remains an image that transcends human traits, for

his life-story is used as an example that discipline, self-will, and perseverance can overcome all misfortunes and tragedies - one such as disability. The analyses of the dialectics involving cinema, representation, and disability seem to illustrate how paradigm shifts impact the way a certain social aspect is understood and projected - from monsters (less than human) to inspirational symbols (more than human) and from the latter to closer to human, but still very much driven by infantilised clichés, and the images of heroes and victims (ROBEY ET. AL., 2006), as we shall investigate in more depth below.

Please note that, despite the advancements in terms of more complex characters, disability is still regarded as an individual tragedy, a characteristic that seems to apply to *most* feature-length films in the West and in the East (ROBINSON, 2005; DIFFRIENT, 2017, RIEP, 2018). As it is also expected from such a perspective, the disabled character is usually dependent upon a non-disabled to break through his limitations. Evidences are the stories of the Mexican writer Gabriela Brimmer, in *Gaby: a true story* (1987), the story of Christy Brown in *My left Foot* (1989), and the eight-Oscar winning *The Elephant Man* (1980), based on the story of John Merrick. The other biographies of the period are *Annie's Coming Out* (1984) based on the life of Rosemary Crossley, an Australian activist, and *Touched by Love* (1980) based on the memoirs of Lena Canada. These films will be a source of inspiration for biographical films of the next period, such as *Door to Door* (2002), *Radio* (2003), *Ray* (2004), *Music Within* (2007), and others that may have not been listed.

Also, during this period (1980-1999), we may perceive films that will illustrate my arguments of the impacts of class condition in the limitations and possibilities in the lives of disabled people. It is interesting to note that after *Charly* other working-class disabled characters were portrayed. Christy Brown, Lennie (in *Of Mice and Men*), Arnie Grape (still a teenager in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, but in a working-class family), and in the next period (2000-2020), Sam (*I am Sam*), Bill Porter (*Door to Door*), Reba McClane (*Red Dragon*), and Yuma in the recent Japanese drama, *37 seconds.*

Their contrast, that is, upper-class disabled characters, is also in evidence in the lives of Raymond (*Rain Man*), Gabriela Brimmer, Carla and Daniel (*The Other Sister*), and the billionaires Phillip Lacasse (*Intouchables* and *The Upside*[21]) and William Traynor (*Me Before You*). The complexities of such portraits seem to come into combustion in Samira Makhmalbaf's *Two-legged horse* (2008), a film I discuss in Chapter 5.

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[21] *The Upside* is the Hollywoodian version of the French film *Intouchables*, based on the autobiographical book by Philippe Pozzo di Borgo.

Let us, then, look at the last period 2000-2020 (Table 7).

Table 7 - Disability in Film between 2000 and 2020

Year	Film	Director	Country	Disability type	Genre	Disabled Actor/Actress
2000	How to Kill Your Neighbor's Dog	Michael Kalesniko	USA	Cerebral palsy	Comedy /Drama	-
	O Brother, Where Art Thou?	Ethan Coen, Joel Coen	USA	Blindness	Comedy / Crime	-
2001	Not Afraid, Not Afraid	Annette Carducci	UK	Down syndrome	Drama	Not available
	Sur mes Lèvres	Jacques Audiard	France	Deafness	Thriller	-
2002	I am Sam	Jessie Nelson	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama	Brad Silverman and Joseph Rosenberg
	Oasis	Lee Chang-dong	South Korea	Intellectual Disability / Cerebral Palsy	Drama	-
	Door to door	Steven Schachter	USA	Cerebral palsy	Comedy / Biography	-
	Red Dragon	Brett Ratner	USA	Blindness	Thriller	-
2003	After Life	Alison Peebles	USA	Down syndrome	Drama	Paula Sage
	Daredevil	Mark Steven Johnson	USA	Blindness	Action	-
	Tiptoes	Matthew Bright	USA	Little person	Drama	-
	Radio	Michael Tollin	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama / Biography	-
	Waiting For Ronald	Ellen Gerstein	USA	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
	The Brooke Ellison Story	Christopher Reeve	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / Biography	-
	Ray	Taylor Hackford	USA	Blindness	Biography	-
	Mar Adentro	Alejandro Amenábar	Spain	Physical Disability	Drama	-
	The Village	M. Night Shyamalan	USA	Blindness / Intellectual Disability	Thriller	-

2004	Aaltra	Benoît Delépine, Gustave Kervern	Belgium	Physical Disability	Comedy	-
	Le Chiavi di Casa	Gianni Amelio	Italy	Physical Disability	Drama	Andrea Rossi
	Inside I'm Dancing	Damien O'Donnell	UK	Cerebral palsy	Comedy /Drama	-
	Dear Frankie	Shona Auerbace	UK	Deafness	Drama	-
	The Unexpected Journey	Gregg Champion	USA	Autism	Drama	-
2005	Marathon	Jeong Yoon-Cheol	South Korea	Autism	Drama	-
	Mozart and the Whale	Petter Naess	USA	Autism	Comedy /Drama	-
	Black	Sanjay Leela Bhansali	India	Blindness / Deafness	Drama / Biography (Inspired on the life of Hellen Keller)	-
	The Magnificent Seven	Kenneth Glenaan	UK	Autism	Drama	-
	Danny the Dog	Louis Leterrier	USA	Blindness	Action	-
	L'Iceberg	Dominique Abel	Belgium	Deafness	Comedy	-
	Leon Y Olvido	Xavier Bermúdez	Spain	Down syndrome	Drama	Guillem Jiménez
	Copying Beethoven	Agnieszka Holland	USA	Deafness	Drama / Biography	-
	After Thomas	Simon Shore	UK	Autism	Drama	-
	Snow Cake	Marc Evans	Canada	Autism	Drama	-

2006	Babel	Alejandro González Iñárritu	USA / Mexico	Deafness	Drama	-
2007	Rosso Come il Cielo	Cristiano Bortone	Italy	Blindness	Drama	-
	Music Within	Steven Sawalich	USA	Deafness	Comedy / Drama / War / Biography	
	Le Scaphandre et le Papillon	Julian Schnabel	France	Physical Disability	Drama	-
2008	The Memory Keeper's Daughter	Mick Jackson	USA	Down syndrome	Drama	Krystal Hope Nausbaum
	Temple Grandin	Mick Jackson	USA	Autism	Drama / Biography	-
	Two-legged Horse	Samira Makhmalbaf	Afeghanistan	Physical Disability / Intellectual Disability	Drama	Haron Ahad and Ziya Mirza Mohamad
2009	Avatar	James Cameron	USA	Physical Disability	Action / War / Sci-fi	-
	Mr. Nobody	Jaco Van Dormael	Belgium / UK	Down syndrome	Sci-fi / Drama	Pascal Duquenne
	City Down: a história de um diferente	José Mattos, P.C. Nogueira	Brazil	Down syndrome	Drama	All actors and actresses in the film have down syndrome
2010	The Book of Eli	Albert Hughes, Allen Hughes	USA	Blindness	Action	-
	Eu não quero voltar sozinho	Daniel Ribeiro	Brazil	Blindness	Drama	-
	Guzaarish	Sanjay Leela Bhansali	India	Physical Disability	Drama / Romance	-
2011	Silenced	Hwang Dong-hyuk	South Korea	Deafness	Drama	-
	Always	Song Il-Gon	South Korea	Blindness	Drama / Romance	-
	Blind	Ahn Sang-hoon	South Korea	Blindness	Thriller	-
	Intouchables	Olivier Nakache, Éric Toledano	France	Physical Disability	Comedy /Drama / Biography	-

2013	A Warm Wind	Jeffery London	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / Biography / War	-
	The Odd Way Home	Rajeev Nirmalakhandan	USA	Autism	Drama	-
	Miracle in Cell No. 7	Lee Hwan-kyung	South Korea	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
2014	Margarita with a Straw	Shonali Bose	India	Cerebral palsy	Comedy / Drama	-
	The theory of Everything	James Marsh	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / Biography	-
	Next To Her	Asaf Korman	Israel	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
2015	Le Tout Nouveau Testament	Jaco Van Dormael	Belgium	Down syndrome	Comedy	Pascal Duquenne
	Rainbow (Dhanak)	Nagesh Kukunoor	India	Blindness	Comedy / Drama	-
2015	The Rainbow Kid	Kire Paputts	Canada	Down syndrome	Drama	Dylan Harman, Krystal Hope Nausbaum
2016	Jane Wants a Boyfriend	William C. Sullivan	USA	Autism	Drama	-
	Hush	Mike Flanagan	USA	Deafness	Thriller	-
	The Fundamentals of Caring	Rob Burnett	USA	Physical Disability	Comedy / Drama	-
	Who's Driving Doug	David Conley	USA	Physical Disability	Drama	RJ Mitte (actor from Breaking Bad)
2017	Me Before You	Thea Sharrock	USA	Physical Disability	Comedy / Romance	-
	The Upside	Neil Burger	USA	Physical Disability	Comedy /Drama / Biography	-
	Special Unit	Christopher Titus	USA	Various	Comedy	Various disabled actors and actresses
	Blood Honey	Jeff Kopas	Canada	Down syndrome	Thriller	Krystal Hope Nausbaum
	The Shape of Water	Guillermo del Toro	USA	Muteness	Drama / Romance	-

2018	Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot	Gus Van Sant	USA	Physical Disability	Drama / Comedy	-
	Zero	Anand L. Rai	India	Physical Disability / Little person	Comedy / Romance	-
	Radiance	Naomi Kawase	Japan	Blindness	Drama	Many blind actors and actresses
2019	Justine	Stephanie Turner	USA	Physical Disability	Drama	-
	Miracle in Cell No. 7	Mehmet Ada Öztekin	Turkey	Intellectual Disability	Drama	-
2020	37 Seconds	Hikari	Japan	Cerebral palsy	Drama	Mei Kayama

Source: designed by the author.

I have hitherto attempted to explore how the images that are associated with disabled bodies and minds have created a tradition of representation, and we may now summarise these images in five main types of characters: *the hero, the villain, the victim, the guru (Inspirational Porn), and the realistic.*

Perhaps the most iconic of all films of this period is Sean Penn's *I am Sam* (2003)[22]. A working-class man who has intellectual disability and who fights in court to have the legal right to bring up his daughter. Despite the constant critics against the over sensationalised plot and the controversies surrounding the Oscars (CALLUS, 2019), the film casted two disabled actors, a rare trait in disability films as our historical journey indicates.

In that regard, we may also point out the participation of other disabled actors and actresses in this period. Pascal Duquenne in *Le Tout Nouveau Testament* and *Mr. Nobody,* both directed by Jaco Van Dormael[23], and Paula Sage in *After Life,* Krystal Hope Nausbaum in *The Memory Keeper's Daughter, The Rainbow Kid,* and *Blood Honey,* Dylan Harman in *The Rainbow Kid,* and Guillem Jiménez in *Leon Y Olvido,* all with down syndrome. Andrea Rossi, R. J. Mitte, and Mei Katayama are the leading actors and actress in their films with plots approaching aspects related to the lives of people with cerebral palsy. Lastly, casting blind actors and actresses, Naomi Kawase's beautiful cinematography in *Radiance* sheds light on the

[22] The story of an intellectually disabled man struggling to be with his daughter is also the plot of the South Korean Miracle in Cell No. 7 (2013) and its more recent Turkish version (2019) available on Netflix.
[23] He had previously directed other films with Pascal, films which we will look into more detail on Chapter 5.

difficulties and complexities in the process of writing audio descriptions for visually impaired audiences in Japan.

The contrast to these improvements, in terms of representation, is marked by the presence of non-disabled actors in roles that could have been given to disabled actors, e.g., *Red Dragon* (blindness), the Indians *Margarita with a Straw* (cerebral palsy) and *Zero* (cerebral palsy and short stature), and the Brazilian *Eu não quero voltar sozinho* (I don't wanna go back alone - blindness). Some of these narratives, revolving around a main disabled character, will continue projecting an image of normality, reinforcing ideologies of competence and, therefore, excluding the socially constructed disabled body (ELLIS, 2005). They are part of the narratives that Paul Darke (1994) calls *normality drama* - a film that uses abnormality to reinforce and confirm what normality is.

The movement that has been called disability rights cinema - within human rights cinema[24] - seeks to highlight modern problems and struggles in the lives disabled people. One aspect that has been apparently improving since *Gaby* (1987) is how love and sexuality are part of the character's lives. The complexities of sexual intimacy are part of the plots in *Carne Trêmula, The Other Sister, Radiance, Margarita with a Straw, Red Dragon, The Shape of Water, I am Sam, Intouchables* and *the Upside,* and *Me before you.* All examples indicate that the film industry is responding to demands for fairer and more human-like representations of disabled people. The image of a healthy sexual interest rejects the infantile and sexual pervert characters - such as *Charly, Lennie,* and *Ephialtes.*

Another aspect worth looking at is the fact many of the characters seek to participate in social activities such as studying and working. *Sam* is a cleaner at a café, *Carla* is studying to become a veterinarian's assistant, *Memo,* in *The Miracle of Cell No 7,* is a shepherd, *Daniel,* in *I don't wanna go back alone,* is a teenage boy who attends regular school, and *Yuma* is an anime designer who is seeking to develop her own brand. These representations bring to discussion the importance to critically think the contrasts in the lives of disabled people in the lower, middle, and higher classes, and reflect upon the roles they play in society.

Disability imagery that comes in the form of realistic representation is bound to contribute a lot more to critically reflect upon the social spaces, opportunities, and limitations of disabled people in the capitalist society of the 21st century than what has been called *positive imagery*. I would like to point out that perhaps the path should be to oppose to the misuse of

[24] *Human Rights Cinema* involves also filmmaking in the feminist, black, and queer movements (WHITE, 2015; SCHOONOVER AND GALT, 2016; DIFFRIENT, 2017; HJORT AND JØRHOLT, 2019).

disability images that naturalise normality as a hegemonic discourse, as the analyses of Paul Darke (1994) and the idea of a normality drama as a genre demonstrate. Mainly, there are three elements that compose this *mise-en-scène*[25]*:* (1) images, (2) language, and (3) politics.

In the beginning of Chapter 1, I pointed out my concerns with the ideological foundations of the politics of correctness and their dialectical relations with language. It was not my intention at the time to entangle myself in the complexities of language and signs because my idea was to focus on the dialectics of capitalism and ableism. However now, after discussing the processes that constituted disabling imagery in the film industry and which, therefore, have influenced and been influenced by our own conceptions of what it means to be disabled, I would like to go back to this dilemma and highlight the influences of language in the processes of ideological representation.

Ableism, a concept we discussed in chapter 1, flows as an *ideological chain* in our interactions. The words we choose to project and represent interact with the concepts and establish a dialectic relationship with the material world around us:

> This ideological chain stretches from individual consciousness to individual consciousness, connecting them together. Signs emerge, after all, only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another. And the individual consciousness itself is filled with signs. Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content consequently, only in the process of social interaction. (VOLOSINOV, 1973 p. 11).

Capitalist society is structured on an ideological base that expects subjects and servants to be ***able*** to produce with the least requirements of adaptation (MARX, 1990; RUSSEL, 2019; WILLIAMS 1992), ableist language, hence, reproduces the ideology of competence and establishes the opposite pole, those who are considered incompetents and the burden, as we discussed in chapter 1 (MARX, 1990; CHAUÍ, 2014). A re-evaluation of concepts and ableist, or racist, or homophobic, or male dominant language is necessary from time to time. The shift from one concept to another, as means demonstrate that one concept is no longer socially acceptable has been analysed by Volosinov (1973, p. 19)

> It stands to reason, then, that the word is the most sensitive *index of social changes*, and what is more, of changes still in the process of growth, still without definitive shape and not as yet accommodated into already regularized(sic) and fully defined ideological systems. The word is the medium in which occur the slow quantitative accretions of those changes which have not yet achieved the status of a new

[25] Just a reminder of what *mise-en-scène is*, according to Sikov (2010, p.5) it means "[…] that which has been put into the scene" or "[…] the totality of expressive content within the image" (p.6).

> ideological quality, not yet produced a new and fully-fledged ideological form. The word has the capacity to register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change.

Volosinov indicates that words can be sensitive grounds, they are subjected to alterations in the way ideas are conveyed and they represent a documentation of social processes. An African-American person in English is *Black* but in Portuguese the preferred word has been *negro,* which is taboo in English. At the same time, there have been social changes in the understanding of *preto* (black) as perhaps a more suitable word instead of *negro,* which may be just hiding the complexities of racial prejudice in the politics correctness.

The same may be applied to the discussions revolving around disability. Some concepts project devaluation and the promotion of ableism. Words such as *cripple, retarded, mental retardation* are no longer acceptable. In English, Marta Russell (2019) understands that *disabled person* may better describe the situation of people who have been **made disabled** - and sometimes disposable - in an ableist capitalist society. The concept of *people with disabilities* has been rejected by disabled people and unions on the grounds that they do not *own* a disability, they are made disabled in this society. The combination of phrases such as 'suffers from' and 'confined to' are also to be avoided and replaced by simply "*has…"*.

Despite the limitations that the politics of correctness may have, we should not ignore that:

> […] Meaning is the expression of a semiotic relationship between a particular piece of reality and another kind of reality that it stands for, represents, or depicts. Meaning is a function of the sign and is therefore inconceivable […] outside the sign as some particular, independently existing thing. (VOLOSINOV, 1973, p. 28).

Thus, word choice may be offensive, and people should refrain from using those words that have been socially and historically banned. When they mean different things to different people, it is always a good idea to search for and be aware of the terminology used in that context. As it is not for men to decide what is best for women, it is not for white people to make decisions on aspects that concern black people, or non-disabled people to establish the linguistic norms for disabled people.

In that sense, the other two elements should be able to follow such social, historical, and linguistic changes. In fact, one example of how they might all be connected is how the South Korean *Silenced* (2011) raised awareness, called attention to a complex issue regarding the education of deaf children, and had a direct impact on the legislation of the

country (DIFFRIENT, 2017). Disablist discourse and imagery will only disappear if disabled people are integrated at all levels into the media, if they are seen as part and active members of our society.

I acknowledge the categories approached as representing the mediation between the so-called reality and cultural manifestations, concerning images of disabled people, their impairments, and the disabling phenomena. What is at stake now is how these images, and consequently the lives of disabled people, are determined, shaped, and influenced by their position in the social structure of classes in the capitalist society. This is my focus in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 - DISABILITY AND THE MAINSTREAM FILM INDUSTRY

Introduction

Considering the academic production on the relations between disability and representation (KRIEGEL, 1987; LONGMORE, 1987; BARNES, 1992), it is seemingly more productive to focus on Paul Darke's concept of *normality drama* in the macrostructure and seek to contribute to its expansion than to discuss disability, cinema, and representation as isolated elements in films. My main contribution to the area lies in this gap and in the emphasis given to the analysis of class condition.

In this chapter, four cinematographic productions of the mainstream film industry will be discussed, aiming to establish theoretical connections between disability and class condition, and to develop the concept of normality drama as a genre. I shall analyse, compare and contrast the films's contexts of production, their elements of content and form, and their use of non-disabled and disabled actors and actresses. My main argument to support the idea of a film genre that validates normality (DARKE, 1998) originates from the analysis of the structure of the narratives. Based on the categories listed by Wayne (2020, pp.139-141), I seek to demonstrate how films that might be classified as normality dramas follow six ideological narrative strategies:

1. Binary oppositions and their reconciliation;
2. Displacement;
3. Individualisation;
4. Redemption arcs;
5. Focalisation;
6. Closure.

We are going to discuss how these strategies come into place to build a narrative that aims to reproduce white, middle-class, male, non-disabled normality aligned with the ontological reproduction of the capital. My objective is to go beyond the analysis of representation and offer a *class-oriented ideology critique* of the films.

This chapter is structured as follows:

Case study 1 - The Other Sister
Case study 2 - The Shape of Water
Case study 3 - Radio
Case study 4 - Me Before You

I have selected films that had cast Hollywood stars, had portrayed cultural and historical stereotypes associated with disabled people - which seemed to validate abled bodies -, had been produced in the 1990's or in the 21st century, and belonged to the mainstream industrial and commercial filmmaking scenario. The films selected portray two female protagonists, one from the upper classes and one from the working classes, and two male protagonists, a black man, and a white man, respectively, from the working classes and from the upper classes. Other films previously discussed will also at times be used as comparison.

4.1 CASE STUDY 1 - MARSHALL, GARY. THE OTHER SISTER. 1994.

Mother: I'm telling you, that boy sees her as a rich girl.
Father: Well, she *is* a rich girl.

Plot

Carla is a 22-year-old young adult woman who spends her adolescence as an intern in a private special institution for disabled people. After her father takes her back home, she begins a journey against social disabling obstacles that hold her from an independent life. Carla has to prove to her overprotective mother that she may actually be able to take care of herself and build a life of her own. Elizabeth is determined to undo what she considers to be a mistake from the past, that is, having sent Carla to the institution. She repeatedly attempts to shape her according to what she believes to be the most adequate social rules, choosing her clothes, her future profession, her hobbies etc. Carla, in contrast, makes her way to a public school to study. In school, she meets Daniel and together they undergo a series of self-discovery moments until they fall in love with each other. Having Carla's sister's wedding as a background story, Carla and Daniel go against all odds to prove to others that they can get married and live together. Radley, her father, and her two sisters, Heather and Caroline, support their decision. At first, Elizabeth refuses to accept the idea, but she eventually realises that to support her daughter might be the best option. After their wedding, Danny surprises Carla with a marching band playing a song from The Music Man and they are chauffeured away to their honeymoon in Ernie's Mustang.

First Words

The Other Sister is a 1994 North American film directed by Garry Marshall (Pretty Woman, The Princess Diaries). The female cast of the film is formed by well-known Hollywood names, such as Diane Keaton, Sarah Paulson, and Juliette Lewis, who plays the main character (Table 8).

The $35-million-budget film is considered to be a box office bomb, not even hitting the $30-million mark in the USA and Canada. In general, it received mostly unfavourable and negative reviews, e.g., from the *Washington Post*[26], by Desson Howe in 1999, and audience reviews on

[26] Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/othersisterhowe.htm on May 25th 2020.

Rotten Tomatoes[27]. Lewis was even nominated for a *Golden Raspberry Award* for *Worst Supporting Actress*.

American film critic, Roger Ebert, in 1999, considered it to be a shameful and offensive portrait of intellectual disability, pointing that "[i]t treats the characters like cute little performing seals--who always deliver their "retarded" dialogue with perfect timing and an edge of irony and drama."[28]

Table 8 - The Other sister: main characters, characteristics, and actors

Character	Main characteristics	Actress/Actor
Carla Tate	Lead character. She is 22 years-old and spent her adolescence in a private special institution for people with disabilities.	Juliette Lewis
Elizabeth Tate	Carla's mother. She carries a strong feeling of regret for having sent her daughter to the special institution. She wants to make up for Carla now that she is back home.	Diane Keaton
Radley Tate	Carla's father. Former alcoholic, he supports his daughter due to the guilt he feels for not being with her during her adolescence.	Tom Skerritt
Heather Tate	Carla's oldest sister, she works in New York as a successful lawyer.	Sarah Paulson
Caroline tate	Carla's middle-sister. She works as a primary school teacher, fact that is frowned upon by her mother. The background story of the film is Caroline's weeding.	Poppy Montgomery
Daniel McMahon	He studies at Carla's new school and falls instantly in love with her. They develop a friendship that becomes a strong love relationship.	Giovanni Ribisi
Ernie	Daniel's friend and landlord. He is responsible for getting money from Daniel's bank account, paying his bills, and giving him the rest of the money.	Héctor Elizondo

Designed by the author.

Ebert is not at all far from the truth - anyone with any knowledge on intellectual disability would be able to argue that Carla's and Daniel's finely tuned and witty

[27] Retrieved from https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/other_sister on May 25th 2020.
[28] Retrieved from https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-other-sister-1999 on May 25th 2020.

dialogues with other characters are nothing but grotesque prejudice. The film attempts to raise the debate of inclusion, acceptance of differences and those outside the mainstream - even bringing the subplot of a lesbian sister, Heather (Sarah Paulson).

Another review, written by Rod Gustafson to the website *Parents Previews*, brings attention to the Tate family's class condition, arguing that "The Other Sister […] resorts to inappropriate comedy and conveniently sweeps any other obstacles under the Tate family's carpet of wealth. Buying a happy ending is popular in movies, but for those stuck in reality, the hard questions remain and the credits never roll."[29].

This article critically grasps a subtle trait of the film, the fact that Carla's and Daniel's lives are determined by the possibilities and limitations engendered in the core of their class. They were born in families that are part of society and we shall look this aspect into more detail in the next section.

On the other hand, we may also find some strangely positive audience reviews on *Rotten Tomatoes*, and I would like to comment some of these before we move on (Chart 1).

Chart 1 - Audiences's reviews of *The other Sister* on Rotten Tomatoes

One of the most pleasant movies made about the mentally retarded people. It had that 'celebration of life' kind of feeling to it. Every time I hear 'Animal Song' this movie just pops into my head. The video of the song was a perfect testimonial to this movie. Jan 15, 2011
Fantastic heart felt movie. A true depiction of the challenges of families who have a special needs child, who in turn desires to be treated as normal as possible. A must see movie for all. Aug 25, 2017
Such an awesome movie.... Feb 24, 2017
Very touching presentation of challenged people being seen for their real value, sense of justice and ability to love. Too bad the homosexual angle is introduced to try to equate the two, something intelligent people will see through right away. Aug 14, 2015

Designed by the author.

First, I believe it to be possible to understand why one would think this to be one *pleasant movie about the mentally retarded,* as the first comment indicates - it is a film that ignores most of the problems faced by real people in real, everyday life, thus, it is, in fact, far

[29] Retrieved from https://parentpreviews.com/movie-reviews/other-sister on May 25th 2020.

from a *true depiction*. The film follows the ideological line of the works directed by Marshall in which a street prostitute is hired to keep company to a millionaire who ends up falling in love with her (*Pretty Woman*) or the poor girl who suddenly finds herself heir to the throne of a tiny nonexistent European country (*The Princess Diary)*. The Other Sister attempts to construct a romantic image of intellectual disability and seems to ignore the complexities of their lives and the limitations their social class status may impose - we must question what kind of life is actually being *celebrated* in such films.

In this set of Marshall films cited, the three promote the reproduction of the happy ending - happy meaning **rich** (from prostitute to millionaire's wife, from poor plebeian to princess, from intern in a special institution to married and happily ever after). For a critical analysis, they ignore the impact of social class conditions on the construction of happiness in the capitalist system.

Secondly, what the film lacks in *content*, it also fails in *form*. There is nothing beautiful or extraordinary to be seen - it is equally poorly written, acted, and filmed.

Lastly, despite the criticism, there might be three reasons to watch it, (1) to contrast it to other films portraying intellectually disabled characters, (2) to discuss matters such as sexuality and the mother-daughter relationship, and (3) to critically reflect upon class conditioned determinations. The following sections demonstrate this in more detail.

The Other Sister and class condition

Elizabeth is the representation of a complex, recurrent social character when we approach the relationship between mothers and disability. She is a mother torn between regret and ignorance. She fails to understand her daughter’s potentials and limitations, and her overprotectiveness blinds her to the fact that Carla is not an eternal child. The initial abandonment triggers in the mother a process of self-blame and, consequently, of overprotection, which becomes the core of their relationship.

Elizabeth’s first reaction to the daughter’s condition comes at the 3:04 mark when we go into Radley’s memories. The combination of low-lighting and the projection of shadows in the scene help create an atmosphere of tension and disruption in the order of the story.

We are introduced to the Tate family all gathered at the table for dinner. The mother talks but we do not see her yet. The camera tilts, showing a moment of growing tension, and through a technique of shot/reverse shot, it captures, first, young Carla - in the foreground

- and her father - in the background, showing clear discomfort with the situation; secondly, the two sisters expressing a certain uneasiness with the fact that the mother is trying to teach Carla to eat with the fork.

Elizabeth emphasises the need to use the fork, even if she is eating peas, by repeatedly telling Carla to use it instead of the knife. Carla tries to eat with her hands, her mother loses control of the situation, gives up and says she will not eat the cake. In the background, the father rises from the table visibly shaken and with a glass of whiskey in his hands. Carla gets up and runs screaming and repeatedly slamming the door.

Low-lighting, dramatic music, the constant shot/reverse shot technique, and the position of the camera - sometimes at ankle height, then, cutting to waist, and finally capturing the two parents arguing - all come together to create the initial tension of the film. After leaving the table, Carla and her father move in opposite directions, toward dark spaces, as an expression of frustration, sadness, and emotional distancing. The camera moves quickly, shifting the focus from the father, to the sisters and to Carla, and, eventually, to the mother.

The inability to manipulate the fork is a demonstration that she may have difficulties adapting to some of the simplest aspects of everyday life. While the mother expresses a feeling of denial of the situation, represented by the abandonment - she wants to send Carla away to a special boarding institution - a process of denial and attenuation of the disability is triggered in Radley, expressed in his sentences:

(1) **Radley:** She is beautiful!

(2) **Radley:** Have you looked at her? She is gorgeous.

(3) **Radley:** I don't want her to be retarded.

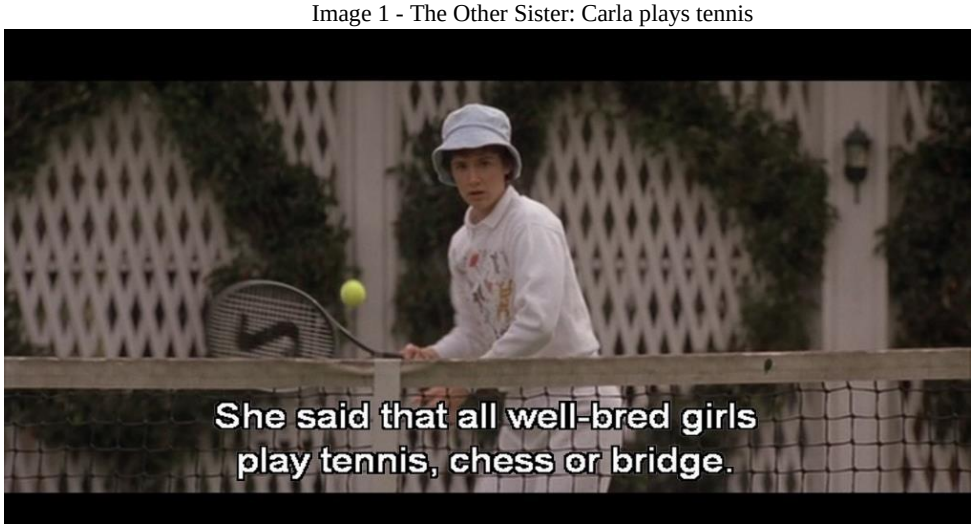
The first element established in this scene is the family’s class position. One character present is almost a shadow, the governess Winnie. Winnie's presence in the background throughout the film is a definitive mark of the Tate family's high social class. She reappears when Carla arrives back home from the institution, when she is supervising Carla’s tennis lessons, and during the Thanksgiving dinner.

Elizabeth embarks on a search for redemption, she is seeking self-forgiveness and blames herself for having sent her daughter to the institution. As previously mentioned, she is blind to the fact that Carla has developed her own personality. The process of overprotection makes her project on Carla her own desires, wishes, likes and dislikes, and preferences. She shifts the spotlight of the relationship to herself, completely ignoring Carla’s personality. She

assigns Carla with a set of activities, chooses her clothes, shoes, and tells her how she should or should not behave, according to what she considers to be more appropriate to Carla and according to the social rules dictated by their class position.

When playing tennis, Winne's message to Carla is that she must continue playing it even if she does not like it because **all well-bred** girls play tennis, chess, or bridge - the three games indicate a hallmark of their class. It is at least curious that, out of the three, Carla was assigned to play tennis. The fact that chess and bridge might be considered challenging games of the mind may indicate the reproduction of the ineducability stigma, printed on people with intellectual disability. It is not clear that Carla was designated to play tennis *because of* her condition, but the argument is strengthened when Carla says: "did you tell her I don't like tennis still?" (Image 1).

Image 1 - The Other Sister: Carla plays tennis



Source: Marshall, 1994.

Winnie reappears during the Thanksgiving lunch, she goes almost unnoticed, pouring wine, smiling in the background, as if she were part of the family (Image 2).

Image 2 - The Other Sister: Winnie in the background

Source: Marshall, 1994.

Winnie's presence in the background throughout the film is a definitive mark of the Tate family's high social class and, therefore, of the possibilities opened up to Carla. As a confirmation of this condition, during a dialogue between Elizabeth and Radley, he makes it clear that Carla belongs to a wealthy family.

Elizabeth: I'm telling you, that boy sees her as a rich girl.
Radley*:* Well, she *is* a rich girl.

This passage leaves no space for doubt in regard to Carla's position in the class structure. It is important to highlight that, for this analysis, the economic factor is the background and imposes determinations on people's living conditions. This means that, although I do not argue against the idea that Carla does have social limitations and barriers imposed on her, it is undeniable that her disability condition is attenuated by her class condition. The options Carla says she wants to consider (having an apartment, going to school without having to ride a bus or bike, going to college in a country where higher education is expensive) are only *options to consider* because of her social class status.

In other words, social class condition is a factor that directly impacts the possibilities and limitations in both Carla's and Daniel's lives. We are not aware of exactly how rich Carla's family is, but some of these elements give evidence that their financial condition is the smallest of the family's problems.

Carla and Daniel behaviour imprints on the audience a representation of innocence and projects a feeling of pity for both of them. Their images are contrasted to the mother, who is portrayed as hard and insensitive.

The idea that Elizabeth is ignoring Carla's personality is also supported by a situation in a clothing store, at the 13:00 mark.

By telling the salesman "those are not what **we** want", Elizabeth ignores Carla's personality and decides what the daughter should or should not wear, despite Carla's clear preference for the red shoe and the high-heels. One may argue that the situation could have happened between Elizabeth and her other daughters, which is possibility true; however, in Carla's case her disability intensifies Elizabeth's overprotection and authority (Image 3).

Image 3 - The Other Sister: Carla and Elizabeth at the shopping mall

Source: Marshall, 1994.

Powerless before her mother, Carla runs away from home, back to the institution. Both parents go to the special institution to pick her up and talk to the principal, who indicates that Elizabeth is suffocating her daughter.

The principal makes an effort to show both parents that Carla has potential, mainly by problematising the fact that Elizabeth is making her daughter's choices. At this point, the film leads the discourse towards the potentialities of people with intellectual disabilities. They must go to school, make their own choices, run the risk of failure, and success like other individual. Thus, being recognised as *humans beyond their condition*.

The period that Carla spends at the institution is not presented in the movie. The viewer is only aware of the institution through a few specific moments, Carla's reports and an analysis of subjective elements.

The first scene we are able to perceive the subtle depiction of the special institution is the one of lunch in celebration of Carla’s return home. The fork manipulation scene can be contrasted with the earlier dinner scene discussed above. The dinner episode is followed by a discussion between mother and father about sending Carla to a boarding school for people with intellectual disabilities. After spending years in the boarding school, Carla returns home. At a family lunch, after Carla's arrival, where the sisters have graduated from college, they already live alone in other cities and one of them is discussing her wedding, with the camera at the eye-level, Carla, subtly and unnoticed, uses cutlery to eat chickpeas (Image 4).

Image 4 - The Other Sister: Carla having lunch at home

Source: Marshall, 1994.

The camera focuses on Carla's hands, who gently selects the beans and places them on the fork. Bringing the fork to her mouth, Carla's eyes move from side to side, expecting to be noticed. This is Carla’s way of demonstrating that she is now in control of everyday life. In contrast to the dinner scene, lunch is held in a bright space, to lighten the mood, with the camera almost fixed, without much movement and without background music. Using the fork is Carla's first step in the process of attempting to build her personal identity and independence. At the same time, Carla's simple control over the fork is contrasted with one sister's professional success and the other's marriage to a promising doctoral student.

The scene and its sequences demonstrate ambiguity in the function, possibilities, and limits of total institutions. Carla remained in segregation in the total institution for most of her life, deprived of living with her family. On the one hand, the film builds the image of the special institution as the space that shaped Carla for the triviality of everyday life.

On the other hand, it represents Carla's independence-building process, as pointed out in the principal's speech, who advocates in favour of Carla's independence.

The image that the film builds is that the special institution is the most suitable space for any child with intellectual disabilities, as if in the institution children could learn to live socially, and would be educated and prepared to live their lives. This perspective contrasts to the most comprehensive analyses of special institutions. Goffman (2015), for instance, indicates that total institutions are social spaces where experiments with what to do with socially unwanted ones are carried out. In his research, the author reveals that in most institutions, inmates will not have their capacities enhanced, but curtailed, even if they officially defend the discourse of education, instruction, and individual freedom, as “it is generally recognised that total institutions are often far from their official objectives” (GOFFMAN, 2015, p. 77). Goffman's (2015) analysis points more to the erasure of the self than to the construction of their individuality, in which they do not choose clothes, haircuts, eating, sleeping or bathing times.

Carla also talks, during a sex-talk with her mother, about the teachers of the institution (Image 5).

Image 5 - The Other Sister: Mrs. Matthews

Source: Marshall, 1994.

Carla reveals to her mother that the Health Education teacher was also the cafeteria monitor. The indication goes unnoticed by the mother and, certainly, by the majority of the public, but reveals a characteristic of the institutions that work with a small team that performs multiple functions, not always, therefore, working in the area of their professional competence (GOFFMAN, 2015).

Carla does not seem to understand the special institution as a school, whereas for her mother it seems to have been the closest to a school that her daughter would attend. The

mother's remark stating that “they even gave you a certificate” may indicate that for her, despite carrying no academic value, this would be the only certificate Carla would have. The analysis gains support in the mother's subsequent actions by placing her in handwriting, origami, tennis lessons - all classed-driven activities - which reproduce the stigma of the person with intellectual disability as unable to learn and produce, and therefore to engage in activities socially considered less elaborate and complex and not academic.

Following her parents' conversation with the principal of the special institution, Carla enrols in a Technical High School, where she attends a Vocational Computer course - despite her mother’s protest against the fact that her daughter is going to attend a public polytechnic school. During the registration, through shot/reverse shot technique and eye-line match, Carla has her first encounter with Daniel (Images 6)

Image 6 - The Other Sister: shot/reverse shot

Source: Marshall, 1994.

Carla's instant identification with Daniel reproduces the social stigma that an individual’s condition puts him in natural identification with another individual, just because they share the same condition of disability. Stigma ignores the subject's personality and erases his individualities and personal interests (GOFFMAN, 1963).

The moment when Carla and Daniel exchange glances is part of her sexual development process. The sexuality of people with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, is still a social taboo, although it is not “qualitatively different from others” (GLAT, 1992, p. 66). There are four main situations that represent the person with intellectual disability with sexual desires like any other.

The first situation is at lunch in celebration of Carla's return home, when she asks Caroline and her fiancé, "Have you two done that yet?” Carla's question is severely scolded by her mother, who indicates that sex is something to do after marriage and never to talk about. Sex in her case is a territory marked by class and religion. The mother, at this point, seems to be unaware that Carla is a 22-year-old girl who has already been interested in, or will eventually

be interested in, the subject. Thus, once she starts attending the lessons in the school, she observes and attempts to reproduce the behaviour of her classmate (Image 7).

Image 7 - The Other Sister: Carla imitating her classmate

Source: Marshall, 1994.

During one of the classes, one of Carla's classmates, in a very sensual way, showing her belly, praises the teacher's class and asks if he gives private lessons ("Do you give private lessons?"). At home, Carla looks herself in the mirror and tries to reproduce her friend's behaviour. The passage is apparently not an indication that Carla is interested in the teacher, but it is actually a way a portraying Carla as a woman who is developing herself socially and biologically.

In a third moment, Carla and her mother talk about sex during a walk in the park, before Carla has her own apartment. The mother is concerned that the girl might receive strange men at home and that they might take advantage of her. Carla indicates that she knows all about sex and her mother says that she actually knows all about reproduction. Carla says that Ms. Matthews, a health education teacher and the cafeteria monitor of the special institution, explained what coitus was and the associated biological functions. The teacher also explained that "boys can try to take advantage of people like" Carla.

The film portrays, albeit briefly and comically, a cruel reality towards people with disabilities, sexual violence. In addition to being vulnerable to other types of violence, people with disabilities are even more exposed and susceptible to sexual violence.

Carla and Daniel's relationship also opens up the analysis to Daniel's life story, to his jobs, and schooling process. At some point in the film, feeling frustrated, he talks to his friend, Ernie about his schooling process:

I went... I went to a regular school. I went for a long, long, long time. [...] I finally quit when I grew a moustache... 'cause I looked older than the teachers.

Daniel clarifies that his schooling process in the regular school resulted in a succession of failures - despite his class condition -, until he looked older than the teachers and decided to leave the regular school and attend the vocational course. Daniel's narrative mingles with the reality of many students from Brazilian schools, as indicated by Meletti and Ribeiro (2014, p. 186). The authors argument that although the educational system claims to be inclusive the analyses of their schooling processes proves otherwise, it reveals segregation, retention in the same grades for years, and lack of professional development of the teachers.

Daniel is the representation that it is illusory to believe that the dialectical relationship between inclusion and exclusion can be resolved only with access to school. Ferraro and Ross (2017, p. 22) indicate that “the biggest challenge is within the school, in the process of schooling itself, that is, in the need to overcome the logic of exclusion that still reigns in the very functioning of the school.” Despite being in school, Daniel makes it clear that he is actually invisible (Image 8).

Image 8 - The Other Sister: The exclusion of inclusion

Source: Marshall, 1994.

Daniel understands that his condition makes him invisible to others, who would rather purposefully ignore his presence. He represents the invisibility of the intellectually disabled person disabilities (“they never, ever talk to me”) (Image 9). He becomes aware of the stigma he carries first due to the isolation within the regular school - *exclusion in inclusion* - and later upon realising himself older than the teachers themselves. For Carla, the discovery of

the process of stigmatisation of her condition still occurs at home, when she is forced to attend a school for people like her, as she reports in one of the dialogues with her mother.

As in educational spaces, the labour market is a fundamental space for social participation for disabled and non-disabled people and this brings us back to the question of class. For people with intellectual disabilities, the labour market brings self-recognition, the possibility of financial independence, social participation, interaction and bond building, at the same time these possibilities are also class determined.

Daniel has two jobs, one in a university band and the other as a pastry chef in a bakery. According to Daniel, in the band he only gets the remains of the marshmallows that are thrown in the tubas during the games in which the band plays. In the other, he gets $350, which is not even enough to pay his $ 500 rent. Daniel, like Carla, needs parental help to pay the bills. Daniel's jobs reproduce the reality of several people with intellectual disabilities, who perform unpaid work which require little or no qualification, only to engage and release others to work, an aspect imposed on disabled people that I have approached in Chapter 1.

In this sense, further discussions are needed on the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the labor market and on the process of professionalisation of this population.

The film in general presents people with intellectual disabilities as potentially capable of taking care of themselves, studying and working. This comes, however, always with adaptations and class-conditioned determinations (Image 9).

Image 9 - The Other Sister: Carla's process of independence

Source: Marshall, 1994.

The three moments presented in Image 10 indicate Carla's process of independence. In the first scene, the camera focuses on a list of tasks that Carla has to perform

before leaving the house, those are turning off the stove, turning off the water, flushing the toilet, turning off the lights, feeding the fish, and locking the door. The list could be on the exit door of any young woman living alone for the first time. At the same time, it is the representation that small daily adaptations can give independence to the person with intellectual disability. Carla indicates this position by stating that she is no longer a baby, that she wants to marry Daniel and that they can take care of each other, after her mother says that he would not be able to take care of Carla.

In addition to passing the subjects of the vocational course at the regular school, the change in the mother's attitude towards Carla also indicates the defense of the learning potential of the intellectually disabled person (Image 10).

Image 10 - The Other Sister: Elizabeth invites Carla to discuss art

Source: Marshall, 1994.

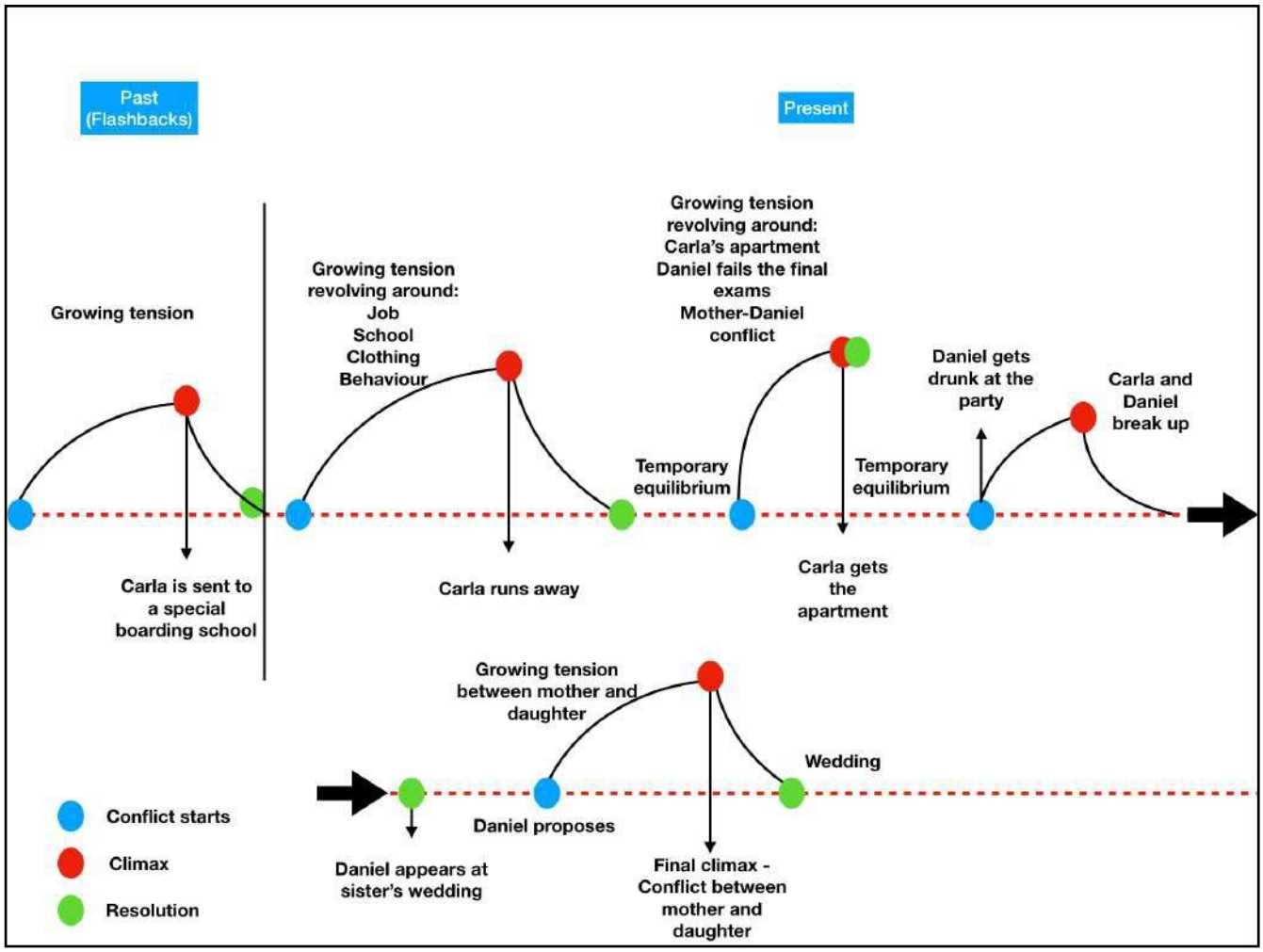
The previous sequence of plans reveals a change in the mother's attitude towards Carla. Elizabeth carries a set of art books to give to Carla select some paintings for them to discuss. The passage may indicate the defense of Carla's potential for develop critical-reflexive thinking and, therefore, a break in the belief of the ineducability of the person with intellectual disability.

Final words

The film is shaped and dimensioned by class. Elizabeth aims to shape the daughter according to the social norms of their class - playing tennis, wearing certain kind of shoes and clothes, attending origami and calligraphy class, and studying art. Carla must fit the model imposed on her not only by capitalist society in general, in terms of everyday life

adaptation, but she must also bend to the values of her class and follow its social class codes. The film follows a sequence of conflict-resolution (and final redemption) situations (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Conflict-resolution analysis in The Other Sister



Designed by the author.

The overprotective mother is not an exclusive trait of higher classes and it may also be found in other films that explore the relationship between mothers and disabled sons and daughters, such as *The Fundamentals of Caring* (ROB BURNETT, 2016), *Justine* (Stephanie Turner, 2019), and the one we are going to discuss in Chapter 5 in depth, *37 seconds.* This relationship, however, will be directly determined by class - whether the mother spends more or less time with their sons and daughters, whether they have enough money to pay for a caretaker or not, or if the mother will have to give up everything to care for her son/daughter.

Carla is sent to a special institution until her mother feels prepared to take her back. Justine's mother and father, who are working-class parents, hire a caretaker and a private teacher, so does Trevor's mother in *The fundamentals of caring*. Yuma's mother, on the other

hand, in *37 seconds*, lives her life in abdication. We could say that all these mothers are overprotective in a way or another, they fear for the health and security of their children. The way this feeling manifests itself, however, is different and follows codes, meanings, symbols, and determinations imposed by class. In other words, not only is the future of these children class-determined, but also their relationships with their mothers, what is expected of them, and where they may get to in life.

4.2 CASE STUDY 2 - DEL TORO, GUILLERMO. THE SHAPE OF WATER. 2017

Unable to perceive the shape of you,
I find you all around me.
Your presence fills my eyes with your love.
It humbles my heart,
for you are everywhere.

Adapted from Hakim Sanai[30]

Plot

Elisa Esposito works as part of the cleaning staff of a secret governmental American research facility in the 1960's. Her life is based on a simple routine and is surrounded by her two friends, Giles, her neighbour, and Zelda, her coworker. The facility is hosting a new asset, an amphibian creature that was captured in the depths of the Amazon forest by Colonel Richard Strickland. The monster is under Strickland's supervision to be studied by the research team led by Dr. Robert Hoffstetler, who turns out to be a Russian spy in disguise. Elisa and Zelda are put in charge of cleaning the room where the monster is being kept. Unable to control her curiosity, Elisa, who is mute and communicates using sign language, manages to attract the creature's attention with music, eggs, and sign language. They build a relationship that is threatened by Strickland's obsession to kill and dissect the amphibian. Elisa, Giles, Zelda, and Hoffstetler design a plan and successfully steal the so-called monster. As their relationship strengthens, Elisa dreads the day she will have to unleash him to the sea. Strickland finds out that they were the ones who had taken his monster and in a desperate attempt to prevent them from taking him to the sea, he shoots and kills Dimitri (Dr. Hoffstetler) and shoots Elisa and the amphibian. Using his healing abilities, the amphibian man rises up, kills Strickland, and dives into the water with Elisa, healing her bullet wounds and the scars she had in her neck. She is then able to breathe underwater. The film ends in a scene that suggests that they lived happily-ever-after.

First words

The Shape of Water is a feature-film co-produced, co-written and **directed** by Guillermo Del Toro and **distributed** by *Fox Searchlight Pictures,* with a considered-low[31] budget of $20 million dollars, at least for a blockbuster, and a $195.3 million **box office** so far.

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[30] This poem appears in the last scene of the film, narrated by Richard Jenkins - who plays Giles, Elisa's neighbour and friend. It is an adaptation of an Islamic poem written by Hakim Sanai in the 12th century as a prayer to Allah. It is published in *The Book of Everything: Journey of the Heart's Desire*. The original poem is the following: "Unable to discern the form of You, / I see Your presence all around. / Filling my eyes with the love of You, / my heart is humbled / for You are everywhere." (SANAI, 2002, n.p.)

[31] https://www.indiewire.com/2018/02/guillermo-del-toro-shape-of-water-budget-savings-1201926201/
https://www.marketwatch.com/story/how-the-shape-of-water-was-made-for-just-20-million-2017-11-29

The film **stars** Sally Hawkins (*Submarine*, 2010; *Blue Jasmine*, 2013), as the protagonist Elisa, and Michael Shannon (*Revolutionary Road*, 2008; *Nocturnal Animals*, 2016) in the role of the antagonist, Strickland. According to Del Toro, these characters were respectively designed for Hawkins and Shannon. On his part, Shannon has created a persona - this strong, will-driven male character - who has been often seen in his performances. As for Hawkins, she was casted, firstly, because of her outstanding ability to interact with other actors in the scene, in the director's words, "[m]ost people think an actor delivers great lines. An actor listens. An actor looks. Sally does all those things. And I wanted their love to not be through talking"[32]. Secondly, because Del Toro wanted an actress who audiences could actually imagine meeting on the bus, having as a neighbour, and seeing as a cleaning lady: beautiful but not Hollywood beauty. Other famous stars casted are Octavia Spencer (Zelda) Richard Jenkins (Giles), and Michael Stuhlbarg (Robert Hoffstetler / Dimitri Mosenkov). Also, known for his roles as non-human figures and casted for almost all of Del Toro's films, Doug Jones (the Amphibian Man).

Concerning **genre**, *The Shape of Water* is a rather flexible film. It harbours romantic, dramatic, and *thrilleresque* themes as well as being a fantasy film. In terms of **content**, I would say that, as we are going to see below, it follows a historical pattern when portraying a disabled character, despite its non-conservative line of thought when dealing with class condition, sexual orientation, racial issues, and chauvinism. As for **form**, the film projects a visually and emotionally absorbing cinematography that combines with its objective to create a romantic story between a monster and a disabled woman. It plays with shades and hues, lighting, and camera movement, described in more detail in the next section, which is a trait that contrasts to traditional disability-focused films - but as Marx would say "form is of no value unless it is the form of its content" (Eagleton, 1976, p. 20).

Discussion - general themes

Muteness is a rare impairment, it is usually a condition associated with deafness, autism, intellectual disability or pathological levels of anxiety (known as selective muteness) rather than a physical inability to speak. It may also be the consequence of an accident such as the case of Leo (Alexander Skarsgård) in in the neo-noir science fiction film *Mute* (2018). So, in *The Shape of Water*, we are actually dealing with a social condition that is

[32] https://www.vulture.com/2017/11/how-guillermo-del-toro-cast-sally-hawkins-in-shape-of-water.html

in general rather different from other cases of impairment or disability. Nonetheless, I have decided to discuss this film because of some of its peculiarities and the director's portrait of the disabled person as part of the working class - it is not a far-reaching perspective, but Guillermo Del Toro's Oscar-winning production certainly carries some controversial yet worth-discussing elements.

The film was not only awarded four Oscars[33], but also the *Leone d'Oro*, Venice Film Festival's highest prize, the BAFTA[34] Award for Best Direction, the Critics' Choice Award, The Golden Globe, and many others. The awards indicate the impact of the film on the audiences and highlight elements of directing, cinematography, mise-en-scène, lighting, and sound which I will attempt to bring together in my analysis.

The Shape of Water is a film full of references, but the inability to identify those in the film may not compromise the understanding of the director's main message: love may take many forms. None of those references will directly affect the outcome but they might have an impact on how one relates to the film. The idea may sound cliché, and the love between a monster and a woman is not original, but, for some, the film's form and composition tend to make up for it - *de gustibus non est disputandum*.

One of the most obvious references is to *Creature from the Black Lagoon* a 1954-monster film directed by Jack Arnold. The creature also resembles *Hellboy*'s friend Abraham Sapien a character created by Mike Mignola and which appears in the two films also directed by Del Toro (*Hellboy,* 2004 and *Hellboy II: the Golden Army,* 2008).

The love story between the monster and the woman is also the plot of many widely known stories such as *The Beauty and The Beast*, *King Kong*, and even *Frankenstein* and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (directed by Francis Coppola, 1992). It may be argued that the main difference between these stories and the one written by Del Toro is that the so-called monster does not have to transform to be loved, following a recent tendency that is also the plot of *Shrek* (Andrew Adamson, Vicky Jenson, 2001) and *Splash* (Ron Howard, 1984). This, however, is controversial.

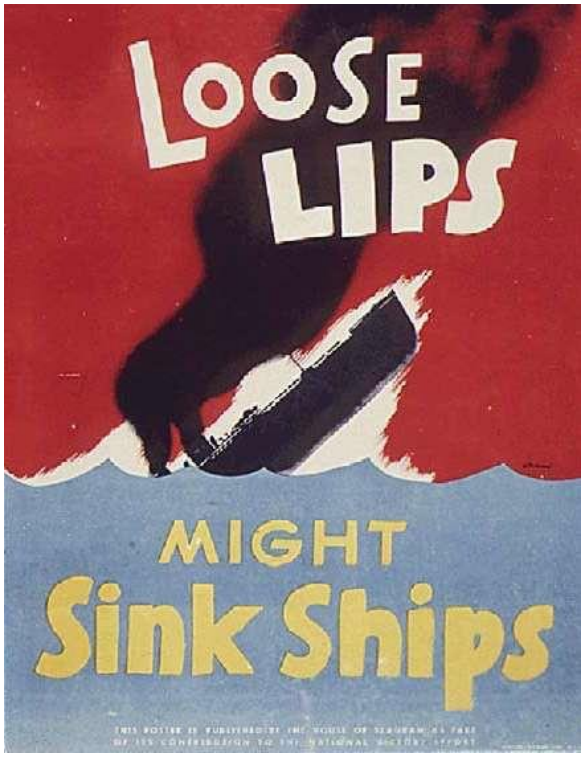
There is also a clear reference to the dance scene performed by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in *Follow the Fleet* (Mark Sandrich, 1936). At the 1:39:09 mark, the lights go off and focus on Elisa. She starts to sing *You'll Never Know* - which is a rather odd moment considering her disability - and the scene slightly fades to a black-and-white tone. The scene

[33] Best Picture, Best Directing, Best Music (Original Score), Best Production Design.
[34] British Academy of Film and Television Arts

cuts as she sings and we are suddenly at the same set as the one we see when Fred sings *Let's Face the Music and Dance*.

The film is also full of historical references, some are very subtle, such as the one to the atrocities during the protests of the Civil Rights Movement in Giles's TV and the World War II propaganda in the lockers of the lady's changing room (Image 11).

Image 11 - The Shape of Water: World War II Propaganda



Source: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficheiro:Loose_lips_might_sink_ships.jpg

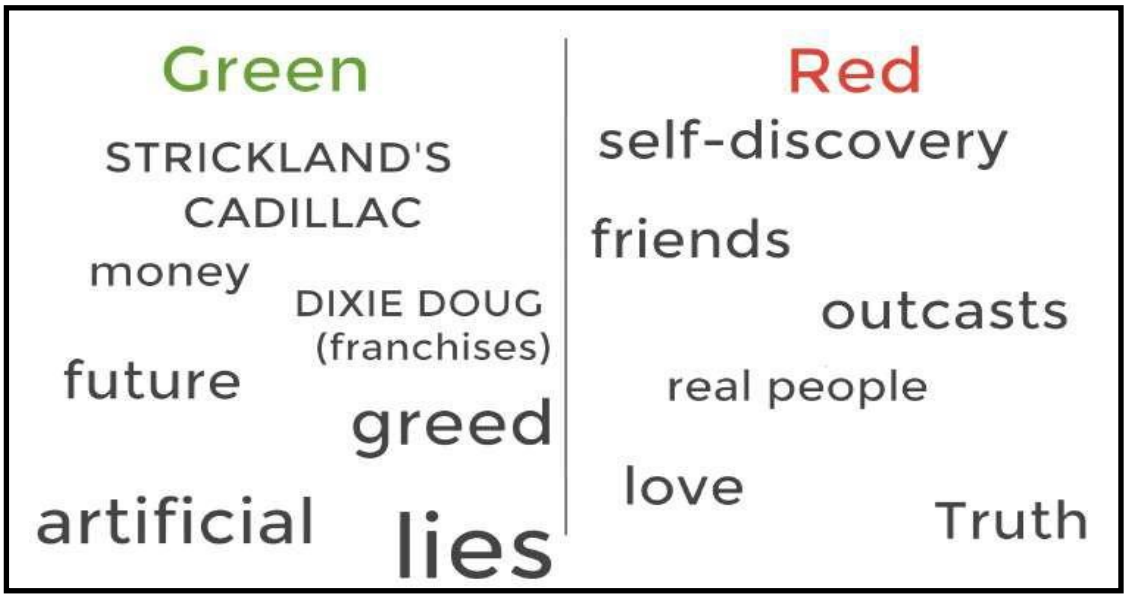
The reference to the American Way of Life is perhaps the most explicit. The perfect American family is embodied in Strickland. He is the representation of the dominant alpha white male and is the contrast to the outcasts of the film, Elisa (woman and mute), Zelda (woman and black), Giles (old and gay), and the amphibian man (the monster). The outsiders, in fact, all belong to the same category under Strickland's eyes, they are not just all outsiders in his world but also a little less than the human he is. This idea, for instance, is expressed when he tells Zelda that God is more like him than her. At the same time, he also expresses the falling of authoritarian masculinity when a mute woman, a black woman, an old gay man, and a Russian researcher steal the asset right under his eyes.

This element may be well perceived in his subplot with Zelda. Elisa's friend and coworker is a black, working-class woman who is part of the cleaning staff of a secret

government laboratory in Baltimore, Maryland in 1962. Her biblical middle name, Delilah, triggers a subplot that engages two opposing forces - Samson (Strickland) and Delilah (Zelda) - which take turns between moments of strength and weakness.

Del Toro's beautiful cinematography and composition make it clear that this is a film of contrasts - even if the audience is unaware of it. *Form*, here expressed in the composition and mise-en-scène, mediates the meaning-making process as well as their dialectics with historical elements, creating a combination of *form* and *content* (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - The Shape of Water: Symbolism in the use of Green and Red



Source: Designed by the author.

One example of how the shades of green are used in the film comes at the 11:28 mark, when Elisa approaches the tube full of green-coloured water where the asset is being kept; there are at least five hues of green in the shot. The film calls upon very vivid colours that contrast to its deep shadowy cinematography, a hallmark of Del Toro's style (last seen in *Pan's Labyrinth*, 2006) and the shades of red, green, and yellow in the shot resemble the brushstrokes of a painter. The use of multiple hues of green and blue green (teal, light and dark green, avocado, etc.) projects an atmosphere of formality, deception, and fraud. In the film, green conveys lies. As the subplots evolve and each one either approaches or reaches its own climax, their colours change to hues of red; red meaning truth. We shall look into details Giles's case as an example.

From the very beginning we know that Giles is the narrator and a character. He is introduced to us as Elisa's friend and neighbour who is working on an advertising

campaign as an illustrator. Giles is fond of a franchising pie shop, *Dixie Doug's*, not because of the quality of the pies rather because he is in love with the owner of the shop. He comes in the shop with Elisa and orders two lime pies. During their short talk, the pie guy explains to Giles that his store is part of a franchise and how the system actually works - *They give us the spinners, the signage- that there's "Pie Boy" our mascot I don't really talk that way, I'm from Ottawa.* The composition of the colours of the scene - in hues of green, including Giles's pie - points towards a representation of the future or a changing society that is based on mass-produced commodities, falseness, and commodification.

The scene cuts and Giles and Elisa are in his apartment eating the pies and watching TV. The dessert turns out to taste horrible and Giles takes his and Elisa's to the fridge, saving it for later. The camera approaches and shows that all of the shelves in his fridge are full with twelve half-eaten lime pies. There is one red jar on the back of the second shelf, surrounded by green pies, which may be implying Giles's truth being kept hidden behind lies, after all, he has created a false relationship with this man - always surround by green.

Giles's life is also affected by technology as we find out that he has been fired from his last job (the reason is unclear but it is probably related to age, sexuality, the fact that illustrations are being replaced by photography, and maybe even a drinking addiction). He hand paints a magazine advertisement for a campaign and when presenting the result to his client (ex-boss), he is told that he should change the colour of the jello in the centre of the picture from red to green - *green is the future now* - his boss says, it again indicates old life being replaced by the new life - truth *versus* lies, old *versus* new, employees *versus* freelancers who are disposable, reusable, and who have to bend to the will of the market to survive.

At the 49:30 mark, after his ex-boss rejects his ideas, Giles goes to the pie shop and gets a free pie from his platonic love - no longer the lime flavoured but a red one. The red pie anticipates a moment of *truth* in which Giles opens up to the man about his feelings. Giles, however, is severely rejected by the attendant and scorned out of the store with a black couple who had just come in. The scene carries an ideological meaning that is representative of the historical moment, but which has roots still in 2020. The rejection engenders a process of self-clarification in Giles as he removes the wig and goes back to Elisa to make peace with her, and with himself.

Strickland, as the antagonist, devours green in his new Cadillac, in his cheap candy, in his house, in his perfect American fake family. Even when he is sitting in his office, reading a book called *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale (1:00:21) -

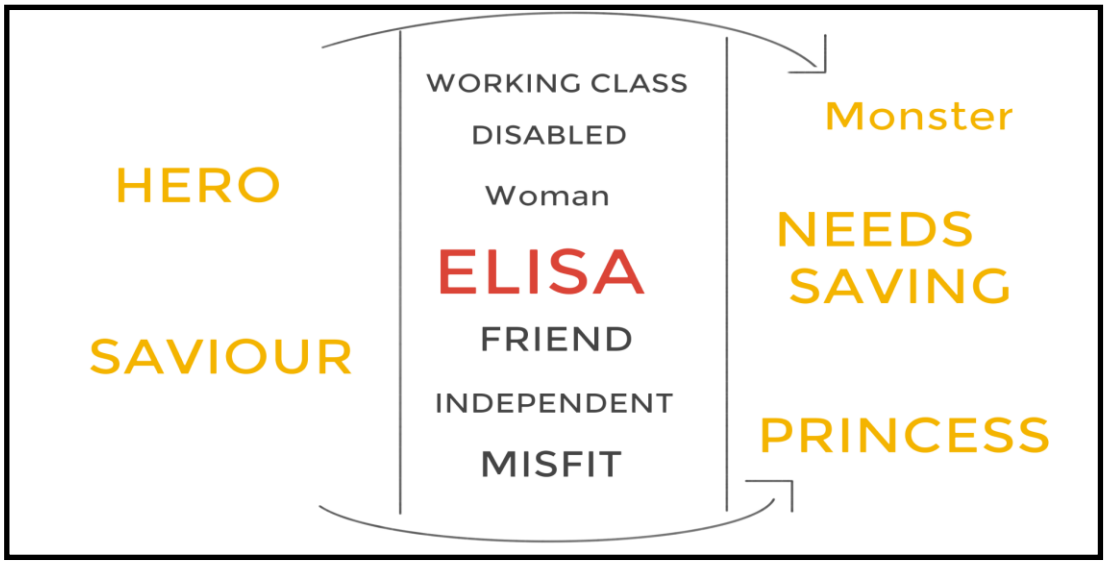
also with a green cover - he seems to embrace the superficial, the life focused on appearances, a life that is lived in capitalism by the middle-class[35]. Thus, green represents the artificial in the jello, in the pie, in the book, in the car and red is the contrast to all that.

In summary, as a fan would expect from Del Toro, the film is indeed a beautiful composition of colours, contrasts and shades, camera movements, lighting, and soundtracks that hoist up and seduce the audience from beginning to middle, at least up to the point when Elisa falls in love with the monster.

Elisa, from Hero to Little Princess

As we have seen, the film critically approaches delicate social issues such as racism, homophobia, chauvinism, and sexism. It also mediates and documents the transformations undergone in the 1960's American society (Hobsbawm, 1995). There is, however, a contradiction when we look into detail at Elisa's relationship with the monster. I suggest two main possible lines of interpretation which dependent on the development of Elisa's relationship with the amphibian monster (Figure 3).

Figure 3 - The Shape of Water: Elisa's process of redemption and self-discovery



Source: Designed by the author.

[35] Other examples of the hypocrisy and artificiality of the middle-class may be found in *The Stepford Wives* (Frank Oz, 2004) and *The Help* (Tate Taylor, 2011) and many others.

Elisa is portrayed as a **sweet innocent,** someone who is“ […] almost implausibly humble, gentle, and perpetually cheerful despite having a disability.” (BENSHOFF; GRIFFIN, 2009, p. 754). In the very beginning, the scenes that establish her routines project her as a character who delights herself on the small things in life - no doubt a characteristic that attracts audiences. From the 3-minute mark to 00:06:54, we are introduced to her routine. She wakes up at 22:45 to the sound of her alarm and in the background sounds we hear firetruck sirens fading and the voices in the film rolling in the cinema downstairs[36]. She fills up her bathtub with warm water, leaves eggs boiling in the stove, sets her stopwatch for about seven minutes, and masturbates in the bathtub. The scene then cuts to a close-up on her wall clock showing 10:55 pm and the camera moves down to her ripping a leaf from a wall calendar and reading on the back of the leaf: “Time is but a river flowing from our past”, this is an idea we will go back to later. She chooses her shoes out of a shelf with dozens of pairs and delicately shines them. She separates her food and sets up a plate for her friend and neighbour, Giles. Elisa leaves her apartment, goes to Giles’s where they watch a scene from *The Little Colonel* with Shirley Temple and Bojangles tap dancing on the stairs. She leaves Giles’s apartment to a corridor with falling-apart wallpaper, with her paper sandwich bag in the one hand and the keys on the other, she stops for a second to tap dance on the corridor and then finally reaches a red door and exits - a moment that is reminiscent of Amélie Poulain rejoicing over those small precious moments in life.

This routine will repeat itself throughout the film and the perfomance given by Sally Hawkins in this establishing scene contributes to the construction of the character as a person who follows a strict schedule and organisation of her daily routine, as a sexually active person, but still a as sweet innocent. So, Elisa is, on one hand, an independent, working-class, sexually active woman, on the other hand, her attitudes and manners are somehow childish. The message of this working-class, disabled woman who feels raged because a creature is being mistreated at a top-secret government research facility, and plots with her misfit friends to rescue it sounds progressive, - if it were not for the fact that she falls in love with it.

Elisa had all the potential to be the *saviour*, the *hero*, from beginning to end. Despite her depiction as a sweet innocent, she could have undergone a process of self-discovery and redemption and could have reemerged as the film’s hero. One could argue that she actually did, but I would like to suggest otherwise.

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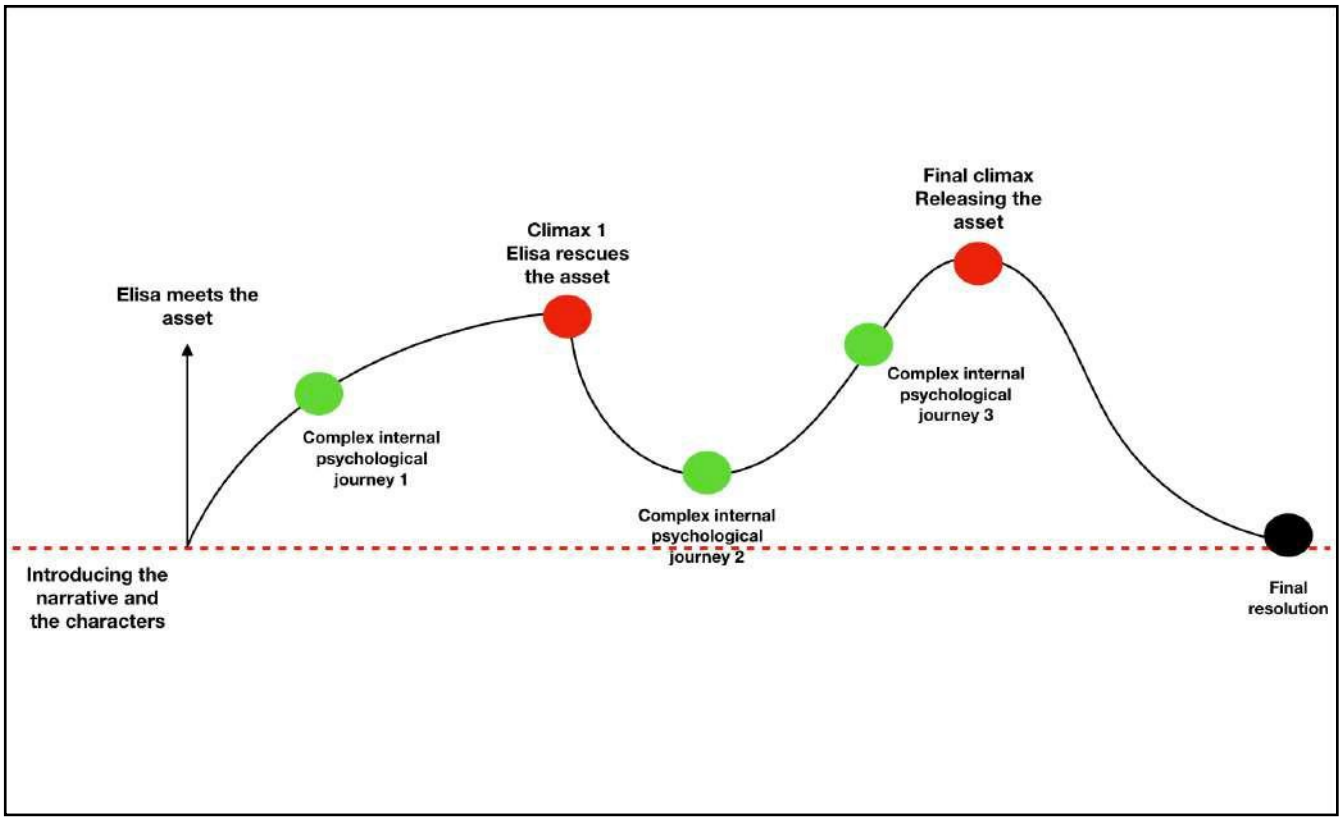
[36] Elgin Theatre, in Toronto.

She faces three moments of complex internal psychological journeys: (1) moments before designing the plan to rescue the monster, (2) having the monster at home, and (3) moments after releasing the monster (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - The Shape of Water: Elisa's moments of complex internal psychological journeys



Source: Designed by the author.

In Chapter 3, I have approached the connections between disability, monstrosity, and evil in the film history. The message that comes across in *The Shape of Water* is that disability and love are such a rare combination that a disabled person should just accept whatever is "thrown at them" even if it is a monster. I understand that this was not the original intention, that Del Toro's idea was to indicate that love, like water, takes many forms - and we may indicate here the role of culture as a conductor of some universal values (refer yourself back to Chapter 2). Disabled audiences, however, do not perceive it that way, as we will see, neither does the film allow critical audiences to ignore some symbols used to bring the two characters together, such as the disability itself.

One of the scenes in which this idea is highlighted comes at the 45:08 mark, after Elisa finds out that Strickland wants to kill and dissect the creature and before Giles's

project is declined. The scene is an explosion of golden shades that appear in moments of exasperation, passion, or excitement - the other two examples would be when Strickland mechanically has sex with his wife thinking of Elisa, and when Elisa and the amphibian man have sex in the flooded bathroom.

Another example is a conversation between Giles and Elisa in his apartment, when she tells him that she wants to rescue the monster from the facility. Giles is wearing his wig and getting dressed, wearing in his best suit, for a job meeting. As he is leaving the room ignoring her idea, she runs in front of him, stops him, and demands him to translate her signs.

> "What am I? I move my mouth, like him, I make no sound, like him. What does that make me? All that I am, all that I have ever been brought me here to him." […]

She hits him and pushes him violently towards her and continues:

> "When he looks at me, the way he looks at me. He doesn't know what I lack... Or how I am incomplete. He sees me for what I am. As I am. He is happy to see me, every time. Every day. And now I can either save him or let him die."

As Giles tries to leave, she grabs him by the edge of his suit and holds on. He struggles to evade from her grasp and says:

> "[…] What are we? What are you and I? Do you know what we are? We are nothing. Nothing. We can do nothing. I'm sorry. [mumbles] It's not even human."

She follows him to the corridor, knocks on the wall making a loud sound and trembles in rage as she signs:

> "If we do nothing, neither are we."

Up to the moment when Elisa compares herself to the monster, the audience feels this to be a film about working-class, minority people who will rescue a creature from this government facility. The story, however, spins around and places Elisa, the disabled woman, and the amphibian man, the monster, as equals.

At 1:22:26, as if in a canvas painted in hues of golden yellow, Elisa and the amphibian man are in her bathroom. They stare at each other and the camera cuts alternating between close-ups of her and the creature, as she touches and caresses it whilst it is in the

bathtub. She leaves the bathroom in a rush after the creature caresses her back. The scene cuts and she is alone, ready to sleep on the sofa. Her eyes are on bathroom door. She gets up, opens the bathroom door disrobes, gets in the bathtub with the creature, pulls the curtain shut as Madeleine Peyroux sings *La Javanaise,* a 1963 song written and composed by Serge Gainsbourg.

The song continues and the camera cuts to a scene on the bus, Elisa is now wearing red from head to toe - and we have already covered the symbolism of the colours -, the bus is bathed by lights fading and brightening, highlighting shadows and forms. Elisa leans against the cold glass and contemplates the beads of rain rolling on the window. The camera gets closer and closer to her and the window. She slides her finger from one side to the other and little drops of water seem to cede and follow her command. Red lights outside are reflected in the window. A moment of truth.

Following subjective elements of the narrative, that Elisa does not know her parents, that she was found by the shores of a river, that she has had her neck scars ever since and has never been able to speak - this scene could be an indication that Elisa is not actually human. Perhaps, she could be a mermaid or any other mystical creature of the water. The subtlety of the message, however, leaves it to individual interpretation.

Towards the end of the film, after Strickland shoots Elisa and the monster, he grabs her, still unconscious, and jumps into the sea. He uses his powers and heals her wounds. He also kisses her and covers her neck with his webbed palms. And just as he releases her, the scars on the sides of Elisa's neck open and reveal gills. She opens her eyes and stares deep into his eyes. He embraces her. Her red dress and his blue-green skin colour contrast and beams of light come from above. The narrator reads his final statement:

> If I told you about her, what would I say? That they lived happily ever after? I believe they did. That they were in love? That they remained in love? I'm sure that is true…
> But when I think of her, of Elisa, the only thing that comes to mind is a poem. Whispered by someone in love, hundreds of years ago:
> 'Unable to perceive the shape of You, I find You all around me. Your presence fills my eyes with Your love, It humbles my heart, For You are everywhere.'

As Giles reads the poem, the camera cuts to a long shot of the two, they are surrounded by hues of blue-green and a strong light is placed on the background highlighting their silhouettes. The camera slowly pulls back until they become small, blurry figures shifting in and out of focus from our field of vision. She is wearing only one of her shoes, perhaps a demonstration of how she is now only half-human - if she ever was one.

Cinematographically, this is indeed a gorgeous scene. Nonetheless, in terms of disability, it reinforces the understanding of the impairment as a pathology that needs to be cured, that disabled people might be actually looking for a *cure* to feel complete, to feel normal. Despite being independent, having her own apartment, looking after herself, being sexually active, Elisa's disability is portrayed as a burden, holding her from completion and driving her towards morally corrupted men, such as Strickland, even to non-human creatures. That no other man is part of her life projects the feeling that she should desperately hold on to whatever wants her, either Strickland or the creature.

Reception and Criticism

Criticism is torn between an analysis of *form* and *content*. Many agree that there is a certain status of art in Del Toro's cinematic techniques, which is reflected in the awards and positive reviews. I have pinpointed some of the highlights of these reviews in the chart below based on Mark Kermode[37], Peter Bradshaw[38], Robbie Collin[39], and Olly Richards[40] (Table 9).

Table 9 - The shape of water: summary of positive criticism

Highlights	Almost drowned in its own gorgeousness
	Timeless
	Incredibly clever
	Del Toro's best film
	Adventurously personal and universal
	Deliciously bestial bite
	The best bath you've ever had
	Both get to be beautiful
	Cute

Source: designed by the author

[37] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/feb/18/the-shape-of-water-review-guillermo-del-toro-sally-hawkins on May 20th 2020

[38] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/feb/15/the-shape-of-water-review-guillermo-del-toro on May 20th 2020.

[39] Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/shape-water-reviewguillermo-del-toros-beautiful-blood-curdler/ on May 20th 2020.

[40] Retrieved from https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/shape-water-review/ on May 20th 2020.

Del Toro's fable-like tone has been praised as one the most magical elements of the film, along with the beauty of the images he was able to create. These elements have granted *The Shape of Water* the title of Del Toro's best film. I would not deny that in terms of *form* the film deserves all the credit. On the other hand, the disabled community and those who support them do not seem to share the same appraisal when it comes to the depiction of disability, in particular Sara Novic[41], Justin Edgar[42], and Aimee Louw[43]. In fact, we shall borrow Richards's last words in his article, and try to scrutinise the "[…] deeper meanings [that may] rise to the surface.".

The deaf-blind writer and disability activist, Elsa Sjunneson-Henry, in an interview to the HuffPost US, expressed her excitement to see a disabled woman as a leading character when she first heard of the whole idea behind *The Shape of Water*; in her own words, she said that she "[…] wanted to walk away from that movie feeling like, 'Yay! I got to see a disabled main character have lots of agency and [engage in] a lot of bad ass-ery,'. […] But that's not what I got.".[44]

In her essay *I Belong Where the People Are: Disability and The Shape of Water*[45], Sjunneson-Henry, in addition to contributing to the debate around the casting of disabled actors and actresses for roles of disabled characters, the activist mentions two specific scenes which impacted her most as a disabled woman. First, the scene we have discussed above when Elisa tells Giles the monster does not know that she is incomplete. For Elsa, it is not that she as a disabled woman feels incomplete, it is an ableism society that foists such mark upon her, an aspect we have approached in Chapter 1.

Secondly, when Elisa dies and the monster grabs her and jumps into the water, Sjunneson-Henry feels that the film sends the message that a disabled woman is not part of a human society, that "[o]f course society would rather imagine a disabled woman living under water with the only creature that has ever loved her, rather than imagining her above the waves, being loved and desired by the other humans in her life." (SJUNNESON-HENRY, 2018, n.p.).

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[41] Retrieved from https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/01/opinions/hollywood-disability-new-normal-opinion-novic/index.html on May 19th 2020.
[42] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/feb/09/let-disabled-actors-and-directors-make-their-own-films-shape-of-water on May 19th 2020.
[43] Retrieved from https://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/episode-379-populism-in-italy-s-elections-greenland-s-ice-melt-the-shape-of-water-ode-to-cds-and-more-1.4555633/what-the-shape-of-water-gets-wrong-about-disability-1.4555657 on May 19th 2020.
[44] Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/shape-of-water-offensive-to-people-with-disabilities_n_5a8b798de4b0a1d0e12c48fc?ri18n=true on May 19th 2020.
[45] Retrieved from: https://www.tor.com/2018/01/16/i-belong-where-the-people-are-disability-and-the-shape-of-water/ on May 19th 2020.

Her final words summarise the point of view of many other disabled people in comments of her essay, “I wanted to feel included in the human world. Instead, the film reinforced the narrative that I belong below the surface, to be put on display when it suits the narrative.” (SJUNNESON-HENRY, 2018, n.p.).

In an article published on *Disability and* Society, Wilde *et al* (2018) gathered some of the criticism and managed to both highlight the delicacy of the form and scrutinise the content. In a way, the authors argue that “[f]ew of us [disabled people] appreciate being quizzed about the causes and manifestations of our impairments. Arguably, the decision to withhold such details in the film averts the medical gaze of the viewer, allowing us to focus on the disablement Elisa faces and the way she lives her life.” (WIDE ET AL, 2018, p. 1530).

As noted by the authors, the film does have the potential to focus on how Elisa *is made* disabled and how disability could have had an impact on how she flourished as a woman or not. The nature of her impairment does not prevent her from performing most jobs in the facility - she could well have been portrayed as one of the scientists, as is the case of the Bollywoodian film *Zero* (ANAND L. RAI, 2018). That she is portrayed as a cleaner points to the relevance of the debate that disabled people are usually found in the secondary sector when they find a place in the job market. Elisa’s life contrasts to Carla’s or Raymond’s, both in terms of class-condition, nature of impairment, and, thus, the possibilities to achieve a flourishing life. However, if we bring her character closer to the young Guiah in *Two-legged horse*, or even, perhaps, Sam, we find two children who were *espositos*[46].

In contrast to the arguments posed by Wide *et al.* (2018), filmmaker and activist Dominick Evans feels that the film projects the idea that disabled people are waiting to be cured to live, “I hated myself for being disabled for so long, […] I know other disabled people who have tried to kill themselves because they internalize these messages. They don’t go to school, they don’t have a relationship, they just sit around waiting to be cured or die.”[47] (WANSHEL, HuffPost US, 2018).

Alternatively, some scholars argue towards a different direction. Some claim that the idea of what it means to be human is malleable, it is subjected to change. This point of view suggests that the amphibian man can actually be conceived as an *esposito* himself and that his relationship with Elisa is that of two misfits finding each other. Unsurprisingly, these perspectives come from non-disabled people (BORG; CALLUS, 2018).

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[46] A word that comes from the Latin terms *expositus*, *exponere* meaning “to place outside”.
[47] Retrived from: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/shape-of-water-offensive-to-people-with-disabilities_n_5a8b798de4b0a1d0e12c48fc on May 19th 2020.

Final Words

Knowing that some of the arguments presented may cause disturbance, I would like to finish with the perspective of a disabled woman, which summarises some of my arguments (SJUNNESON-HENRY, 2018, n.p., **my highlights**),

> Science fiction, fantasy, and horror have an obligation to do better. As writers, as consumers, as creators, we have to push back and ask for better representation. We have to make better stories, and disconnect from societal bias. **If we can imagine a world where a literal fish monster can be loved by a human being, we can imagine a world where a disabled woman can be loved by a fellow human being.**

I understand that some would argue otherwise, that the film does not deal with disability as a life tragedy. Perhaps, it may be that some of us might have misinterpreted the message, if we consider that such thing is possible in criticism or in taste. Nevertheless, I stand my ground that there are so few opportunities to have a strong, working-class disabled woman in the leading role of a blockbuster that when it happens, it is frustrating, to say the least, to see her partnered with a fish. Del Toro says that he wanted to make a film in which the monster from the *Black Lagoon* would 'get the girl' and live a romance, but it makes one wonder why she had to be disabled. Referring back to Williams, Elisa is a subjected exile - she does not conform with the social organisation nor does she feel part of it. She is subjected to the determinations engendered by the relations of her class position and personal characteristics. Her final moment of redemption, of self-discovery, leads her towards a life of an ultimate exile, of becoming a vagrant, moving beyond this social organisation for she does not belong here.

4.3 CASE STUDY 3 - TOLLIN, MICHAEL. RADIO. 2003

Plot

Harold Jones is a High School American football coach at T. L. Hanna High School in Anderson, South Carolina, USA, and a highly-respected member of the community of the small town. In the 1970's, while coaching his team in the football field of the school, he notices a young man, pushing a shopping trolley full of varied objects who stops to watch the team. After a couple of sessions, the coach invites the young man to participate in the training classes as his assistant. Jones and the boys of the team start calling him Radio, because of his fascination for the gadget. The coach takes it upon himself to look after and educate Radio while he is in the school's dependencies. Jones, however, faces resistance from other teachers, players, and parents who refuse to accept Radio's presence in the school, arguing that he is a distraction to the coach. Beyond the training sessions, Jones attempts to get Radio involved with some of the school's activities, but no one understands the coach's intentions in helping the young man. Following the death of Radio's mother and the pressures to send him to a special institution, coach Jones

resigns and argues that he wants to spend more time with his family and with Radio. Jones, however, is convinced to stay, Radio eventually gets his diploma and a letterman jacket, and the team wins the final games. In the end, clips of the real-life Jones and Radio are shown.

First Words

It has been an almost mandatory element of research in the area of Cultural Studies to consider the multiple and varied aspects of something we may call *elements of the identity* - gender, race, disability, sexuality, and so on. However, seldom do they take into consideration the entanglements of these elements with one another and with the condition of class (EAGLETON, 1996; WOOD, 1997)[48]. As Terry Eagleton (1998; 2003; 2016) has pointed out, most of these studies are based on an assumption that Marxism as an ontological analysis of man, as an epistemological theoretical framework, and as a revolutionary project has failed. It presupposes that we have moved beyond history and beyond those social problems engendered by class stratification, that we are living in a time of shattered identities and linguistic debates that do not involve the class position occupied by individuals in society. It is the assumption that class struggle represents a problem of the past. Postmodernism considers language, identity discourses, deconstructions, knowledges above and beyond class condition and overvalues differences, ignoring their liberal, hedonistic, and narcissistic traps (WOOD, 1997). The focus on the relations of class, however, does not mean the denial of these elements of identities nor the irrelevance of linguistic and discourse analysis in a world certainly mediated by symbols. Rather it is precisely the importance of such elements that advocates in favour of a materialist analysis - and that has everything to do with a film about a working-class, black man with intellectual disability. Foreshadowing my final argument, while postmodern analyses insist on denying the ultimate relevance of class, materialism reiterates that any social disadvantage faced by any of these elements of identity, or the association of more than one, is intensified by class condition[49].

Radio is a Columbia Pictures film starring Cuba Gooding Jr. and Ed Harris, based on the true story of James Robert "Radio" Kennedy and Harold Jones. The film was directed by the American producer, director, and philanthropist Michael Tollin in 2003 on a $30 million budget.

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[48] A quick survey in any academic platform would give my reader an idea of what I am talking about.
[49] This has now been emphasised by Marxist intellectuals for decades, for instance the works of Eagleton, 1996; 2003; 2006; and 2011; and the books edited by Wood and Foster (2006) and O'Neill and Wayne (2017), to mention a few.

James was born in 1947 in Anderson, South Carolina, USA. He was eighteen years-old when he caught the attention of coach Harold Jones during an American football practice at TL Hanna High School. At the time, he could not speak or read properly, and due to his love for music and radios, he earned the nickname *Radio.* According to the website dedicated to their story[50], Radio soon became part of the town's community and received formal education and a job at the school. James passed away on December 15, 2019.

Critics diverge when it comes to the analysis of the film. Giving it three stars out of five, Roger Ebert[51], on October 24, 2003, considered it to be a convincing portrait of how a small town adopted a "[…] mentally disabled local man, as a team mascot and cheerleader". Ebert also argues that he was fond of the film because it "[…] isn't hyped up with the usual contrivances". As my reading of the film intends to demonstrate, I must disagree with Mr. Ebert, since *Radio* apparently "[…] adheres strictly to Hollywood's unwritten rules of how to handle disability and race in a family movie. Sweetness and light are required, along with a whopping amount of bald-faced denial"[52], as Stephen Holden suggests in his analysis. Writing to the *New York Times* (coincidently) also on October 24, 2003, he described *Radio* as "[…] a synthetic mush of molasses-soaked pablum". As for the idea of Radio as a *mascot,* I will go back to it later.

My reading of the film, diverging from Ebert's opinion of the film, focuses on Hollywoodian ideological narrative strategies (WAYNE, 2020) that support normality drama as a genre. It is a focus on how Hollywood absorbs, projects, and sells a true story about disability. In *Radio*'s case, these strategies will shed light on aspects that we have not yet touched in the previous films (Elisa's and Carla's). First of all, this is the only film that is based on a true story. Secondly, it brings to discussion the association of class condition with disability and race, helping us move closer towards what has been my main objective all along, that is, to reflect upon the impact and intrinsic relations between class and disability.

Discussion

Contrary to what I have done so far, I would like to start by highlighting two positive aspects of the film. *Radio* may be an example of Vygotsky's (1993) arguments that

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[50] http://www.radioandcoachjones.com/OurStory.html
[51] Retrieved from https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/radio-2003 on September 29, 2020.
[52] Stephen Holden to *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/24/movies/film-review-a-town-s-innocent-outcast-facing-gentleness-and-jeers.html on September 29, 2020.

people learn and develop in different ways and that the selection of the correct mediation tools may stimulate a process of compensation for the biological defect. He argues that "[…] compensation, the individual's reaction to a defect, initiates new, roundabout developmental processes - it replaces, rebuilds a new structure, and stabilises psychological functions." (VYGOTSKY, 1993, p. 34).

When James first gets to the school he is an eighteen-year-old boy that could not speak or read and the time he spends under coach Jones's supervision, the formal education he receives, and the social stimulation of the school's atmosphere trigger in him a dialectic compensatory process of development.

The second aspect relates to the first. Harold's attitude towards James, despite the pity and charity that lies therein, as we shall see below, is the one of a friend who does not belittle the other. Harold treats James not as the "severely retarded man", as others in the film put it, but rather as a capable man, a human with his own individuality and personality.

These elements, despite their contribution to the positions that advocate in favour of compensatory processes, do not prevent the film from reproducing stereotypical characteristics of intellectually disabled people. At the same time that it, in a way or another, echoes Vygotsky's studies, there is very little emphasis on this aspect; eventually, it fails to move beyond the fetishisation process of the disabled person so characteristic of the Hollywoodian narrative.

Evoking the ideological narrative strategies, as identified by Wayne (2020, pp. 139-141), I attempt to develop my analysis based on three topics that seem to reveal how *Radio* reproduces non-disability as the norm and may, therefore, be included in the normality drama genre (DARKE, 1998), they are: (1) inclusion versus exclusion; (2) charity and capitalism; and (3) fetichism of the disabled body.

Previously, on chapter 1, I have argued that exclusion and inclusion are not opposed disconnected phenomena, as the Cartesian dualist locus of the disability studies[53] area usually supposes. On one hand, inclusion rises uncritically as the solution to all structural problems of inequality in capitalism - a loving face of the cruel system. In materialism, on the other hand, exclusion and inclusion are part of the same dialectic phenomenon, one only exists because of the other. Hence, dialectically speaking, inclusion and exclusion may be understood as two phenomena that "[…] are as inseparable as they are opposed, and that despite all their

[53] In fact, this dualism may be also perceived in any postmodern identity-related study (Eagleton, 2016).

opposition, they mutually interpenetrate.' (ENGELS, 2008 [1892], p. 47). Marx himself has considered this as an ontological aspect of the structure of capitalism when scrutinising the general law of capitalist accumulation. *Ontological* in the sense that there is no capitalism without poverty, without misery - "[…] The relative mass of the industrial reserve army increases therefore with the potential energy of wealth." (MARX, 1995, p. 479). And he goes on to conclude that

> The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus-population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. *It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital.* Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital. (MARX, 1995, p. 480, *my italics*).

We may also consider here how Engels (1979 [1883], p. 41, my translation), in *The Dialectics of Nature*, indicates that:

> All motion is bound up with some change of place, whether it be change of place of heavenly bodies, terrestrial masses, molecules, atoms, or ether particles. The higher the form of motion, the smaller this change of place. It in no way exhausts the nature of the motion concerned, but it is inseparable from the motion. It, therefore, has to be investigated before anything else.

If we conceive inclusion as a motion, a *social motion*, we are, therefore, implying some *change of place*. That is, it entails that we intend to move someone from a place of exclusion to somewhere else where s/he will be *included*. That does not, however, "[…] exhausts the nature of the motion concerned." That is, inclusion does not extinguish exclusion because the latter is part of the nature of capitalism itself. Furthermore, in order to investigate such motion, we are required to consider not only who is being included where, but also investigate how the motion of exclusion itself works and why one would want to include this person or group of persons.

James is an intellectually disabled, black and working-class (*Arbeitsmensch*) man, which means that his survival is dependent upon his work. His exclusion lies in the sense that as a non-working *Arbeitsmensch*, he does not exist and, therefore, does not participate in any of the social activities - school, church, friendship, taking the bus etc. - that would usually characterise the routine of a person who is part of that specific social formation - the small town, Anderson. Let us dig into this relation between the *Arbeitsmensch* and the disability.

Since his early writings on Political Economy, Marx (2016 [1844], l. 1524) argues that the "[…] worker produces capital, capital produces him." The man, thus, exists as a worker inasmuch as he is actively producing capital. The *Arbeitsmensch* is the one who exists to sell his work force and depends on it to survive, the one whose body and soul are part of the working-class since birth. When the *Arbeitsmensch* does not work, he is ignored by the capital, he is excluded. Please be aware that this exclusion is not an exclusion from the system, he is a product of the system as part of the industrial reserve army. He is and will always be a part of it, a product of it. However, insofar as he does not work, being part of the working class, it means that the working class will have to take upon itself to sustain him (MARX, 1995). In Marx's terms, as part of the Stagnant Relative Surplus Population, the lowest sediment of the Relative Surplus Population, the sediment that dwells in pauperism. The third category of the Stagnant Relative Surplus Population is where those unable to work are placed, they are "[…] the dead weight of the industrial reserve army." (MARX, 1995, p. 479).

James relates to this as he is socially conceived as an *Arbeitsmensch* unable to work; his intellectual disability requires the dispense of extra social energy and extra amounts of capital to train him as a worker. As we saw in Carla's and Daniel's case, their participation is sustained with capital that is accumulated and flows in their families and the same applies to William in the next film. They are not part of the working class and, although they might be segregated from certain spaces, they are not excluded from civil society.

My argument against the concept of exclusion as *outside of society* is supported by Marx's concept of the *social being.* Marx claims that even when one's life is not directly involved with others, we are ultimately the totality of the unity between our individuality and our social life. In his own words (MARX, 2016 [1844], l. 1913, *his highlights*):

> Man, much as he may therefore be a *particular* individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real *individual* social being), is just as much the totality – the ideal totality – the subjective existence of imagined and experienced society for itself; just as he exists also in the real world both as awareness and real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human-life activity.

Therefore, James is not excluded from society, between his individuality and his *limited* social life, he is very much a product of it. He had been excluded from social interaction with others. This is the nature and essence of his exclusion. It comes as no surprise that he could not speak or read when he first comes to the school. Radio is a modern Kaspar Hauser or *Enfant sauvage* and Harold Jones comes as a sort of Georg Daumer or Jean Itard.

As an example of how this exclusion is portrayed in the film, we mayanalyse the shots between 3min20s and 4min55s, when James approaches the football field where Harold Jones is training his team for the first time.

In a shot/reverse-shot pattern, the camera captures Radio pushing the trolley around the field fence while the team is focused on their exercises. As spectators, we are given both Radio's and Jones's perspectives (Image 12).

Image 12 - Radio: Shot/reverse-shot in Radio's and Jones's perspectives

Source: Tollin, 2003.

As the establishing scene, this sequence of shots sets the tone of the film. Harold and the team, as the included ones, and Radio portrayed in the shadows of exclusion. The camera captures the white and black students/players, and white and black teachers. The presence of other Black characters in the school suggests that Radio's exclusion was not built on racial differences, it implies that he is not part of this community due to the nature of his impairment.

Pushing the trolley around the football field, outside the fence, Radio is perceived by coach Jones's eyes (Image 13).

Image 13 - Radio: Jones perceives Radio for the first time

Source: Tollin, 2003.

Harold's role in James's life gives evidence to how little attention the State gives to people with intellectual disabilities and how dependant they are upon the charity of others. We shall analyse a similar situation in the next chapter when we discuss *The eighth day* (1996). As a comparison, it is sufficient to point out here that Georges' situation differs from Radio's in terms of class condition.

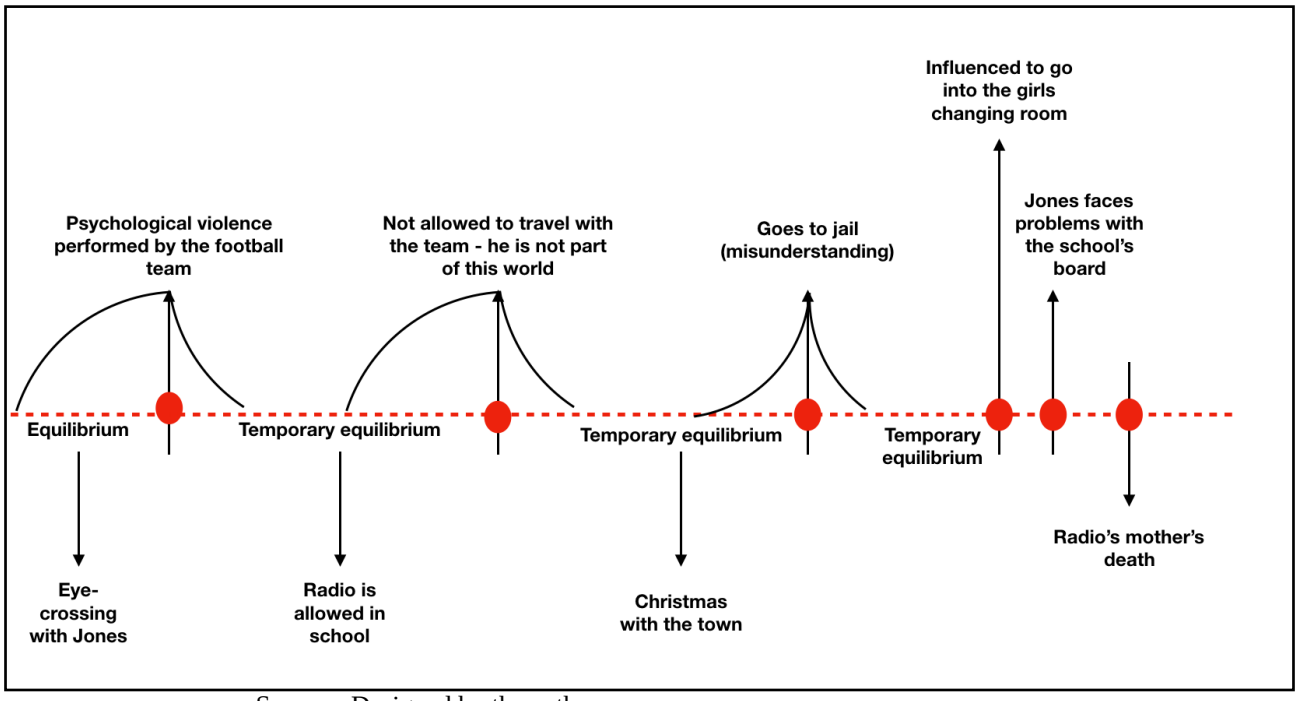
In *Radio*, Harold Jones is the main character, not James. Harold is the saviour, the normal, the included, and the one responsible for bringing James closer to the world of the normals. But before I move on with the analysis, two considerations are required. First, be mindful that I am not analysing Harold's and James's *real* life experiences, I am discussing the way Hollywood absorbs their story, creates an ideological narrative around it, reproduces normality, and uses the disabled as a fetish. Secondly, I am not one to say that Harold was not important in James's life. As far as I am concerned, I would say that only because of Harold, James had the chance to experience a variety of opportunities in life and come closer to a *flourishing life.* However, one should not have to wait for a Harold Jones in their lives to have the chance to experience life. It falls upon the State and the Civil Society the responsibility to make sure that they will be looked after. In other words, charity *cannot* be the norm.

The analyses of the narrative strategies will demonstrate why I am suggesting that Harold is the main character here. First of all, his world is the focus of the story (*Focalisation*). The world of the normals is the world where Radio is to be included - not as an equal, but rather as a symbol of charity, of inclusion. As Mike Wayne (2020, p. 140) indicates,

"[…] What makes focalisation potentially ideological is that typically we spend most of our time next to characters (following characters) who are from the dominant sectors […]" - dominant here meaning *abled* (normal) in contrast to *disabled* (abnormal). He goes on to say that we are encouraged to "[…] sympathise, identify and feel allegiance with these characters and their moral world-views". In a Christian-morality-driven world, Harold symbolises the role model. He is the symbol of America, an echo of the Protests founders, the God-fearing white, Anglo-Saxon man who embraces charity. *Radio* may be understood as a film that in its choice to tell the story from the point of view of the dominant normal, white, male reproduces these characteristics as the norm. As Darke indicates, "[n]ormality dramas do not challenge cultural forms, they reaffirm them both in their predictability and in the specificities of their narratives." (1998, p. 194).

Furthermore, the film's storyline - a roller-coaster moving towards a happy ending (KING, 2002) - follows the nearly-unbreakable Hollywoodian predictable structure of *equilibrium - conflict 1 - climax 1 - moderate equilibrium - conflict 2 - climax 2 - moderate equilibrium* - and so on until it reaches the final climax and closure (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Radio: Troughs of action in the narrative



Source: Designed by the author.

Radio follows a classical/traditional Hollywoodian narrative structure. The *equilibrium* in the life of the characters is disturbed and the narrative is built upon the process

through which they have to undergo in order to re-establish the equilibrium, reaching closure. There is a major disturbance in the narrative - the presence of James - which causes smaller, less overwhelming situations of loss of control. The narrative here is "[…] sustained through periodic moments when the emphasis shifts towards spectacle/action that are not overwhelming, before building perhaps towards a more sustained spectacular climax." (KING, 2002, p. 187).

These moments are linked to the binary oppositions faced by Jones. Each one of these moments of action, the *climaxes*, seem to represent one battle fought by Jones in order to accommodate James in the community. In truth, I would suggest that there is only one binary opposition, that is 'prejudice', which manifests itself in different characters and in different moments of the narrative. Prejudice here embodies the social contradiction that will not be easily resolved in Capitalism, but Jones (charity) rises as the hero that may actually be able to fight against it and thrive (Table 10).

Table 10 - Radio: Binary oppositions

Ideological Narrative Strategy	***Manifestation***
Binary Oppositions and their reconciliation	Jones (the hero) vs the football team Jones (the hero) vs the school's principal Jones (the hero) vs townspeople Jones (the hero) vs his daughter Jones (the hero) vs the police Jones (the hero) vs Johnny (Riley Smith) Jones (the hero) vs Fran (Chris Mulkey) (anti-hero)
Displacement	Displaces structural problems onto the individual level (charity)
Individualisation	Charity
Redemption arcs	The football team The school's principal The townspeople Jones's daughter The police Johnny (Riley Smith) Fran (Chris Mulkey)
Focalisation	The life of the WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant)
Closure	Radio becomes the mascot

Source: designed by the author based on the narrative strategies proposed by Wayne (2020, pp.139-141)

Wayne (2020) also indicates that narratives tend to develop towards the reconciliation of antagonist elements (*Binary Oppositions and their reconciliation*). In Radio, they are represented by what I have called *manifestations of* prejudice. The movement of

reconciliation with Radio indicates the completion of the redemption arc of each of these characters. Their actions towards James are guided by prejudice at first, but they undergo a process of self-reflection and social experiences that "[…] transform them and apparently make them more decent human beings" (WAYNE, 2020, p.140). This is very similar to the transformation endured by Carla's mother, Elizabeth, in *The Other Sister*. In *Radio*, they find their redemption through Jones's guidance and/or disapproval of their actions. Jones, the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (WASP) is the saviour, the hero of the black, intellectually disabled man.

The football team, around the 8-minute mark, is found by coach Jones violently throwing balls at the little shed where their store their equipment (refer back to the first trough of action in Image 3). Jones approaches them, releases Radio and severely punishes them. Their relationship with James develops and they learn to accommodate him as part of their routine.

James gets himself really involved with American football, with the activities of the team, and with coach Jones. His presence in the school and in Jones's life creates a tension between Jones and his daughter, Mary Hellen. The tension follows the two characters until towards the end of the narrative. Their private narrative, that is, a narrative that is developing in the background of the main story, will intercalate between moments of equilibrium and disruption until both characters reach a moment of redemption, make peace with each other, and give the audience a certain feeling of closure.

Jones invites Radio to come in a trip with the team that is going to play in another town but in the last minute he is not allowed to get on the bus. This event disrupts the temporary equilibrium that had been established between the team and Radio's presence. The scene is a cliché representation of Hollywoodian drama. Under a heavy rain, James, soaking wet, holds on to his radio to listen to the match, he goes to the empty football field to play alone. The team wins the game, Jones apologises to Radio and the equilibrium is temporarily restored - despite the tension gliding around them in the figures of Johnny and his father, Frank.

Johnny and Frank are the two main opposing figures in the narrative. Johnny is one of the American football players and Frank, his father, believes in his son's potential to become a professional player. Frank organises the townspeople against Radio's presence in the team, which is said to steal the coach's attention from what is really important - winning the games. It is as if some form of prejudice is manifesting again between Jones and James,

represented by the townspeople led by Frank. And, although they make peace with James and Jones, this prejudice and self-centred behaviour migrates back to Johnny and Frank.

As a way of apologising to James, the people of the town bring lots of Christmas presents to him. The next morning, James takes his trolley, packs it with presents, and distributes them in the houses of his neighbourhood. Approached by a policeman, Radio is unable to make him understand where the presents came from and he is arrested (third trough of action in Image 3). The policeman who arrested him did not know Radio or his newly-developed relationship with the town but the other policemen recognise him and call coach Jones, reestablishing the equilibrium *again*.

The two next disruptive moments are caused by Johnny and Frank, and they will represent the completion of the characters' redemption arcs. Johnny and his friends manipulate James and talk him into entering the girls changing room, telling him that one of teachers was asking for his help. Radio goes into the changing room while all of the cheerleader girls are there. When he enters, they scream and tell him to leave immediately. He leaves the changing room clearly disturbed, aware that he had done something wrong. Radio does not tell anyone who convinced him that there would be no problem to do that in that specific moment, but Jones has the feeling that Johnny was behind everything and punishes him. Radio demonstrates to Johnny that he forgives him, and they create a new bond of mutual respect, creating a moment of reconciliation between the two binary opponents and closing Johnny's redemption arc.

Frank, however, uses this episode against James' presence in the school. Anonymously, he calls the school's board. This causes a major problem for James, Jones, and the principal. A representative of the board comes to the school and questions Radio's presence there and, despite their wish to send to a special institution, Jones and the principal manage to keep him in the school. This event and the last trough of action, Radio's mother's death, lead to Jones's resigning from his role as a coach of the American football team - this will allow him to have more time with his family and with James. This scene leads to the moment of *closure*.

The scene cuts to the graduation event. Johnny gives James an American football jacket, and they hug while a melodramatic song plays in background. The song continues playing and principal is presenting the certificates to the students. Radio is called and receives a title of *honorary graduate* and the chance to return to the school as an eleventh-grade student the following year - by the end of her speech, the principal says "[…] for as many such years as he so chooses".

The principal's final statement epitomises the education of students with intellectual disabilities. He should not return to the school for as many such years as he so chooses. He should be provided access to formal education, according to his potential and, perhaps, the possibility of working in that community. Apparently, James does become part of the school's community (as a *mascot*), but it is not clear whether or not he gets paid for her services in the school.

Finally, I left the idea of displacement for last. The film displaces capitalism's dialectics of inclusion/exclusion onto the idea of inclusion-through-charity by (1) reproducing the non-disabled, white, male as the norm, (2) objectifying the image of the disabled person and (3) fetishising their representation. Radio again attenuates, using images of disability, complex social problems with simple personal solutions (LONGMORE, 1987; BARNES, 1993). Let us explore these ideas in more depth in the last section.

Final Words

The meaning of *fetish* I am applying here orbits around the idea that images of disabled people and the melodrama associated to them - melodramatic soundtrack, Christian-morally-driven discourses, melodramatic scenes with rain and yelling (examples are found in all three films discussed so far), and so on - produce some kind of metaphorical - not sexual - pleasure in the audience. That is, some form of enjoyment in seeing disabled characters suffering and struggling and somehow being saved by non-disabled characters.

Barnes (1992, pp. 6-7) indicates that "[..] the disabled person is frequently portrayed as especially endearing to elicit even greater feelings of sentimentality - as opposed to genuine compassion.". As an example, he cites *The Elephant Man*, pointing out that "[…] The careful recreation of Merrick's public humiliation at the hands of unscrupulous non-disabled men […] extract from the audience feelings of pity and distress." - an idea that could also be observed in *Radio* when he is locked in the equipment shed and the players throw balls at it to scare him. The scene continues and Ed Harris appears to *save the day* and remind the audience that "[…] disabled people's well-being is dependent solely upon the benevolence of others - in this case [*The Elephant Man*] Sir Frederick Treves" and in *Radio*'s embodied in coach Jones. And here stardom analysis plays an important role.

That the WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant) plays the role of the hero in the film comes as no surprise. As we discussed in Chapter 2, stars often project a *persona* that creates an expectation in the audiences. Ed Harris, in this case, with his blue eyes, square jaw,

and slightly grey hair and his Christian morality transmits the ideal of masculinity and reproduces it as the norm. In contrast, Radio embodies the opposite of that. Audiences relish in the feeling that Jones is saving James (and indeed he probably did) but the films completely ignores the social complexities entangled in the education, care, and possibility of providing a flourishing life for an individual with James's condition of intellectual disability. The film is constructed upon an idea of charity that grows in strength with the development of capitalism (WILLIAMS, 1983). It is a projection of charity as a form of self-validation, of moral character, of pride and it has very little - or nothing - to do with the recipient. It clearly contrasts the biblical concept of charity as form of love for the other, evoked even by the original Latin meaning of the word, according to Williams (1983). In his own words (1983, p. 53), he reminds us that "[…] It is not surprising that the word which was once the most general expression of love and care for the others has become […] so compromised that modern governments have to advertise welfare benefits […] as 'not a charity but a right'". He is highlighting the fact that most people would find joy in proving charity but they seldom willing to accept it.

In conclusion, in spite of the positive elements I have pointed out in the beginning, *Radio* seems to reinforce Paul Darke's arguments of normality drama as a genre in the sense that the reproduction of the numerous narrative conventions analysed - such as lighting, camera movement, plot, characters, locations, set design, soundtrack - in this film around the disability more or less orient audiences to reproduce the non-disabled body as the norm. It is a film to be watched by those who consider themselves *normal* "[…] and, as such, will seek solace […] from a film that reinforces the everyday 'common sense 'that the audience will bring to a film about an individual with an impairment." (DARKE, 1998, p. 190). In addition, a materialistic analysis of the film, in comparison to the other films discussed, emphasises the impacts of class condition in the lives of individuals with disability.

3.4 CASE STUDY 4 - SHARROCK, THEA. ME BEFORE YOU. 2016

Plot

Louisa "Lou" Clarke (Emilia Clarke) is a young, cheerful, working-class girl who lives in a small town in England. When her boss dismisses her, Lou finds a job opportunity at the Traynor's mansion. She is hired by Camilla Traynor (Janet McTeer) as a caregiver for her quadriplegic son, William (Sam Claflin). The young and successful entrepreneur sustained a severe spinal cord injury that paralyzed him from the neck down after being hit by a motorcycle in London. Distant and cold, William completely ignores Lou's presence in the house and barely speaks to her. Despite his bitterness, however, Lou does not succumb to failure and struggles to get close to the young billionaire and cheer him up. Over the course of six months, Lou's unconventional personality thaws his coldness and she manages to gradually penetrate in his mind. As feelings flourish between Lou and Will, her relationship

with her boyfriend, Patrick (Matthew Lewis), is jeopardised by this new romance in her life. Already in love with Will, Louisa finds out that, after unsuccessful attempts to commit suicide, Will decided to go to Switzerland to end his life in an assisted dying procedure at Dignitas. The broken-hearted Lou, running against the clock, manages to convince Will to use his money to experience different things in life in an attempt to change his mind about Dignitas. William, nevertheless, is determined to proceed as agreed with his parents six months earlier and flies to Switzerland. Lou goes after the family only to spend a few last moments with Will. The film ends with Louisa, sitting at café in Paris, reading a posthumous letter from Will after inheriting a significant amount of money to set her life on a new course.

First Words

Drawing on the intersection between the characteristics of the *normality drama* as a genre, as designed by Paul Darke (1998), and on the ideological narrative strategies categorised by Mike Wayne in *Marxism goes to the Movies* (2020, pp. 139-141), in this last case study, my objective is to analyse the film in order to demonstrate three important elements: (1) we shall investigate how the narrative and other cinematographic elements scaffold the construction of a character whose image perpetuates a representation of disabled people as bitter, grumpy, and unhappy *because* of their impairment; (2) discussing the reception of the film and analysing the structure of the narrative, we shall unfold the message that lies therein suggesting that the life of a disabled person is worth less; and, finally, (3) I intend to demonstrate, by scrutinising the ideological narrative strategies, how the story uses disability as a way to bolster the meaningfulness of the elite's lifestyle in contrast to the supposedly trivial and insignificant life of the working class. My intention is to bring together all of these elements to sustain my main arguments so far, those are that disability and class *cannot, in any case,* be analysed separately and that the dominant filmmaking industry insists on exploiting disability and disabled characters as forms of *Inspirational Porn* for non-disabled audiences.

In association with other ideological elements that comprise the *normality drama*, the specific use of "[…] abnormal - impaired - characters to deal with a perceived threat to the dominant social hegemony of normality" (DARKE, 1998, p. 184) is the main characteristic of the genre. This goes along with a non-disabled individual's subconscious desire to consume a normality drama as a source of validation to their own bodies and lives. The unspoken crave for inspiration from someone who is *cursed* with an impairment and, in some cases, who thrives anyway. Darke (1998, p. 191) argues that "[t]he normality drama genre fulfills both the audience's expectations and needs as well as the industry's need for reduced risk; there can be no other reason for the success of the genre over the entire history of cinema.". In *Me Before You*, normality is reinforced when the film sends a message that besmirches and

stereotypes the disabled body with William's death and endorses non-disabled bodies with Louisa's new life.

Moving non-disabled audiences to tears, *Me Before You* shocked the disabled community right after its release. The intended message of a modern *Beauty and the Beast* came across as a prejudicial and disrespectful portrait of disability. In the article *'I'm not a thing to be pitied': the disability backlash against Me Before*[54] *You* published in *The Guardian*, Ryan Gilbey elicits the varied reactions of activists to the film, including the use of the hashtag *#MeBeforeEuthanasia*.

The film is a representation of what Stella Young means by Inspirational Porn, that is, the use of disabled characters to inspire non-disabled audiences. Disability is used to touch, to move audiences to tears, and to highlight the potential of the non-disabled life. It is a product to be consumed by non-disabled people so that they can feel inspired to value their bodies and live their lives at full. In his article, Gilbey argues that "[…] the screen-time granted to these stories, to the exclusion of more diverse representations of disability, has helped plant in the public consciousness the notion that life is worth less when it resides in a disabled body".

According to Thea Sharrock, however, this was not the intended message, she argues that her film tells "[…] a fictional story about how important the right to choose is. The message of the film is to live boldly, push yourself, don't settle"[55]. What the director fails to notice is that this message is constructed upon the fetishisation of the disabled body. It can only send its message of toxic positivity in the glorification of abled bodies, the appeal for pity, and on the stereotyping of the disabled people.

On chapter 3, I have discussed the different images of representation of disability categorised by authors in the area of Disability Studies (KRIEGEL, 1987; LONGMORE, 1987; BARNES, 1992). These categories have been designed based on analyses of cultural manifestations - literature, TV programs, films, and pieces of news - and they bring forth to the debate on disability the importance of representation. As I have pointed out towards the end of the chapter, the shaping of our psyche is a dialectic process influenced by our experience in a concrete social formation, hence a combination of ever-changing cultural references. Hence, representations matter because our conceptions of a certain social aspect are strongly stimulated by the way they are represented in cultural manifestations.

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[54] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jun/02/me-before-you-disabled-backlash-not-pitied on January, 2021.
[55] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jun/06/me-before-you-director-thea-sharrock-disability-campaigners on January, 2021.

Disability, in its turn, has long been associated with evilness, revenge, madness, and treachery, as Barnes (1992, p. 11) pointed out, "[…] The depiction of disabled people as essentially evil has been a particular favourite among film makers". In modern cinema, despite the attempts to follow the rules of the politically correct, these ideas have been translated to images of grumpiness, loneliness and solitude, and explosions of rage. William Traynor (Will), in *Me before You*, is a distinct representation of these. As for Louisa Clark's (Lou) presence in his life, the non-disabled, female character seems to represent the taming of the wild bull. Plots surrounding grumpiness, disability, and the caretaker who has to face the bad-tempered disabled character are a cliche in cinema history. A famous example is the relationship between Al Pacino's Frank, a retired and blind war veteran, and Charlie (Chris O'Donnell), his caretaker, in *Scent of a Woman* (1992).

The establishing shot, the first two minutes of the film, present Will as this sexy and very successful young entrepreneur who lives in a beautiful flat in London with his girlfriend until an accident leaves him quadriplegic (Image 14).

Image 14 - Me Before You: William Traynor seconds before the accident

Source: Sharrock, 2016.

The close-up depicts William talking on the phone, under heavy rain in London, when he is crossing the street in a hurry to catch a cab. A motorcycle comes right at him and the light of the motorcycle's lantern projected in his face. He has a scared expression on his face and his eyes have a glimpse of light that flashes back to the lantern and suggest that they are face-to-face, the accident is reinforced by the horn and the sound of the motorcycle skidding. The rain seems to add a dramatic tone to the shot.

The establishing shot is crucial here, not only because it is the moment upon which the whole history is to be built, but also because it cuts his life asunder between perfection as a non-disabled man and misery as a disabled man. In summary, the film reinforces the historical stereotype of disabled people as bitter and grumpy and reproduces the idea that the life of a disabled person is not worth living. The narrative completely ignores the decades of academic research, cultural changes, and social movements that advocate against the association of these kind of images with disability.

Ideological Narrative Strategy	***Manifestation***
Binary Oppositions and their reconciliation	William vs Louisa William vs Louisa's boyfriend William vs ex-girlfriend Old William (non-disabled) vs New William (disabled)
Displacement	Displaces disability onto death
Individualisation	Assisted suicide
Redemption arcs	William with the other characters and with himself
Focalisation	The life of the white upper-class
Closure	Louisa in Paris; Spiritual relationship

Returning to the analysis of the ideological narrative strategies, hitherto my argument has been the idea that they are founding pillars that support the narrative structure of the normality drama. *Me before You* seems to corroborate my reasoning (Table 11).

Table 11 - Me Before You: Ideological narrative strategies
Source: designed by the author based on the narrative strategies proposed by Wayne (2020, pp.139-141)

Although some may argue that Louisa is the main character, I have decided to analyse the elements from William's perspetive for it seems to make more sense when it comes to scrutinising the structure of the normality drama - it is Louisa's normality that is validated, but this validation is dependent upon the derogation of his impairment. In the next section, I shall explore these strategies in more depth.

The use of Ideological narrative strategies in *Me Before You* (2016)

There are a number of different binary oppositions in relation to William. The first to be introduced is the conflict between Louisa and his world and his current state of mind. Firstly, there is a clash of worlds in the clear contrast between Louisa's working-class

background and the wealth of the Traynor family. Secondly, the dissonance of his and her personalities.

After being fired from her previous job, Louisa finds a well-paid position as a caretaker for a disabled man. The job requires no experience or training, and the description indicates five previous failed attempts to fulfill the position. For more attentive audiences, the combination of these three elements may signal the obstacles that are likely to rise at work. When Louisa arrives to be interviewed for the job, the general feeling of seriousness and refinement of the mansion contrast to her gullible, simple, and cheerful spirit.

Despite being apparently unsuitable for the job, after what seemed to be a disastrous interview, Lou is invited to take the position. The hiring of the unexperienced and most improbable candidate may be pointed out as a recurrent component in the narrative structure of many cinematographic productions. It is, for instance, present in the biographical French film *Intouchables* (2012), and its American version *The Upside* (2019). The scene does put an accent on the obviousness of the plot, that is, the sweet, pretty, joyful and spirited working-class unexperienced caretaker who is going to keep company to the handsome, wealthy, and hostile disabled man (Table 12).

William	**Louisa**
Disabled man	Non-disabled woman
Upper-class	Working-class
Bitter	Sweet
Hostile	Friendly, joyful
Witty	Naïve

Table 12 - Me Before You: personality contrasts between William and Louisa (Binary Oppositions)
Source: designed by the author.

Camilla Traynor, Williams's mother, guides Louisa through the corridors of the mansion to the annex adapted for Will. This scene reemphasises the contrast of class position that had been introduced when Louisa arrives at the castle-like mansion of the Traynor family (Image 15).

Image 15 - Me Before You: Louisa marvelled at the mansion in contrast to Camilla

Source: Sharrock, 2016.

The shot depicts Lou marvelled at the luxury of the mansion and the whole scene accentuate her personality traits. Her whole attitude is an indication that this is not her world. We also come to realise that in spite of the resemblance between the two characters's outfit, Lou's height, cheap clothes, clumsy walk, and her timid posture are contrasting Camilla's, who walks with confidence and dresses smart and classy. Camilla's attitudes and clothes put emphasis on the conversation between Lou and her mother, Joise. As she helps Lou get dressed for the interview, Joise tells her that "styles change, love, but smart remains smart" (6min15s). What Mrs. Clark is in fact telling Louisa is that "the world may change, love" but the rich remain rich. The wealth and tradition of the Traynor family is also going to be underlined when far ahead in the story (1h04min40s) William takes Lou to the city's castle, which owned by his family. They talk about his childhood when he used to play in castle pretending that he was a warrior prince.

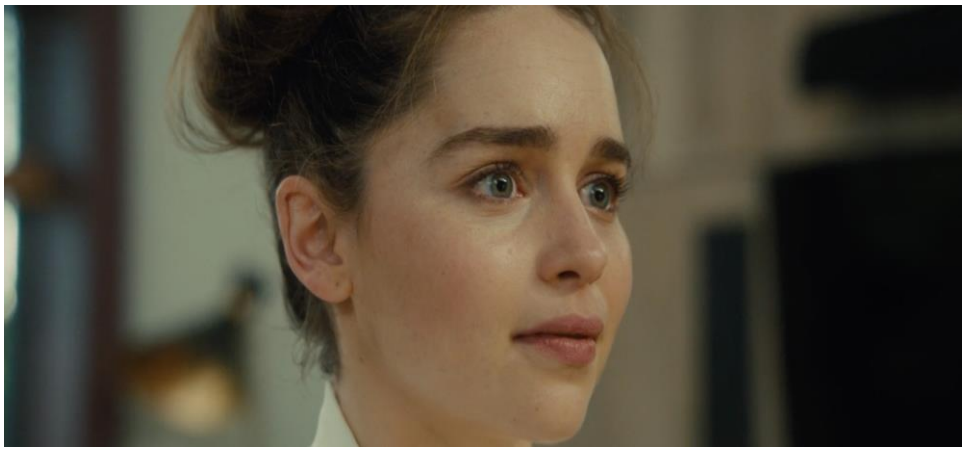
Going back to moments before William and Louisa meet for the first time, Camilla gives Lou a quick introduction to her duties at work and prepares her to meet William (Image 16).

Image 16 - Me Before You: Louisa and Camilla about to meet William

Source: Sharrock, *Me Before You*, 2016.

The shot is a depiction of Lou, on the left, and Camilla, on the right. The doors that slide open to opposite directions and the glass that creates distorted images establish the suspense of the scene. The mood is intensified when Camilla, with a concerned look on her face, says that “he has good and bad days”. The doors to the *Kraken* are opened and William and his nurse, Natan, are inside the room looking right back at them. Lou meets Will and Natan, and a close-up catches Camilla leaving the room and Lou’s expression of apprehension and uneasiness as her eyes, begging for help, follow the mother (Image 17).

Image 17 - Me Before You: Close-up of Louisa meeting William

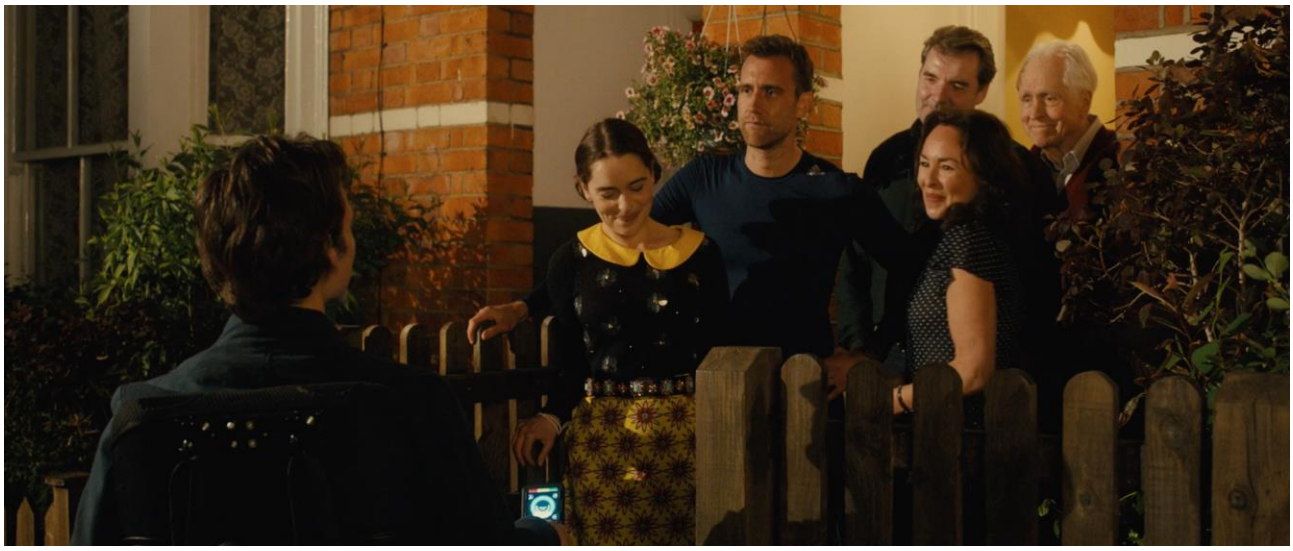


Source: Sharrock, 2016.

Their first encounter is William performing an imitation of Daniel Day-Lewis's Christy Brown in *My Left Foot* as a way to make her uncomfortable. From this first moment on, William's behaviour is driven by a constant desire to make his new caretaker uncomfortable with his criticism, sarcasm, and mean wittiness. As a character, William incorporates the sociocultural belief that disability makes one hostile and cruel (LONGMORE, 1987; BARNES, 1992). This sequence of shots set in motion the atmosphere of awkwardness and uneasiness under which Louisa is going to work. Day after day, Louisa makes it her goal to please and cheer William up. She patiently thaws his coldness until he asks her to watch a film with him. In summary, the romance in the film, as form of reconciliation, rises from the conflicts between his bitter personality and her peculiar dressing style, her uncoordinated movements, and cheering personality.

There is also a tension between William and Louisa's boyfriend, Patrick. On one side, there is her non-disabled boyfriend who is obsessed with sports (running, cycling, canoeing, etc) and was nominated young entrepreneur of the year. On the other side, there is the handsome disabled William who is a billionaire successful entrepreneur. The opposition between the two characters rises from the space they occupy in Lou's life. One example of the antagonism of the two men is during Louisa's birthday (Image 18).

Image 18 - Me Before You: Shot of the Clark's family with Louisa's boyfriend and William Traynor



Source: Sharrock, 2016.

In the conversation between them, William makes fun of Patrick by thanking him for the fitness advice and by saying that he is a lucky man to have a girlfriend who gives a

good bed bath. The tension escalates as Lou gradually falls for William and the flaws of her relationship with Patrick come to light, until they eventually break up.

William's ex-girlfriend and her new fiancé, who used to be his friend, represent another conflict in the narrative. They are going to get married, and they send an invitation to William. There is an initial tension between the three characters when the couple tells William about the wedding (20min03s) which is solved when Louisa and Will decide to attend the ceremony (1h10min17s) after the scene in the castle described above.

It is, however, in the conflict between the old William and the new William that lies the main conflict. William's existential crisis is laid bare during his and Louisa's tour to the castle. Will says that he does not want his memories of the old William in his favourite place in the world, sitting outside a café in Paris at *Place Dauphine, Pont Neuf*, erased by the new William (1h06min07s):

> Will Traynor : You don't get it Clark. I want to be in Paris as me. The old me. With pretty French girls giving me the eye. […] If I shut my eyes now, I know exactly how it feels to be in that little square. I remember every sensation. I don't want those memories erased by the struggle to fit behind a table, the taxi drivers who refuse to take me, and my wheelchair power pack that won't charge in a French socket.

One of the contributions that might be elicited in *Me Before You* is the allusion to the difficulties faced by wheelchair users in the everyday life. There are, however, only a few references to such sociocultural and historical limitations. The excerpt above sheds light on three, the struggle to fit behind tables at restaurants (and any other places, such as schools, for instance), the difficulties with transportation, and the charging of electric wheelchairs. Some of these references, on the other hand, fail to provide a more accurate and non-stereotypical representation of disability, such as the shot in the parking lot (Image 19).

Image 19 - Me Before You: Louisa, William, and Nathan at the parking lot

Source: Sharrock, 2016.

Lou convinces Will to go see the horse racing with Nathan. When they park and Will drives his chair out of the minivan, there is a puddle of mud right in front of him and his chair gets stuck. Ignoring Will's protests, Lou asks the three men on the back for help, and, with Nathan's assistance, they lift Will up and carry him to an area with dry grass. The scene was probably intended to highlight Lou's positivity, but it shows instead Nathan's and Louisa's incompetence to assist Will and the flaws of casting a non-disabled actor. It is clear that any trained nurse, wheel-chair user or anyone with some decent reasoning would have known better than to park next to a mud puddle.

As I have argued, the association of disability and class condition may enhance or lighten up the limitations imposed. I *am not* suggesting that money solves all the problems, but class condition has proven itself to play a life-changing role in the lessening down of socio-historical-cultural difficulties imposed on the everyday life of a disabled person. It is the difference between the wheelchair that will not charge in a French socket, while one has a strong coffee in Paris, and not having a wheelchair at all; it is the difference between being refused to be taken by a taxi driver and not having another option but to take public transport; the difference between having all financial support for nurses, hospital, caretakers, medicine, etc., and depending upon the public health care system and upon a relative who has to remain unemployed. Such contrast may well be perceived when we look at the examples already mentioned (*My left foot*, *Gaby, a true story*, *The theory of everything*, *The upside* and

Intouchables), at the other films analysed in this chapter (*The Shape of Water*, *The other Sister*, and *Radio*), and in the case studies of the next chapter (*37 seconds*, and *Two-legged horse*).

The conflict between William and his parents is soon transferred to and shared with Louisa when she finds out about his decision to perform an assisted death in Switzerland. Previous unsuccessful attempts to commit suicide drive him to seek assistance from *Dignitas*, a Swiss association that conducts assisted dying procedures. According to their website,

> "DIGNITAS – To live with dignity - to die with dignity" is an association in accordance with Swiss law and was founded on 17 May 1998 at Forch (near Zurich). The organisation, which pursues no commercial interests whatsoever, has in accordance with its constitution the objective of ensuring a life and a death with dignity for its members and of allowing other people to benefit from these values.[56]

The introduction of this element to the narrative leads us to an analysis of the combination of displacement, individualisation, and focalisation. The conflict generated by the impairment is dealt with at an individual level and displaces social disabling problems onto the assisted suicide from the perspective of an upper-class family. Displacement here appears as an important pillar to ableism. In a society founded on the principles of the ideology of competence (CHAUÍ, 2016), the narrative displaces the limitations imposed on disabled people, that are engendered socially, culturally, and historically, onto the individual level.

As argued above, the film does consider social disadvantages imposed on disabled people, but in the end, they are only arguments used to support William's final decision. In other words, when William says that he wants to enjoy life as the "*old me*", and then chooses death over life as disabled man, he is sending the film's ultimate message. Despite Lou's efforts to show him different ways to enjoy life using the resources he has at his disposal, taking him to parties, festivals, a trip to the beach, William does not change his mind. In addition to the controversial casting of able-bodied Sam Claflin (William), the assisted suicide has also triggered a backlash from the disabled community. (Table 13).

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[56] Retrieved from http://www.dignitas.ch/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=44&lang=en on January, 2021.

Table 13 - Me Before You: Reception of Me Before You in the disabled community

Opinion	Interviewee	Profession
The message of this movie is that it's better for this person to die in order to be of service to her than for him to live	Zack Weinstein	Disabled actor
What rubs me the wrong way as an actor and as somebody with a disability living in the real world is not that this story is being told. […] It's that so frequently this is the only story of disability that is told.		
To romanticize cowardice is indeed perpetuating a stereotype for the sake of forsaking actual people with disabilities who are struggling to maintain their sanity and livelihood and aren't given opportunities in Hollywood.	Grant Albrecht	Disabled actor
Why always show disability as the worst thing? In *Million Dollar Baby*, you had a character who is a boxer, who fights and overcomes her lack of money and her awful family, but the one thing that is unsurmountable is a physical disability to the point that she is helped to kill herself.	Jenni Gold	Disabled filmmaker
Hollywood shouldn't take this criticism as a negative slap in the face. They should see [diverse and accurate stories about disability] as a void where nothing exists, and they can be the first ones to do it and reap the gold dust of success.	Kurt Yaeger	Disabled actor

Source: Designed by the author based on the article written by Rebecca Sun, *The Hollywood Reporter, 6/6/2016*[57].

Supporting the analyses of the study cases presented so far, the opinions shed light on the contradictions engendered by the narrative structure of the many normality drama films that were produced in the dominant filmmaking scenario. These productions ignore the contributions and opinions of activists and researchers for the rights of disabled people. We may even come across spaces of resistance against the perpetuation of normality dramas, but as Weinstein argues, these are the dominant kinds of stories still being told when it comes to disability. Albrecht criticises both the casting of non-disabled actors to play disabled characters and the use of stereotypical representations of disability to validate non-disabled bodies. Gold compares *Me Before You* with *Million Dollar Baby*, a disabled girl who overcomes a number of difficulties to become a professional boxer, as portraits of disability "as the worst thing" in one's life.

It is also interesting to go back to biographical films such as *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Gaby, a true story* (1987), *My left foot* (1989), and *The Theory of Everything*

[57] Retrieved from https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/me-before-you-storyline-sparks-899779 on January, 2021.

(2014) to emphasize that, even with the difficulties to overcome the problems socially and historically imposed and the controversies surrounding these productions, they all go in a different direction. While William decides to proceed with his plan to commit suicide because disability is portrayed as the "the one thing that is unsurmountable" in his life, these are just some based-on-real-life examples of representations of disabled people working, traveling, studying, having sex, having children, building a family, etc.

Both articles, Gilbey's and Sun's, highlight the fact that the film is built upon a narrative that offers no other perspective of disability (this takes us back to *focalisation*). Only one perspective is offered and there is no other disabled character in the film who could possibly counterbalance the message being sent.

Me Before You focuses on the world of the white and wealth and how they might choose to live life as they please. As Wayne (2020) argues, *focalisation* is potentially ideological because the narrative usually seduces audiences to adhere to the ideals focused. In William's case, the fact that he was once a non-disabled, athletic, adventurous, young billionaire and is now quadriplegic is presented as reason enough to justify his assisted suicide. It perpetrates the notion that it is better to die than to live as a disabled person. It is also worth noticing that Will tries to justify his decision to end his life by saying that he understands that one could possibly live with disability, but suggests that he is not "the kind of man who just accepts this" (1h29min11s). Gilbey, to *The Guardian*, then indicates that this idea only makes things worse in the plot, "[s]ince Will is shown to be strong, determined and uncompromising, it seems clear that the "sort of man" who would put up with a paralysed body and its demands could only be inferior to him.".

Digging a bit deeper in the idea of focalisation, we may also infer that in William's perspective *only* the life of the wealthy, non-disabled, adventurous, successful and powerful (in capitalist terms) is a life worth living, a life lived as fully as possible (42min20s). We have a glimpse of what his life was like at the 36-minute mark and it contrasts to the life lived by the great majority of the working class. Hence, in a way or another, he is actually suggesting that any kind of life that diverges from his is not worth living. From this point of view, disability does become the only unsurmountable thing in his life, the social and cultural disabling limitations in an ableist world are in fact the *only* real-life challenges he has ever had. Little does he know that his lifestyle was constructed upon the shoulders of those who will never be able to afford any of his "live-life-as-fully-as-possible" adventures.

As his final act of redemption with himself and with Louisa, Will leaves her a significant amount of money after he passes:

> When you get back home, Michael Lawler will give you access to a bank account that contains enough to give you a new beginning. Don't start panicking. It's not enough for you to sit around for the rest of your life but it should buy you your freedom, at least from that little town we both call home. Live boldly, Clark. Push yourself. Don't settle. Wear those stripy legs with pride. **Knowing you still have possibilities is a luxury.** Knowing I might have given them to you, this eased something for me. So, this is it. You are scored on my heart, Clark. You have been the first day you walked in with your sweet smile and your ridiculous clothes and your bad jokes and your complete inability to ever hide a single thing you felt. Don't think of me too often. I don't want you getting sad. Just live well. Just live. I'll be walking beside you every step of the way. Love, Will.

In his final words, William again suggests that life with an impairment is a life without possibilities. As he has decided that his life was pointless as disabled man, his letter is an indication that living boldly, pushing yourself, not settling is only for those with a non-disabled body. Louisa gets the money and will not live to see her loved one grow old and/or need her support for anything. Gilbey, in his article, argues that, "As love stories go, it's every bit as creepy as Ghost, which suggested that the perfect relationship was exclusively spiritual […]".

Final Words

On her article on the question of physician-assisted suicide, the Marxist activist and researcher Martha Russel (2019) calls attention to the socioeconomic controversies surrounding the rise of varied institutions and activists advocating in favour of voluntary self-elimination. According to Russel, these advocates's main arguments lie on the social representation of disabled people, the elderly, and those with certain kinds of chronic disease as disposable unproductive burdens to society. As medicine resources advance and create the means to prolong live, they see people who belong to these groups as expenses that could be avoided if only they would agree to a physician-assisted suicide procedure. A world shaped by an ideology of competence thrives on the categorisation of individuals as either competent and exploitable or incompetent and disposable. Hence, cultural depicts of these groups in films, books, soap operas, etc may propagate and cement this perspective or help prevent it from spreading.

As we have discussed hitherto, *Me Before You* reinforces the supposedly humanistic side of William's assisted suicide by making references to his old-self and depicting

his life now as miserable, unbearable, and purposeless. William's words at the beach (1h27min50s) sustain the argument:

> I get that this could be a good life, but it's not my life, it's not even close. You never saw me before. I loved my life. I really loved it. I can't be the kind of man who just accepts this. […] I can't watch you wandering around the annex in your crazy dresses. Or see you naked and not be able to... oh Clarke if you have any idea what I want to do to you right now. I can't live like this. […] Shh. Listen, this, tonight being with you is the most wonderful thing you could have ever done for me. But I need it to end here. **No more pain and exhaustion and waking up every morning already wishing it was over.** It's not going to get better than this. The doctors know it and I know it.

As Liz Carr argues, cultural representations of disability as a problem to be solved by death "[…] seem to love those individuals who want to die. They're less keen to cover the rest of us who might want to live but are struggling to get the health and social care resources to do so […]"[58]. Russel (2019) also remonstrates against the lack of resources and obstacles created to hinder the lives disabled people and influence public policies to support the access to assisted suicide, "A lethal dose in Oregon costs only $35 to $50; compare that to one day's stay in a hospital at about $1,000" (RUSSEL, 2016, p. 226).

Portrayed as a humanistic practice that provides a way to relive oneself from pain, from feeling like a burden, from depression, from disability, from growing older, the hidden economic discourse that promotes the assisted suicide of those deemed unproductive and disposable reveals neoliberalism's true face, a world driven by the only and ultimate desire to increase profit and reduce costs by any means.

[58] Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jun/02/me-before-you-disabled-backlash-not-pitied on January, 2021.

Chapter 4 – Final Words

My main objective in this chapter was analyse the elements of the narrative structure of four cinematographic productions portraying disabled characters in the American dominant filmmaking industry. My idea was to work with films that had cast Hollywood stars, had portrayed cultural and historical stereotypes associated with disabled people - which seemed to validate abled bodies -, had been produced in the 1990's or in the 21st century, and belonged to the mainstream industrial and commercial filmmaking scenario.

The films were released in 1994, 2003, 2016, and 2017 and they might be said to have been produced in times of social and cultural pressures from the civil society in favour of more equalitarian cultural and political practices. In what concerns disability, social movements have played a significant role in favour of the rights of the disabled people, especially since the 1990's, but also long before that. Given the sociocultural changes observed since then, one was to expect the filmmaking industry to incorporate them to their own productions.

Hollywood, however, is a lot more complex than this, "as a multi-faceted creature, Hollywood is shaped by a combination of forces ranging from the most local and industry-specific detail to the scale of national or global social and economic movements". (KING, 2002, p. 2). Despite the innovation in the narrative structure that may be perceived in the dominant filmmaking industry in terms of gender, race, sexuality etc, the analyses indicate that the most conservative spaces resisting to change still adhere to ableism, the ideology of competence, and the principles of meritocracy.

My conclusions point out in the direction that perhaps resistance lies in the acceptance of disabled people (1) as complex and complete individuals and (2) as members of society. There have been positive changes in the overall scenario of disability and cinema, as we have seen in chapter three, nonetheless, films still portray disabled people as individuals who are incomplete and in need of salvation. Even when there is an attempt to create a more complex character, the depictions of disability analysed indicate that the narratives still cling to cultural stereotypes. In addition, the films tend to refer to the obstacles and barriers faced by disabled people in the everyday life as individual problems, rarely calling upon them as social and historical constructions.

A short summary of the analyses would indicate that *The other Sister* reproduces manners and grimaces associated with people with intellectual disability which

oddly seem to escalate and soften as the plot develops, a problem that could have been avoided if only disabled actors had been cast. There would have been no *acting disabled*, rather only acting. The performance given aims to create characters who are disabled but not *too disabled* for Hollywoodian patterns. In *The Shape of Water*, there is the question of love. Elisa is a disabled independent woman who falls in love with a fish-like monster. There is no reference to any other kind of relationship she might have had that would have led her to falling in love with a monster. The film suffered a strong negative backlash from the disabled community, which argued that it represented disabled people as unworthy of human love. The narrative at some point does suggest that Elisa was not in fact human at all, but that is open to interpretation. As for *Radio*, the whole narrative makes us question if the story is really about Radio or just another film about a blue-eyed white man saving the day. Additionally, the casting of a non-disabled actor also represents an issue. Lastly, in *Me Before You* disability is again associated with bitterness. It reinforces the stereotype of people with acquired disabilities as resentful and bitter who were once adventurous and joyful. It also carries a controversial association with assisted suicide, conveying the idea that it is better to die than to live with a disability.

All of the examples studied seem to follow the ideological narrative structure associated with the normality drama genre. They are films used to reiterate and validate non-disabled bodies and reestablish them as the norm. They celebrate ableism by associating disability with incompetence and incompleteness. As for the *Carla* and *Daniel*, in *The Other Sister*, despite the fact that they do seem to challenge some of the stigmas associated with intellectual disability, they do so by reproducing others. And, although some may argue that there advances in certain aspects of the narratives, "[…] unrealistic depictions of disabled people can be problematic, especially when they become firmly lodged in the popular imagination." (CALLUS, 2019, p. 189).

The use of binary oppositions and their reconciliation, the displacement of limitations and problems engendered in core of the capitalist society onto the individual level, the focus on white middle- or upper-class characters, the redemption arcs of both protagonists and supporting characters, the happy and inspirational endings, the use of melodramatic soundtracks, and the recurrent presence of rain to convey sadness, all come together as elements to inspire non-disabled audiences.

The indication that much has changed in Hollywood, but much has remained the same (KING, 2002) follows the theoretical understanding of culture as lived practices. Eagleton's (2003, p. xii) reflections on the rates of historical changes may be helpful here. As

he argues, changes may vary in terms of speed - highly volatile areas, spaces of resistance to change, and medium-range-time changes. Ableism and the long-lasting association of disability with the image of a personal tragedy seem to resist. Ableism is founded on one of the pillars of capitalism, the idea of being productive and reducing costs (MARX, 2013; RUSSEL, 2017). As for tragedy and disability, they thrive on the need to see pain and suffering as forms of inspiration - "[…] suffering is a mightily powerful language to share in common, one in which many diverse life-forms can strike up a dialogue. It is a communality of meaning." (EAGLETON, 2003, p. xvi).

Disability, for the time being, seems to be the one element that may not be easily refashioned "[…] And even when we do manage to transform it, its weight may still be found resting like a nightmare on the brains of the living." (EAGLETON, 2003, p. xii). In summary, Hollywood is after all a multi-billionaire filmmaking business (KING, 2002). It gives people what they want to see. In spite of (1) the presence of a few disabled actors in the filmmaking industry, (2) the production of films that focus on the potentials of disabled people, (3) the films that aim to portray disabled people as individuals working, traveling, studying etc, (1) the idea of non-disabled actors giving the *not too disabled* performances remains (CALLUM, 2019), (2) they usually convey a message of positiveness towards life and disability as a tragedy that must be overcome, (3) they ignore the condition of class as a determining element.

CHAPTER 5 - ALTERNATIVES TO NORMALITY DRAMAS IN THE INDEPENDENT CINEMA

Introduction

I have hitherto focused on the analysis of the narrative structure and ideological influence of the normality drama as a genre in the mainstream film industry. On chapter four, the case-studies discussed seem to represent what we came to understand as a genre that reproduces and reinforces non-deviant/non-disabled images, symbols, practices, and meanings (DARKE, 1998). Furthermore, it has also been my interest to investigate how normality dramas address class-shaped conditions and how social class impacts the lives of the disabled characters in the films. The analysis of class makes it possible to bring to light the absence of a critical approach to the relations between disability and class in the film industry.

My main objective in the two case-studies on chapter five is to discuss alternatives to the established systems of codes, conventions, visual styles, and narrative structures of normality dramas. I endeavour to achieve this objective by (1) indicating how these films challenge dominant ableist practices in the film industry, (2) specifying contrasts between these films and the normality dramas studied, and (3) demonstrating how they approach the impacts of class on individuals of the working classes and of the dominant classes.

Attempting to present alternatives to the narrative structure of normality dramas, I have selected two films of the independent filmmaking scenario. I considered independent films those which combined attributes opposed to those listed as dominant. Namely, films (1) produced or distributed by small independent studios or media companies; (2) spoken in other languages rather than English; (3) supplied with small budgets; (4) which do not use stars; (5) and, in the case of normality dramas, which cast disabled actors or actresses to play disabled characters.

The films analysed are *37 seconds* (2020) and *Two-legged horse* (2008). *37 seconds* is a Japanese film directed by Hikari and it is the director's first feature film. *Two-legged horse* was directed by Samira Makhmalbaf and written by her father, Mohsen Makhmalbaf. They have been carefully selected as critical representations of disability in cinematographic productions.

5.1 CASE STUDY 1 - 37 SECONDS. HIKARI. 2020

Plot

Yuma (Mei Kayama) is a 23-year-old manga artist who lives in Tokyo with her mother, Kyoko Takada (Kanno Misuzu). She works with her cousin designing their own manga magazine. When she realises her cousin is keeping her in the shadows, Yuma looks for opportunities to publish her own independent work. Yuma contacts several publishing houses and gets an interview with Fujimoto (Yuka Itaya), the editor-in-chief of a publishing house specialised on adult mangas. Fujimoto sees potential in her work but tells Yuma that she needs more life-experience to impress realism on her drawings. Inspired by Fujimoto's words, Yuma embarks on a journey of self-discovery. It is when she meets Mai (Makiko Watanabe), Toshi (Shunsuke Daitō), and Kuma (Yoshihiko Kumashino) that she manages unveil the past and find her own path.

First words

Written and directed by the Japanese filmmaker Hikari, *37 seconds* was nominated for the *GWFF Best First Feature Award* at the *Berlinale - Berlin International Film Festival* in 2019 (Image 1). It was produced by Shin Yamaguchi and Hikari, distributed and streamed by Netflix, and the legal rights are held by the independent international sales company, *Films Boutique*.

Image 20 - 37 seconds: Berlinale: GWFF Best First Feature Award Nomination

Source: http://37secondsfilm.com

Hikari manages to deliver a film that is not afraid to delve into the nuances of the everyday life of a disabled young woman, into her relationship with her mother, and into her journey of self-discovery. The plot focuses on Yuma (Mei Kayama), a 23-year-old manga artist, who lives in Tokyo with her mother and works with her cousin. In contrast with most of the narrative strategies applied in normality dramas in the dominant filmmaking industry, for over an hour, the film's aim is to present Yuma as a *real* person beyond her impairment, demanding attention to details as it attempts to create a bond between the disabled character and the audience. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Hikari's feature debut is sensitive and

empathetic, showing a young woman who is more than just her cerebral palsy. Yuma is a wildly creative, sexual person who deserves more than her society often gives her.”.

37 seconds depicts Yuma as an active, spirited young woman in need of a breakaway from her mother’s protective bubble, “Yet sentimentality and pathos are banned from Hikari’s screenplay, which surprises with its fresh, often humorous realism”, setting the film apart from the clichés and stereotypes of normality dramas (LONGMORE, 1987; KRIEGEL, 1987; BARNES, 1992; DARKE, 1998).

Considering that the film offers two transparent themes, the mother/daughter relationship and the journey of self-discovery, I would like to shed light on four elements that I think contrast with the dominant narratives revolving around the disability analysed hitherto, they are (1) the casting of a non-professional disabled actress; (2) the structure of the narrative, (3) the father-daughter relationship, and (4) the portrait of a disabled person as an active member of the working class.

Discussion

37 seconds offers alternative elements which contrast with those of the dominant filmmaking industry explored in chapters three and four. The casting of a disabled non-professional actress is the first one. According to an interview delivered at the *BFI London Film Festival*, Hakari and the producers advertised the role in different social medias, looking for a disabled woman, who was a non-professional actress. Mei Kayama was the last to come to the audition and she was the one selected to play Yuma. Due to the nature of her disability (cerebral palsy), Hikari had to rewrite parts of the script, which initially focused on a woman with paraplegia. Since it was Mei’s first time acting, the film was shot in chronological order and the more emotional scenes are delivered relying on her own experience as a disabled young woman. Despite her lack of experience in acting, Mei does not disappoint. For *The Hollywood Reporter*, “Kayama is an expressive actress who one very much hopes will find more roles onscreen. More calibrated and conventionally moving is Kanno’s trajectory as her mother, who seems so transparent until her hidden drama is revealed.”.

Casting a real disabled person is an example of resistance to the dominant industry, it is an act that fulfills the demands of the disabled community for space and representation and demonstrates respect towards the everyday challenges faced by disabled people. Hence, now that we are dealing with a film with a disabled actress, it is fundamental to reemphasize that for a disabled actress/actor there is no acting *too disabled* or *less disabled*,

there is only acting. Although the whole film supports this idea, some scenes may be pinpointed as examples.

The dressing up and undressing scenes may be clarifying. At 3:00 minutes, for instance, Yuma gets home from work. It was a hot day and she and her mother are going to take a bath. She undresses with her mother's help. At 27:07 minutes, after she decides to go on dates with different guys she met online, she is on a public toilet to get ready for her date, changing into more colourful and youthful clothes, applying makeup, and doing her hair. Despite the whole acting involved, her movements and manners do not have to be acted out. These shots may well be placed in opposition to the idea of acting *too disabled* or *less disabled*. We may take them in contrast to the same kind of scenes with non-disabled actresses/actors playing disabled characters in *The Other Sister*, *Gaby, a true story*, *The upside* etc.

If the casting of a disabled actress fosters a more respectful and precise depiction of disability, portraying Yuma as a complex individual contributes to going beyond the stereotypical images of disability approached on chapter three (Table 14).

Table 14 - Images of representation of the disability in the works of Kriegel (1987) and Longmore (1987)

Author	Images
Kriegel (1987)	Demonic cripple
	Charity cripple
	Realistic cripple
	Survivor cripple
Longmore (1987)	Disability and Criminality
	Disability and Adjustments
	Disability and Sexuality

Source: designed by the author based on the works of Kriegel (1987) and Longmore (1987).

According to Kriegel (1987) there are four recurrent images revolving around disabled characters in works of literature: the demonic, the charity, the realistic, and the survivor. As for Longmore (1987), he analyses how complex social problems related to disability are portrayed as simple individual problems in three main themes: disability and criminality, disability and adjustments, and disability and sexuality. I have already discussed these images on chapter two, but referring back to the works of Kriegel (1987) and Longmore (1987) may be a productive way to provide evidence of how *37 seconds* distances itself from mainstream portraits of disability.

Demonic cripple/disability and criminality: The demonic cripple is connected to Longmore's idea of disability and criminality. Disabled characters choose the path

of evilness or become criminals as a form of revenge on normality or on the world of the normals. These characteristics, however, do not apply to Yuma. She is depicted as a spirited, sweet girl who is polite and seems to get along well with most people.

Despite an atmosphere of solitude and segregation in her life - no access to any other friends except for Sayaka, her failed attempts to have a relationship, abandoned by her father etc - Yuma does not take it as a source for revenge.

Charity Cripple: The charity cripple is the representation of disabled characters as depend upon philanthropic institutions or the charity of non-disabled characters of the story. In contrast with normality dramas, Yuma does not rely on either. It may be argued that there is a form of charity when Yuma decides to run away from home and her friend Mai helps her with some money and clothes and Toshi offers his house for a couple of days. However, this does not come in the form of charity, rather as friends supporting a friend in a very specific moment of need. In a normality drama, the running away scene would probably have been at night (*The Other sister,* for instance) and the charity moment would have been accompanied by a melodramatic soundtrack (see *Radio*). Furthermore, Yuma tells Mai that she does have money and that she wants to go to a hotel. It is Mai who tells her that it would not be possible to find an adapted room at that hour and that she should stay with Toshi instead (1h12min).

Realistic Cripple: As for the realistic cripple, his/her impairment is treated as a banality and it never occupies a significant role in his/her life, at times, it is almost a denial of the existence of the impairment. Yuma's impairment, on the other hand, is central in in the storyline. Her disability is depicted as part of her life, without denial or protagonism over Yuma herself.

This seems to be one the images that is most easily broken when a disabled actor/actress plays the role. As I have argued before, a disabled actor/actress has only to act whereas a non-disabled one has to imprint realism through acting disabled. In other words, what I mean to say is that when Yuma drives her electric wheelchair around the house or the city or at work, when she is practicing her drawing or when she has to undress to take a shower, Mei Kayama does act disabled, she acts.

Survivor cripple/Disability and Adjustments: The survivor cripple is the representation of the one who thrives despite the disability, the most common image used to inspire non-disabled audiences. Disability and adjustments refers to representations of disabled people as self-piteous and resentful because they do not feel like they belong. A non-disabled

character usually lectures them - what Longmore (1987, p. 70) calls "*a slap in the face*" -, they change their attitude, and succeed in the end. Characters who fall into these categories convey the message that positive thinking and a positive attitude are sufficient to thrive in any circumstance. It ignores sociocultural issues and depicts the social disabling phenomena as an individual problems. As Longmore (1987, p. 72) points out, "[…] Repeatedly they recount stories of achievement and success, of heroic overcoming. Over and over they display inspiring blind carpenters, paraplegic physicians, and "handicapable" athletes […]".

Although Yuma's journey of self-discovery may be interpreted as a form of inspirational discourse, it does not seem to have been pushed to the limits of inspirational porn. The idea to experience life in new ways is depicted as a rational decision of a trapped soul in a moment of that she needed to leave her comfort zone. Conceiving Yuma beyond her disability is to understand that running away from her protective mother, finding her place in the world, finding out who is and who she wants to be are processes that every human being undergoes.

The film's description - *Disability is a state of mind* - in its official website for the *Berlinale*, however, seems controversial. Disability is much more than just a state of mind. It is rather a complex ideological, cultural, and sociohistorical issue that is interwoven in capitalism in its symbols, practices, and meanings and the film does seem to acknowledge that. In that sense, I reckon the film's description more as a reference to the mother's super protection than to Yuma's journey of self-discovery. In other words, Yuma is depicted as strong character, who has all the potential to live a life on her own; her mother, on the other hand, still sees her as incapable of looking after herself. For Yuma, her mother's overprotective feelings are fed by fear of being left alone. Kyoko and Yuma have to resignify their lives and feelings to forgive each other and move on. In this process, Kyoko has to see Yuma beyond her disability, in this sense disability may be understood as a state of mind.

Disability and Sexuality: Lastly, Longmore (1987) indicates that disabled characters, in terms of sexuality, are usually portrayed as sexual perverts or asexual. In the case of *37 seconds*, Yuma's sexuality triggers off her whole self-discovery journey. At the 1h27min mark, she is on a date with a man she met online. They talk about their lives, she tells him about her High-school crushes and, eventually, he says that he had never thought that he would have been comfortable around people with disabilities, to which she replies "We're just like everybody else".

Disabled people's sexuality is a complex topic to be addressed in cinema. While normality dramas rely either on provoking laughter (*The Other Sister; Gaby, a true story;*

Radio) or bringing audiences to tears (*Me Before You*), *37 seconds* explores Yuma's sexuality as a natural human trait. The absence of comedy and melodramatic elements reiterates my analysis.

In *The Other Sister*, for example, the scene when Carla and Daniel decide to have sex uses comic elements to alleviate the sexual tone. They are together in Carla's apartment, choosing from the pictures in a book the position that they are going to do, Daniel showing Carla all of the condoms he had bought. The scene projects an atmosphere of cuteness and comedy, as if there were anything funny in the idea of intellectually disabled people having sex. As for *Me Before You*, which intends to be appeal to dramatic emotions, there is an atmosphere of romance created around William and Louisa and intensified by rain and the melodramatic soundtrack.

In opposition to what happens in normality dramas, Hiraki explores a delicate social issue regarding sexuality, that disabled people may sometimes find no other alternative than to rely on sex professionals. Yuma, contrasting Carla and William, faced with disappointment decides to hire a male prostitute. She books a date and waits for him in hotel room. When he arrives, he says that he was not informed that she was disabled and that he usually charges more in these cases (Image 21). There is no romance, no comedy. It is a timed and straight-to-the-point appointment. The experience does not go well, and this is Yuma's only and failed attempt to have sex in the film.

Image 21 - 37 seconds: Yuma and the male prostitute in the hotel room

Source: Hikari, 2020.

The analysis of these images demonstrates the film's intention to challenge cultural forms, meanings, symbols, and practices that reinforce disability-related stereotypes. *37 seconds* validates the demands on portraying disabled people as complex human beings and

on casting disabled actors/actresses as requirements to move beyond stereotypical images of disability.

In order to explore the entanglements that eventually lead to the turnaround in Yuma's life, Hikari relies on details. An example of the subtleties of the film comes at 10:27 when the camera elegantly captures Yuma and the non-disabled girls around her. At the 9-minute mark, Yuma wakes up and her mother soon comes into the bedroom. She opens the wardrobe and chooses Yuma’s clothes for the day - a grey cap, a white shirt, and moss green trousers. Yuma asks for a dress but she is denied the right to choose on the account of the “many creeps out there”, a sentence the mother will repeat numbers of times along the story (“there are too many creeps out there”). The clothes chosen by the mother and her attitude in this scene already indicate how she controls Yuma.

Kyoko accompanies Yuma to the train station and the scene cuts to Yuma inside the train. The composition of the shots of the scene shows the contrast between Yuma’s neutral and colourless outfit and no-makeup face with the other girls on the train. In a medium, low-angle shot, Yuma is on the background with her head down and, on the foreground, the faces of the girls on the seats of the train. They are applying makeup, reading, talking, laughing, taking a nap. The camera adopts a long shot at Yuma’s eye level, and we see the train from her perspective. Next, it cuts to a close-up of her hands drawing the faces, expressions, and attitudes of the girls around her. The final shot seems to summarise her feelings. She looks at her reflection in the window, removes the cap and the sadness in her eyes suggests that Yuma feels the contrast between herself and the other girls (Image 22).

Image 22 - 37 seconds: Yuma on the train

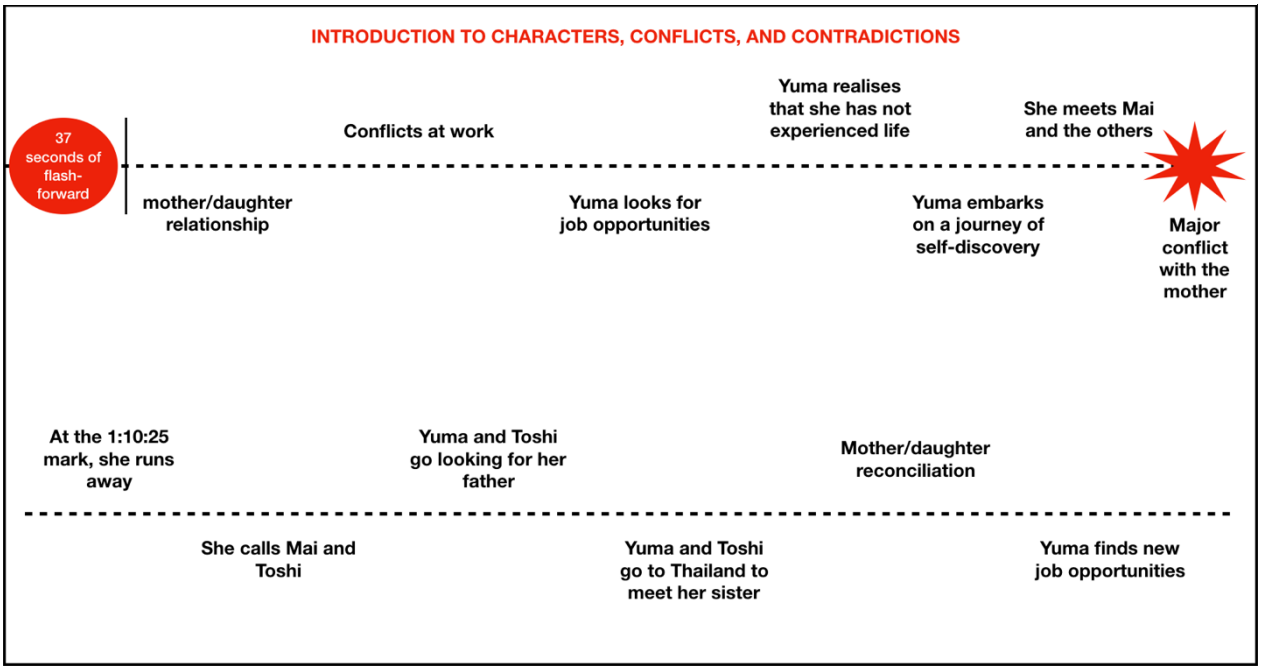
Source: Hikari, 2020.

That the film relies on implied meanings and requires from audiences a close attention to details detaches it from the traditional narrative structure of normality dramas.

Modern Hollywoodian normality dramas, as the ones analysed on chapter four, depend on obviousness and on the numerous sequences of disruption/resolution (troughs of action) in the plot to grasp and maintain the interest of the audience in the film (KING, 2002). In these cases, action escalates up to the moment when the film reaches the climax, *Me Before You*, for example.

37 seconds, on the other hand, is constructed upon a narrative style that does not depend on the rising of action until it reaches climax. It is uncertain if the so-called climax could be the fight between mother and daughter or the running away scene - or even, perhaps, another scene. Anyhow, in this case, it does not seem to matter (Figure 6).

Figure 6 - 37 seconds: narrative analysis



Source: designed by the author.

The film begins with a flash-forward, or a prolepsis, that lasts about 37 seconds. Yuma is applying makeup and lipstick when she is interrupted by a knocking on the door. It is an extreme close-up that captures Yuma's fingers with red nail polish, black eyeshadows in her eyelids, and red lipstick (Image 23).

Image 23 - 37 seconds: Flash-forward

Source: Hikari, 2020.

The scene of the prolepsis cuts to an aerial shot of Tokyo. As if zooming in, the camera captures Tokyo, people on the streets, a train, and then Yuma on the train. The background is in focus and portrays a Yuma with no makeup, a grey cap, and sad eyes (Image 24).

Image 24 - 37 seconds: Yuma on the train

Source: Hikari, 2020.

Images 23 and 24 represent the processes of psychological transformation Yuma undergoes during her journey of self-discovery. Respectively, the contrast between the new and the old Yuma, an element audiences will only be aware of in the end.

After the prolepsis, we are introduced to her life and to the other characters around her. She commutes, comes back home, showers with her mother (it is not clear if they always shower together or not), they have dinner and read poetry together before going to bed. This sequence of scenes depicting Yuma's routine is embedded with her mother's controlling attitude.

Narratives revolving around disability often explore the overbearing relationship between mothers and their disabled children (*The Other Sister; Gaby, a true Story; And Your Name is Jonah; What's Eating Gilbert Grape?; Eu não quero voltar sozinho; The Fundamentals of Caring*, and others). One might jump to the conclusion that there is a certain obviousness in the story in what comes to Kyoko's suffocating control over Yuma and the process of redemption that she has to undergo to accept Yuma as an adult woman. However, the analysis of form will take on again a paramount role. This becomes more evident if we take a look back at *Radio* and *The Other Sister.*

Carla runs away from home during the night, while a suspenseful soundtrack plays in background. When Radio is sad because he was not allowed to travel with the team, he spends his evening in the American football field, under heavy rain, and the melodramatic song intensifies the mood. Yuma runs away during the day to a lively electronic beat. At the physiotherapy clinic, she sees an opportunity to dodge the physiotherapist and her mother (Image 25).

Image 25 - 37 seconds: Yuma running away

Source: Hikari, 2020.

In normality dramas, any moment of tension and rupture or reconciliation necessarily employs a handful of melodramatic elements to exacerbate emotions, namely rain, music, low lighting, characters crying etc. Unlike them, *37 seconds* opposes this tradition in its construction of a stimulating scene, which happens during the day, in open air, Yuma is smiling, and the music is more vigorous. Similarly, the scene when Yuma reencounters her mother, after meeting her sister in Thailand, may also be used as an example of this opposition.

Once again, instead of an extravagant melodramatic song played by a famous band or singer, the soundtrack is a smooth, vivid music with repetitive pulses. The scene begins

with Yuma arriving at the front door and going straight to a room where her mother is waiting for her (1:44:36). The music fades away and the shot is structured with only three sentences: “I’m back”; “Welcome back”; and “She wants to meet you” (Image 26).

Image 26 - 37 seconds: Yuma returns home

Source: Hikari, 2020.

The scene mentioned above illustres my arguments. Yuma and Kyoko are in a room that gives evidence to the natural light that comes through the window. The objects on the foreground and the soft light in the background seek to promote a general feeling of reconciliation. A genuine moment that is part of life and not necessarily just a cinematographic spectacle. For a moment, the light separates them. But it is in the overexposure to this natural source of light that they hug and make peace with each other. In this scene silence speaks out what needs to be said.

The film also expands the narrative constraints of normality dramas when it allows access to the image of the father. Mothers are usually under the spotlight of criticism as these overprotective characters, such as the cases of *The Other Sister*, *37 seconds*, *The fundamentals of caring*, and *Justine.* If he is in the story, the father is usually just a shadow.

Yuma's only reference to her father is a postcard that got in the mail, which she has been keeping hidden from her mother ever since. When she meets her father's brother, she is told that he used to post her those drawings every year until his death, five years early. Time here also seems to dismiss excessive dramatic effects. Normality dramas tend to adopt short periods of time as a strategy to enhance emotions, leading characters and audiences to think that if action had been taken five seconds/minutes earlier, everything could have been different in the end. Please note that the contrast in this case lies not in the denial that seconds may change one's life, but in the use of *time* as a narrative strategy to intensify dramatic emotions.

The uncle tells Yuma that she has a sister, Yuka, living in Thailand. She and Toshi travel all the way to the country to meet her (Image 27).

Image 27 - 37 seconds: Yuma meets Yuka in Thailand

Source: Hikari, 2020.

The shot depicted above places the twin sisters side-by-side. They talk about their parents. According to Yuka, their father was free-spirited, a pacifist and he always looked on the bright side. Yuma says that Kyoko is a good cook and overprotective. And comments that she thinks that Kyoko would have been different if she were not disabled. They wonder why they divorced and Yuka thinks that is because Yuma is the most important thing in Kyoko's

life. The audience does not have access to the past and the real reasons that caused the divorce. The scenes, however, lead us to wonder why they decided to separate the girls and why the father never contacted Yuma directly. These questions remain unanswered.

The last aspect of the film I shall explore is related to Yuma's conflicts at work and her portrayal as a worker. First, it is her dissatisfaction with her partnership with Sayaka, apparently her cousin or a friend, that paves the way to her whole journey of self-discovery.

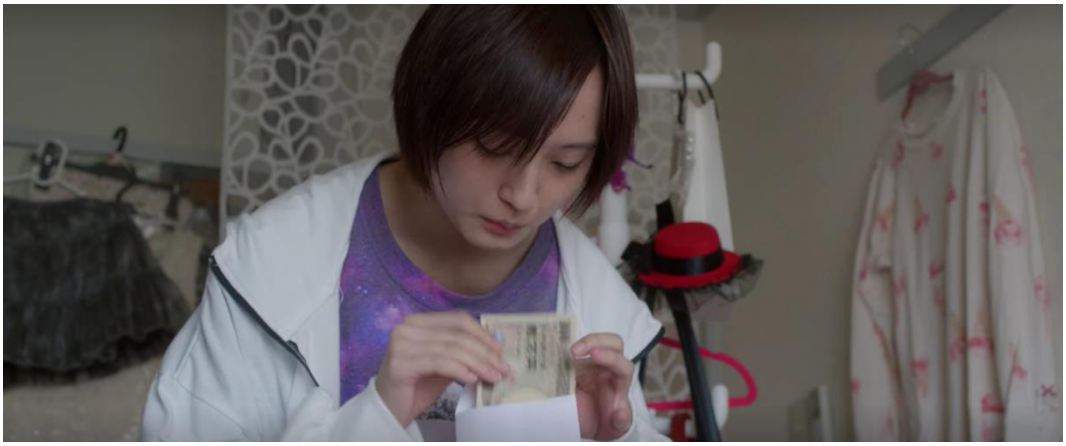
Yuma is a talented manga artist who works with Sayaka. The two artists are working together on the release of a new manga for young teenagers. Most of the creative process, the design of characters, most of the drawings, the design of the covers, and so on, is Yuma's responsibility. She is the one who gives life to the manga. Sayaka is the one who advertises on social medias, goes to events, and negotiates with publishers. Although they seem to be both responsible for the small business, their relationship is based on exploitation.

The first indication of the exploitative relationship between the two cousins is a close-up of Sayaka's hands while she counts some money, keeps a certain amount to herself, and puts the rest on an envelope (6:10). Her whole attitude in this scene is suspicious. She is in a different room and when she joins Yuma in the office she gives her the envelope and says "here is last month's payment" (Images 28 and 29).

Image 28 - 37 seconds: Sayaka counting money (Yuma's payment)

Source: Hikari, 2020.

Image 29 - 37 seconds: Sayaka putting the money on the envelope



Source: Hikari, 2020.

As Yuma opens the envelope and counts the money, Sayaka says that she had "to buy a lot of office supplies, so…", confirming that Sayaka is in fact stealing from Yuma. The camera draws back and captures the office, Yuma on the left and Sayaka on the right. Sayaka's black desk is decorated with jars of candies, giving it a more colorful and cheerful atmosphere. Whereas at Yuma's white desk there are piles of files of sketches and documents (6:45). The shot draws a line between them and creates the opposition and contrast between Yuma and Sayaka (Image 30).

Image 30 - 37 seconds: The contrast between Yuma and Sayaka

Source: Hikari, 2020.

The image shown above seems to give evidence to the fact that Yuma is the one who does the hard work in the creation of the manga, not Sayaka. In spite of knowing that Sayaka puts her aside and exploits her talent, it is only when Yuma looks for possibilities to publish her own work that she realises that she has to leave Sayaka.

As we have seen so far, normality dramas tend not present disabled characters as productive workers and when they do so they are rarely portrayed as what capitalism would consider successful. They might be workers, but they work in the secondary sector (*The Shape of Water*; *I am Sam*). If they are rich, they have achieved wealth through inheritance or before acquiring a disability (*Gaby, a true story*; *Me Before You*; *The Upside*). Therefore, Yuma's characterization as an active member of the working class is of fundamental importance. *37 seconds* invites audiences to see disability beyond the stereotypes of incompetence and unproductivity and suggests a disruption with the ideology of competence. If we take labour as a founding human characteristic, Yuma's contrast with the other characters in this sense, who either rely on their family's wealth or on charity, is seemingly the film's most valid contribution.

I am not ignoring the importance of other elements that constitute Yuma as a complex character, but as Eagleton (2016, p. 68) puts it "[…] For Marx, the primary form this action takes is labour.". By *this action*, he means how we act in world as humans, the process of transforming nature and our own conditions of existence through labour. He goes on, "[…] men and women can survive only by working upon their environment, and it is the peculiar constitution of their bodies that allows them to do so." (EAGLETON, 2016, p. 68-69). On that account, portraying a disabled character interpreted by a disabled actress is to validate the social space to be occupied by disabled people in society. *37 seconds* offers a perspective that is rarely approached when it goes beyond the focalisation on disabled characters who are either part of the dominant sectors or who have to rely on non-disabled characters of it.

Hence, that *37 seconds* approaches disability as a social and ideological issue is indeed a significant support to rupture cultural disabling practices. There is, however, a contradiction that lies therein. On one hand, Yuma's portrait as this talented manga artist seems to refuse capitalism's ideology of competence and the disabling phenomena. On the other hand, capitalism absorbs Yuma into the working class as a productive worker to be exploited, as part of the Industrial Army, and reinforces its own ontological practices. In other words, it is an improvement in political emancipation, but it does not contribute to the emancipation of mankind (MARX, 2010).

History has proven that in times of need, e.g., political/economic crises, capitalism will absorb workers in the reserve army, even people who had been identified as unproductive and superfluous, namely those in the stagnant surplus population. Nevertheless, they will also be first ones to become unemployed once the system has reestablished the order. Going back to Marx's Industrial Reserve Army or Relative Surplus Population, he indicates that

> […] a surplus population of workers is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, the surplus population also becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalist accumulation, indeed becomes a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production. […] Marx, 1976, p. 784.

Marx is reinforcing the importance of the relative surplus population for the ontological conservation of capitalism as a mode of production. This idea applies to Yuma and to the disability movement in the sense that we may indeed have more inclusive practices in capitalism concerning disabled people, but they will not fix the issue, rather only alleviate it, for it is engendered in the core of capitalist practices (MÉSZÁROS, 2011). Corroborating Marx's thought (1976; 2012), Russel (2019, p. 77) sheds light on the contradictions of civil rights movements and affirmative actions, concluding that "[…] Basic changes must be made in the economic, social, and political structure in order to advance economic solutions that reach beyond capitalism's instability. The reserve army, itself, must be made a disposable concept.", and this can only be achieved by surpassing capitalism itself.

Final words

It is interesting to note that some of the aspects I have pinpointed about this film have been identified as positive aspects by film critics in different online magazines (Table 2).

Table 15 - 37 seconds: Critic Reviews on Rotten Tomatoes

Review's Highlights	Critic	Newspaper/Magazine	Date
Mei Kayama [gives] an authentic and genuinely touching performance.[59]	Lynden Barber	Limelight – Music, Arts & Culture	January 6, 2021
Writer-director Hikari's feature debut looks at the life of a disabled person with a view so raw and honest that it hurts to watch.[60]	John Lui	The Straits Times	May 27, 2020
It's a rare film that understands disability as a complex part of its character's understanding of themselves and the world around them.[61]	Cody Corrall	The Chicago Reader	March 6, 2020
A remarkably frank and surprisingly warm depiction of disability, care-giving and sexuality.[62]	Roger Moore	Movie Nation	February 1, 2020

Source: designed by the author based on the reviews available on Rotten Tomatoes

The reviews recognise Mei Kayama's outstanding performance as Yuma and the importance of casting a disabled actress. They praise the uniqueness of a film which does not use disability to reinforce normality, and which acknowledges disability as just *one* part of a complex and profound character.

As we have discussed, disability has been traditionally portrayed in literature and in cinema within a range of stereotypical images. These images of representation have been reproduced for hundreds of years and are impinged in our everyday life. However, audiences who are used to the narrative structure of and to the techniques applied in normality dramas will meet a character who does not comply to the rhetorical and ideological rules that constrain

[59] Retrieved from https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/features/film-and-television-january-2021/ in February 2021.
[60] Retrieved from https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/at-the-movies-leave-no-trace-37-seconds-and-toni-erdmann-are-films-about in February 2021.
[61] Retrieved from https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/37-seconds/Film?oid=77551966 in February 2021.
[62] Retrieved from https://rogersmovienation.com/2020/02/01/netflixable-cerebral-palsy-sex-and-manga-all-boil-down-to-37-seconds/ in February 2021.

disability in cultural productions. Yuma's impairment is not portrayed as a personal tragedy, a fetish, or a reason to pity her.

37 seconds has taken an important step forward in filmmaking industry. There are four elements in the film that disrupted the traditional model of normality dramas, namely (1) the casting of a disabled actress; (2) the rupture with melodramatic techniques; (3) the dissolution of the traditional narrative structure; and (4) the representation of the disabled character as a worker. These four pillars sustain a film that understands disability as a sociocultural phenomenon and the character's impairment as just one of the characteristics of an individual. Yuma is much more than her impairment. Hiraki has managed to create a character that in all her complexity goes beyond the stereotypes and who is not constrained to her disability.

5.5 CASE STUDY 2 - MAKHMALBAF, SAMIRA. TWO-LEGGED HORSE. 2008

> "[…] people speak sometimes about the 'animal' cruelty of man, but that is terribly unjust and offensive to animals, no animal could ever be so cruel as a man, so artfully, so artistically cruel."
>
> Ivan Karamazov

Plot

Living inside an abandoned sewer, young Guiah participates in a contest, organised by Mirvais, the servant of a rich man. Mirvais has to select a strong boy who is going to look after his master's son in his absence. Father of two disabled children, the master is on his way to India with his daughter for medical treatment. His son, who does not have both legs, needs someone to take him to school on his back, bathe him, feed him, and help him with whatever else he needs. In the contest, the boys take turns carrying the young master on their back, so he can choose his new horse, and, eventually, Guiah is chosen. For one dollar a day, Guiah then starts his job as a two-legged horse. The young master and Guiah soon develop a relationship based on power, in which the rich controls and subjugates the poor. Sometimes tempted to develop a friendship with Guiah, the young master does not give in to sentimentality and, seduced by power, he becomes a brutal and cruel portrait of human nature in the most machiavellian way.

First Words

Out of all the films discussed in this dissertation, and this is the last one, *Two-legged horse* is the most tragic, critical, and disquieting one. I would go as far as to suggest that this is the most comprehensible one in terms of what I wanted to achieve, that is, the establishment of a critical perspective of the dialectics of class and disability and the suggestion that it is indeed possible to move beyond the narrative structure of the normality drama when

we are portraying disability in cinema or in any other cultural production. I have pointed out in the previous chapters how questions of social class, race, and gender may build walls between individuals and a flourishing life which are seemingly harder to break than the limits imposed by disability itself. *Two-legged horse*, in this context, summarises my arguments and greatly adds to the discussion.

This is a film entangled in a complex sociopolitical background and which grows in the fertile ground of Iranian cinema. If all films are political they are so in different ways (Wayne, 2001), then the cinema produced in Iran has been recognised world wide as a prolific thought-provoking cultural artefact.

Both before and after the Islamic Revolution (1979), cinema in Iran has had a major impact on shaping Iranian identity and on the way the Western world views its citizens and their culture. Filmmakers in Iran, always committed to the political upheavals of their country, have been granted awards in the most famous film festivals of the world and have been greeted with honours in their country - at the same time, they have been exiled and/or imprisoned for questioning the authority of the Iranian governments (RAHBARAN, 2016; ZEYDABADI-NEJAD, 2010).

The movement some call *New Iranian Cinema* rises (SADR, 2006), albeit not without repression and censorship, in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, mediating the socio-political transformations underwent by the country and their impact on the lives of the Iranian population. As an immediate and much more accessible form of art, filmmaking in Iran flourishes in defiance of the shallowness and poor aesthetics of Western, mainly Hollywoodian, cinema.

Samira Makhmalbaf was born in this context, in 1980, in Tehran, Iran. Daughter of one of the most well-known Iranian filmmakers, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, she grew up in a family of filmmakers. Her first official involvement with a cinematic production, when she was just seven years-old, was her role in the acclaimed *The Cyclist* (1897), directed by her father.

In 1998, when she was 18 years-old, she presented her *The Apple* at the *Cannes Film Festival* and was nominated for the *Un Certain Regard*. In 2001, she was nominated for the *Palme d'Or* for *Blackboards*, and in 2003, for *At Five in the Afternoon*. Despite not being awarded the Golden Palm, she won, in both years, the *Prix du Jury* of Cannes.

In 2003, *The Guardian* named her one of the world’s best art directors alive:

> You could say Ms Makhmalbaf had it easy, being the daughter of one of Iran's greatest film-makers, but she's hardly taken any easy options. Her films get bolder and more confrontational every time - *Blackboards* took her into the Kurdish lands on the Iranian border; her latest, *At Five in the Afternoon*, was shot in the chaos of post-Taliban Afghanistan - but for all their political currency, there's still evidence of an artistic sensibility. And she's only 23 years old.

The authors indicate in a tone of approval that Makmalbaf displays 'evidence of artistic sensibility', but this is almost despite the 'political currency' of her work. The casual aside reveals more than the author seems to realise. It assumes that 'artistic sensibility' and 'politics' do not really go together. The idea of *neutrality* is a myth, there is no such thing as *being neutral*. Film and any other kind of media - newspapers, magazines, TV, streamings, social media - is skewed, politically bias - it conveys meanings that may be in the surface, clearly apparent, or they may require from audiences further analysis, but they are never neutral.

In fact, this reminds me of an interview with one Brazil's most famous female writers, Raquel de Queiroz. During the interview she advocates against the idea that artists can be politically engaged; according to her, they should *describe* reality without any kind of political position, that they should be *true to reality*. This is something Williams calls *naïve realism* (2011), one's gullible belief that reality can be accessed and described apart from one's own perceptions and judgments of it.

Williams's comprehension of mediation is, perhaps, the best way to respond to the matter. As we have discussed in Chapter 2, Williams argues that art is much more than a mere reflection of reality, it mediates the multiple contexts involved with itself - where it was produced, who produced it, where it is consumed, who consumes it, when, how, and why. All elements involved in these ever-lasting processes of production, reproduction, and consumption of that piece of art will transform it and be transformed by it - even if unconsciously (WILLIAMS, 1977; 2011).

Art, here represented by Ms. Makhmalbaf's film, as a process of creative communication has "[…] the capacity to find and organise new descriptions of experience." (WILLIAMS, 2011, p. 45). Art is "[…] the substantial communication of experience from one organism to another. […] When art communicates, a human experience is actively offered and actively received. Below this activity threshold there can be no art." (WILLIAMS, 2011, p. 44). And Samira is indeed an artist. She was considered bold and confrontational in 2003 and she proved herself even more entitled to those adjectives in *Two-legged horse*.

Almost 85% of the film was ready when Samira and her crew were the target of a grenade attack while shooting the film in Afghanistan in 2007. After the recovery of the injured, Samira was determined to finish the film even if they could no longer shoot in Afghanistan. Mohsen, who had already been the target of other two assassination attempts, is hated by both the Iranian authorities and by the Taliban, due to his *Kandahar* (2001). In an interview to *The Guardian*, he recognises that his presence in the set put everyone in danger and that, after the explosion, he understood if they no longer wanted to work with them. Living in self-exile in France at the time, Mohsen was cautious considering who would have been responsible for the attack:

> I have to be careful answering this because Samira is still living in Iran. But I have some reason to think the bomber came from there. The new situation in Iranian politics doesn't like me, doesn't like many things." He shrugs. "Please remember that this is only my theory, my opinion. But if you hear that Mohsen is killed, that Mohsen is dead, you will know it was Iran that did it.

They finished the film and presented it in the Toronto International Film Festival in 2008 where it caused people in the audience to stand up and yell out that "[…] he had never seen such a stupid, insulting and sadistic film […]" or simply to stand up and leave. Responding to the critics, Samira argues that this is not a film about the Afghanistan or Iran, it is an investigation of the limits of human exploitation and relations of oppression.

Recalling that Williams (2011) advocates in favour of analysing culture and art as three complementing and inseparable elements - (a) *ideal* (investigating universal human feelings and sensations), (b) *documentary* (working as a historical document), and (c) *social* (scrutinising the sociohistorical processes and actors involved in the creation and reproduction of a cultural expression) - allows us to highlight them in this film and understand why Samira indicates that this is a story that could happen anywhere. The aim here is to access the roots of human relationships and push exploitation to the verge of madness and cruelty. They are investigating the whole of human relations, working on the grounds of art as an exercise of human consciousness and the latter as a process of human interaction with others, with oneself, and with the material world (MARX AND ENGELS, 2011; WILLIAMS, 2011). In terms of (a) ideal, it not only scrutinises human feelings of superiority *versus* exploitation, cruelty *versus* necessity, and power *versus* despair, but it stretches the scrutiny and goes as far as to establish, in the (c) social sphere, a bond between the dominant and the exploited. It also works as a (b) documentation of (1b) how the capitalist societies established a social contract that places those who own the property and the means of production in sovereignty and those who possess

nothing but their labour power in submission and (2b) exposes the impacts of this concrete social formation on the lives of the individuals (MARX, 2012).

It is a story that, in contrast with the films analysed so far, does not seek traditional redemption or balance, it does not provide any kind of *pornographic inspirational* satisfaction, the kind that uses the disabled body to inspire and redeem the non-disabled. We have discussed how traditional story-telling follows a structured line of events and the ways mainstream cinema absorbs these traits, reaching as far as discussing how these manifest in what has been called the *normality drama* - a drama that has a disabled person as the central figure of the story and around whom the other non-disabled characters will seek redemption and will reinforce their normality.

This divergence from traditional story-telling tiggers feelings of uneasiness and discomfort in the audiences and this may be perceived in the few reviews available on the internet. While the other films analysed here as well as the other films directed by Samira Makhmalbaf were reviewed by multiple and heterogeneous audiences, *Two-legged horse* offers limited reviews, it is a film almost ignored by the critics and the general public.

Some of the reviews available share the idea that the film is disturbing but that it is a rewarding portrait of human nature. It is a profound and dark analysis of the dynamics of power and how it is rooted in our social structure and in our social relations. At the same time, some suggest that it is a vision of the underdeveloped world and that "Perhaps the most human response to 'Two-Legged Horse' is just to look away.".

I would like to argue otherwise, that identifying it as a *vision of the underdeveloped world* is a perspective that reveals itself to be oblivious to history and to the sociometabolic system that sustains capitalism (MÉSZÁROS, 2011).

Discussion

The film's first establishing shot is iconic. With the camera positioned at eye-level, the image projected is of deserted sewer pipes and smoke coming out of them. In the background, hidden in the smoke, a man named Mirvais yells out towards the pipes:

> I want a boy. One dollar a day. A clean, strong boy. I only need one boy.
> (Mirvais)

All of a sudden, like ants rising out of an anthill, dozens of boys come out of the pipes and surround Mirvais. They are desperate to get the job and they do not seem to care what they have to do.

The camera cuts to the entrance of one of those sewer pipe houses and out of the darkness comes Guiah. Mirvais is dragged by the mob of boys screaming, all desperate to be chosen. The job interview is a test. The boy has to bend "*like a camel*" in front of the Young Master, a boy who lost both his legs in a mine explosion, and carry him around the muddy courtyard in circles - referring to a traditional practice in the taming of horses. The scene establishes the degrees of power, how one rules over the others and indicates the absurdity of this relationship. The boys are brought to the young Master's presence, to his house, to his dominions. He rides them around his courtyard in a demonstration of power over them.

They are subjected to his eccentricities because their survival depend on him - as Marx puts it, "[…] The extremity of this bondage is that it is only as a *worker* that he continues to maintain himself as a *physical subject*, and that it is only as a *physical subject* that he is a *worker*" (MARX, 2016, l. 1279).

All of the other boys speak at the same time, protesting and boasting their skills:

I am fast. I'm agile, take me.
(Boys)

This shot is a representation of how "[…] Labour produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a commodity - and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally." (MARX, 2016, l. 1248). Mirvais and the Master select the boys to take turns carrying the young master while he dismisses them for a variety of reasons:

Too skinny. His bones stick into me.
His breath stinks.
Not that one. He's too small.
No way. He's too small.
(young Master)

The camera alternates between shots of the boys waiting in the mob and close-ups of the boy taking the test. The image blurs the background and clearly highlights the effort

of the two-legged horses attempting to satisfy the young master. In a shot/reverse shot, we see Guiah standing amongst the other children. He is picked to be the next to take the test.

The camera follows them in a medium shot, capturing both characters and again blurring the background; as the world spins around them, they create their first bond.

> You are lucky to make a dollar a day.
> (Mirvais)

Guiah is chosen and the other boys are dismissed in protest. The scene cuts to the entrance of the courtyard as the boys, Mirvais, and the Master leave. The camera slides back into the courtyard and Guiah is galloping with the young Master on his back. His process of reification has started.

This scene may be perceived as an allegory of thousands of workers seeking for jobs in the Western world, both in the primary and in the secondary sectors. Thousands of the so-called white-collar and blue-collar workers will daily leave and become part of the Industrial Reserve Army of Capitalism. They help maintain and regulate the market and they usually have to bend like camels. Carrying their briefcases or their folders, they send their CVs, go through endless selection processes with psychologists, Human Resources specialists, trainings, interviews, and, in the end, only one is chosen - the rest will go back home and try again the next day - regardless of what s/he has to do, they have to feel lucky, an idea expressed by Mirvais:

> To Guiah: You are lucky to get a dollar a day.
> To the other boys: You'll find work too.
> (Mirvais)

Mirvais summarises the logics of the job market - "*This is what we have to offer, if you do not want it, there are many who would feel lucky to have it*" - thanks to the metabolic movement of the industrial reserve army and the thousands of workers who will not find work, and the movements of concentration and centralisation of the capital.

After the father leaves to India for 40 days with his daughter, the story now follows only the two disabled children - the young Master and Guiah, who apparently has an intellectual disability. We encounter here the second contrast between the two boys, they are not only separated because of their class position, but also due to the nature of their disability, which may also be allegorically understood. Whilst Guiah has the physical strength, the young Master has the means, he is the head that controls the body. This analogy of the working class

as the horse, the strength, the physical power that supports production and, thus, society as a whole, has also been explored by George Orwell in the figure of Boxer. Boxer is strong, dedicated, but gullible, what he has in physical strength, he lacks in intelligence. It also creates a certain intertextuality with the 1998 Hollywoodian production, *The Mighty* (Peter Chelsom) - in which a boy with learning difficulties becomes friends with a gifted student, one has the strength and the other the intelligence.

Guiah, in contrast, occupies this position because the access to opportunities to move beyond the sociohistorical limits imposed by his disability has been denied to him, he is a product of his class, scorned out of society and left in misery. The scenes in the school are examples of that. When the previous scene cuts to a shot of the first day of school, Guiah carries his master on his back, trotting like a horse. As they get to school, at the 00:07:10 mark, the master is holding on Guiah's ears, the class has already started and Guiah leaves the master in one of the benches and moves away from the improvised classroom to the stables.

As we hear the boys answering the questions of the teacher, the camera captures the young Master's profound look, staring at Guiah. His eyes carry a mixture of doubt, pity, compassion, superiority, hatred, they seem to reveal a hurricane of feelings.

At 00:008:17, Guiah is in the centre of the stable where the students leave their donkeys. The next scene, built in shot/reverse shot, depicts Guiah among the animals and, in the other shot, a mare and her just-born foal. The mare licks the foal, removing the placenta, in one shot, and Guiah, in the foreground, is staring in the direction of the class and the other boys and, in the background, the donkeys are out of focus. For over a minute, the images alternate between Guiah and the mare with the foal and the sounds of horses neighing and donkeys braying. This is a prelude to the process of bestialisation that will fall upon Guiah, his whole attitude in the shot is that of a horse being born, this is his birth as one.

Further in the film, the mare and the foal will reappear and again be used in comparison with Guiah. The images alternate between the mother nurturing the little foal and Guiah amongst the horses. The horses smell Guiah, as if recognising him as one of their own in the same way they smell each other. The scene is a cruel portrait of humanity - it is easier for the horses to recognise Guiah as one of their own than for the young Master to see Guiah as an equal, or even, perhaps, for the other boys in classroom to accept the young Master.

The young master intensifies his violence towards Guiah, in a process that refuses to reach any kind of redemption arc. While urinating, he writes Guiah's name on the wall with urine, beats him, yells at him, humiliates him, plays with his despair for the dollar,

that is how he sees him nothing but an object subjected to his will, to be used, played with, abhorred, and discarded. He uses Guiah in a horse ride, promising to buy him ice cream if he wins, and with a stick beats him, grabs his neck choking him, and yells at him demanding Guiah to run. He cannot go anywhere without Guiah, as they are in the middle of the road. At some point, Guiah can no longer run and falls to the floor exhausted and the young Master repeatedly beats him with the stick. In another competition, the young Master wants to take part in a fight against the other boys in school. He challenges the boys saying that his horse is strong and boasting that no one would be able to win against him. After he wins the first fight, thanks to Guiah of course, his eyes are filled with pride. He uses his stick to demand silence and challenges another boy, but this time they lose.

These scenes leave us with a possible metaphorical interpretation of the relationship between the working classes and dominant classes. The dominant classes depend on the working class to survive, to produce, to carry the weight of the world on their shoulders - without them nothing can be done (MARX, 2011; 2015). We will continue to explore this idea.

Losing the fight is unacceptable to the young Master and, when back at home, he orders Mirvais to get rid of the boy and buy him a wheelchair. Guiah cries in protest:

> I'll ride you on my back and run. I'll wash your clothes but you hit me. You grab me by the throat and choke me. Get out. You were not good. You hurt my feet. You have no feet. You can't walk. You ate five carrots. I didn't eat anything. But you did. Don't fire me. **You ate bread and became fat. Too heavy to carry.** You, you… I'll wipe your nose. I'll wash your body. And your face. Didn't I wash you today? But you hit me. I carry you on my back and run
> but you keep eating bread. You're heavy. Don't fire me master. For God's sake don't throw me out.
> (Guiah)

Guiah begs for another chance to prove that he can carry him, wash him, wipe his nose, etc. He is a worker who looses his job and who is now in despair for he has no where else to go or how to survive if he does not sell his body to the employer. The boy feels no empathy and fires him.

In his tricycle, the next day, he goes to school and Guiah meets him on his way to his school, begging to have him back. The boy is so manipulative and sly that he changes his tone of voice, to a lower and sweeter tone, his facial expressions, his eyes are almost convincing that he is gentle and forgiving, and tells Guiah to collect some stones for him - stones he uses to throw at Guiah and tell him to "*go away, jackass*". However, when he gets to

school in his new tricycle none of the boys seem to see him as a friend and they all refuse to help him.

The young Master uses Guiah to exert power over Guiah and gain the respect of the other boys. Going back at 00:25:00, when Guiah is carrying the Master so he can use the board at school and answer the questions, the camera spins around the class and captures all the faces and laughs of the other boys and both scenes suggest that the master is not actually seen as part of the group.

The film has a strong connotation that class has a greater impact on setting limits to the interactions than disability itself, since it is class that separates the worlds of Guiah and the Master. Disability, for its turn, sets boundaries within the class, as both Guiah and the Master do not seem to be recognised as members of their social class by the other members.

Their relationship does flirt with friendship between the 00:50:25 and 1:00:00. Although they dance, shower, have ice cream together, the young Master soon falls back into his psychological game of power. Their nearly *sadomasochist* relation is fed by fear - one is afraid of losing power and dominion, the other is afraid of losing his job and his only means of survival.

The young Master even attempts to replace his horse with a machine, but his tricycle does not meet his needs and feed his lust for power. Power presupposes two creatures, it is a two-way road. In his sadistic love for power, the young Master repossesses the body of his horse. He is now complete again - but he needs more.

When Guiah falls in love with the beggar girl, the Master also wants her. The beggar girl and Guiah's love for her humanise him, as do his dreams, when he dreams that he is shaking his back and dropping the boy to the ground. Their relationship now is pushed to the edges of exploitation in which one desires to possess both the body and the mind of the other - his dreams, thoughts, and wishes.

At 1:08:00, they look for the beggar girl and when they find her, the Master gives her some coins and her eyes water. Guiah leaves him on the floor and refuses to carry him. In despair, he cries and follows Guiah, using his hands to move his body. All his power crumbles.

> Where are you going? Why did you leave me alone? Stop. Stop. Why are you leaving me alone? Why are you leaving me alone? My dad left me with you. Don't leave me alone. Where are you going? My dad left me with you. Why are you leaving me alone? My dad asked you to look after me. My dad left me with you. Don't leave

me alone ... my God. Don't leave me alone. My dad left me with you. Stop I'll kill you. I'll give you to the police. Stop I'll kill you. I'll kill you if I catch you. Stop my horse.
(Young Master)

Between 1:10:00 and 1:12:00, the young Master runs after Guiah using his arms and his lower amputated limbs, in a movement that resembles that of a horse. Guiah moves away from him as he screams *stop, my horse*. The camera follows them sliding from right to left cutting between one character and the other. Reaching him, he pulls Guiah to the floor and mounts on him again.

A dramatic soundtrack opens the next shot, the young Master rides Guiah and they mingle with horses and horsemen - this is the beginning of Guiah's ultimate oppression process and final metamorphosis into a horse. The scene cuts and the camera captures a cemetery in a wide shot. Guiah and the master arrive, Guiah bends so that the Master can reach the ground (Image 31).

The master and Guiah are in the foreground and a horse stands on the background and, despite the fact that the three of them have their four limbs on the ground, Guiah and the horse are in a plan of comparison and the boy seems to be the contrast.

Image 31 - Two-legged Horse: The young Master, Guiah and the horse

Source: Makhmalbaf, 2008.

In the cemetery, the boy demonstrates a moment of weakness, which usually anticipates his events of pure evilness - and the next scenes do not differ. The boy uses Guiah to attract the attention of other boys and uses him to profit, charging a fee to ride him. At 1:21:56, one of the rich boys brings a saddle (Image 32).

Image 32 - Two-legged Horse: a boy brings a saddle to ride Guiah

Source: Two-legged Horse, Makhmalbaf, 2008.

They saddle Guiah and ride him as he screams. Guiah is humiliated in front of all the town, the boys, and the beggar girl, who refuses to ride him when the young Master offered her to ride for free. Surprisingly, no one in the little town questions this odd and cruel relationship. The young Master rides Guiah even during a town festival alongside adults riding their horses and competing to capture a calf - he is the master and no one questions his authority.

The Master climbs up a tree and from the top of the tree, like a leader brought up to dominate, he teaches the boys how to command the horse - "*pull the right ear and he will go right*". When back at home, the boy feeds the cows and Guiah with hay in the stable. His final metamorphosis, the climax of his reification, happens when Mirvais brings a costume of the head of a horse.

Mirvais: Hello master.
Young Master: I've brought you two presents. How beautiful!
Mirvais: I searched the whole town to find it.

Mirvais puts the horse's head on Guiah and asks him to come back the next day wearing it to take the Master to school (Image 33).

Image 33 - Two-legged Horse: Guiah wearing the horse's head with Mirvais

Source: Makhmalbaf, 2008.

This scene highlights how cultural capital - as the education of norms, signs, ways of life - works as an agency of incorporation and how it reproduces the dominant culture. Mirvais not only does not question the Master's behaviour towards Guiah but he also stimulates it when he brings the head of the horse. Furthermore, as if that were not enough, right after he puts the head of the horse on Guiah, the young Master hand-walks to house and the camera captures only the legs and feet of the beggar girl going up the stairs and into the house and the master following her - a shot that is reminiscent of the moments which suggest that Mirvais himself brought a prostitute to the Master's house while he is away, at 19:46 and 29:50.

Guiah completes his transformation as an animal. The shot is reminiscent of Marx's words when he states that as a result of processes of *Enfremdung* and *Entäusserung*, "[…] man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions - eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal." And he closes the paragraph with the final statement "[…] What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal." (MARX, 2016, l. 1327).

Guiah goes to his sewer pipe house and the horse's face on his head disappears in the shadows. Seeking his own redemption, refusing to go back the next day, the

camera founds him wandering. The scene cuts and we are back to the beginning with Mirvais at the apparently deserted sewer pipes offering a one-dollar-a-day job for a strong boy.

This last scene is the closest moment to any kind of redemption in the film. It is just Guiah and the sky. The clean, blue sky contrasts with Guiah's dirty clothes and skin, with his dusty hair (Image 34).

Image 34 - Two-legged Horse: Guiah and the sky

Source: Makhmalbaf, 2008.

The close-up here brings Guiah to the foreground, closer to us, and hides everything else around him. The sky projects an idea of freedom without the use of any kind of narration or dialogue, Guiah is free from the cruelty of his master.

Final words

It has been my concern not to cross the boundaries of what may be considered a plausible analysis; evidently knowing that others may feel otherwise but attempting to provide my reader with a materialist perspective of the films. When it comes to *Two-legged horse*, I feel I had to be twice as careful. First, because, from my perspective, it is a comprehensive and deep scrutiny of the dialectics of power based on profit, money, private property, the relations between dominants and dominated, commodification, and fetishism that feeds the sociometabolic system of capitalism. Secondly, because it is provocative and disquieting in a way that goes beyond Neo-Marxist and postmodern approaches to disability which tend to ignore the impact of race, gender, and *mainly* class condition, on the grounds that this *so-called*

postmodern capitalism has ruptured the barriers of class. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Samira's and Mohsen's objective is to explore human nature and go as far as possible with their experiment. It is not the first time that cultural manifestations delve into human nature, contrast it with relations of power and money and turn a human into an animal of capitalism. Kafka, for instance, has also investigated the matter and provoked his readers when he turned Gregor Samsa into a disgusting insect in *Metamorphosis* and nearly drove him mad because he could not go to work. Despite the similarities, *Two-legged horse* goes in another direction.

The young Master is the ultimate representation of a dominant class, who uses his power to rule, exploit, and subjugate. Guiah, in contrast, embodies a desperate working-class in thrall to a bourgeois dominion. Up until the end, he is the opposite of Melville's *Bartleby*. The Master boy may at times struggle with feelings of both sympathy and hatred towards Guiah, but in order to extract from him everything that he wants, to exert his power over him, he has to dehumanise him, transform him into something repulsive or beastly, something as far as possible from his own image. The dominant has no other interests but his own (MARX, 2013).

The director's cinematographic techniques and artistic style bring the audience closer to the characters, establishing a bond between the viewers and the boys. The telephoto lenses trigger a cloistering feeling, nearly suffocating us, as if one could not escape it, as if one could not move beyond that relationship. I could suggest that here there is a dialectic relation in this feeling between form and content, perhaps, it was this claustrophobic feeling that made so many leave the cinema before the end of the film in Toronto. Guiah's beastly transformation is the reification of the individual, his alienation. He may feel desperate to break free from the chains that imprison him but he sees no exit. Williams (2011, p. 112, author's *italics*), when analysing the positions we occupy in relation to the social structure, states that "The *subject*, at whatever violence to himself, has to accept the way of life of his society, and his own indicated place in it […]. It is not *his* way of life, in any sense that matters, but he must conform to it to survive.". Samira manages to seduce and repulse us from beginning to end while we ride on a rollercoaster of feelings - from pity to hatred - which is intensified by the fact that we are watching a physical and a symbolic violence between two kids If one *looks away*, as a reviewer suggested, s/he ignores their own rollercoaster of feelings and probably

avoids acknowledging the system of oppression that feeds capitalism and its general law of accumulation - which leads us to my next point.

For decades, the area of disability studies has overlooked the impact of class on the constitution of the individual, despite a few areas of resistance (OLIVER, 1990; OLIVER; BARNES, 2012). Recent approaches even go as far as to consider race and gender, but rarely does one consider how these elements are also part of wider economic structure. Guiah and the young Master are both disabled children, but they belong to very distinct classes. One has so much power over the other, that he manages to take everything from him - from his feelings to his identify as a human being. Guiah protests, argues that he is doing everything he can to satisfy the boy, but he still beats him, chokes him, mistreats him. The boy does not see Guiah as a companion, rather he is his inferior in every way. He is so articulate that Guiah himself seemingly fails to recognise himself as human at some point. He falls to ground, tosses and turns, behaving and screaming like an animal, until he meets his own redemption. Disability here is the last element that would bring the two boys together. It has been a common postmodern misunderstanding of the dialectics of class structure to consider that other characteristics - race, gender, disability - would have a greater impact on an individual's social disadvantage than class. However, Samira's keen eye demonstrates otherwise, in accordance with studies that still emphasise the importance of studying and analysing class when considering race, gender and disability (DORLING, 2018; SANTOS, 2020).

There is no indication that the young Master has found or even sought any kind of redemption, he is in internal conflict because of his father's absence, because he lost his mother and his legs, but that has nothing or very little to do with Guiah, nevertheless, Guiah becomes the aim of his hatred, in a kind of Freudian displacement. In Chapter 2, I have presented Wayne's analyses of six ideological strategies and tied them to traditional disability-related narratives.

In contrast to other films analysed here, this film is *not* about disability. All of the other narratives revolve around the fact that the main character(s) is disabled and the social consequences that the premise engenders. The normality drama, as we have seen, follows the traditional ideological narrative and brings disability under the spotlight. The main disabled character is contrasted with a non-disabled character, their lives are disturbed, and so that they can reestablish order, they will seek (1) reconciliation and (2) redemption. The disabled character is always the source of redemption, he or she is the one who saves the non-disabled character(s).

Two-legged horse, however, does not follow this established, traditional structure. First of all, although it deals with disability from a class perspective, the focus is not disability, but the clash of classes and the power one exerts over the other. Secondly, it lacks redemption and reconciliation between the two binary oppositions. Perhaps, we may point out only two moments that could almost suggest redemption, when Guiah and the Master play and dance together and when Guiah decides to quit the job and is found by the camera wandering around. Audiences driven by traditional narratives will certainly wait for the moment when one will apologise with the other and the boys will become friends, but that does not happen. Breaking with the idea of individualisation, neither of them has any kind of outstanding abilities, that usually suggested by disabled characters. Samira invites two disabled kids to be part of the film, they do not have to *act* disabled, they are what they are. In terms of focalisation, the film differs from traditional narratives in the sense that it does not follow the perspective of dominant sectors - it is a film produced by Iranian directors, in Afghanistan, with non-professional, non-white, actors. And, lastly, the film does not offer any kind of closure. In the end, it actually suggests a repetition of the same process of dominance when Mirvais goes to the sewer pipes to look for another boy - the hegemonic, dominant culture will continue to reproduce itself for as long as we maintain the elements that feed it (WRIGHT, 2019).

Going back to this case study's epigraph, *Two-legged horse* is a perfect example of what Ivan Karamazov means. It is so realistically accurate when projecting the artful and artistic cruelty of man, using children to intensify the sensations, that it has made some look away. It has made them so uncomfortable with the obviousness of their own cruelty as humans, the limpidness of the processes of oppression, segregation, exploitation, and exclusion that sustain this system that they even had to leave the cinema. It is easier to deny that this is the fundamental logics of our lives or to regard them as something of the other - the third world argument we saw in the beginning - than to face the fact that I am also responsible, that I am implicated in this reproduction.

If we look back at Carla (white and upper-class), Raymond (male, white, and upper-class), and William (male, white, and upper-class) and contrast their cases with Sam's (male, white, working-class), Elisa's (female, white, working-class), Radio's (black, working-class, homeless), and Guiah's (homeless, working-class) their condition of class comes to surface as a fundamental element. In the next and final chapter, I will go back to all of these stories, summarising them in an attempt to highlight and reinforce the importance of class conditioned analyses.

NOTES TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

It has been my prime objective to discuss the representation of disability in cinema. Rather than focusing on images of representation, which have been largely investigated[63], I endeavoured to expand Paul Darke's (1998) work on a genre that he came to understand as *normality drama*. Darke argues that films depicting disabled characters, either as protagonists or in supporting roles, tend to use these characters as a way of reproducing the system of meanings, codes, practices, and symbols that reinforces normality, that is, non-disabled bodies and minds. In order to successfully achieve their objective, these films have traditionally applied cinematographic techniques that will guide audiences towards a simplistic and ableist perspective of disability. Hence, when going to the movies, audiences expect this structure of film.

If a genre follows certain culturally and ideologically predetermined structures, it conveys a concept, a message, and an intention even before the film is watched. When it comes to the *normality drama* as a genre, films must fulfill the audiences's expectations to see disabled characters from their preconceived perspectives and as an assurance of their normality. The meanings produced are the result of the intricate relations between audiences and the film. It is my understanding that these meanings are determined by the ideological system that sustains the ontological reproduction of capitalism.

Therefore, examining the six ideological narrative strategies proposed by Wayne (2020), I committed to the purpose of scrutinising the narrative structure of and the cinematographic techniques used in films that could represent the genre normality drama. In other words, I intended to explore the complex association between content and form, pinpointing the elements that are recurrently employed in these films. Furthermore, based on a Materialist perspective, the analyses in the case studies aimed to give evidence to how these elements are in profound dialectic relation with a critical perspective of class.

In chapter four, I analysed four films of the mainstream filmmaking scenario. By mainstream, I mean films (1) produced or distributed by dominant studios or media companies; (2) spoken in English; (3) supplied with large budgets; (4) which use stars to attract audiences; (5) and, in the case of normality dramas, which use non-disabled actors or actresses

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[63] See the works of Kent (1987), Kriegel (1987), Longmore (1987), Barnes (1992), Ellis (2005), and Lacey (2009).

to play disabled characters. The films discussed in chapter four all have these elements in common.

Based on the scrutiny of each film, I may argue that normality dramas are structured upon those six ideological narrative strategies listed by Wayne (2020). The strategies are applied in order to reproduce non-disabled and non-deviant bodies and minds as the sociocultural norm established. All films presented binary oppositions and the narrative revolves around their reconciliation. The conflicts are generally between non-disabled and disabled characters and they are solved when the non-disabled foe is punished and/or lectured and undergoes a redemption arc. Normality dramas displace disability as a sociocultural and historical issue onto the individual level. When displacing all responsibility onto the individual, they ignore the intricate relations of class and the disabling symbols, practices and meanings that sustain the capitalist system and reproduce ableism as the norm. A critical perspective on the relations of class is also neglected in the focalisation on middle-class or dominant-class characters.

In pursuance of alternatives to the narrative structure of normality dramas, I sought to present in chapter five an analysis of two films of the independent filmmaking scenario. I considered independent films those which combined attributes opposed to those listed as dominant. Namely, films (1) produced or distributed by small independent studios or media companies; (2) spoken in other languages rather than English; (3) supplied with small budgets; (4) which do not use stars; (5) and, in the case of normality dramas, which cast disabled actors or actresses to play disabled characters.

My analysis of *37 seconds* has emphasised the importance of casting a disabled actress for the role of a disabled character. One may endeavour to argue otherwise, but Mei Kayama's delicate and remarkable performance has given evidence to the fact that it is no longer acceptable to cast non-disabled actors or actresses for the roles of disabled characters. With few exceptions, non-disabled actors and actress in these roles have served the purpose of validating normality and reproducing capitalism's complete disregard and loathe for disability.

Hikari's first feature film has also shed light on the potentials of disabled people beyond the sociocultural limitations imposed. It understands disability as part of an individual's multifaceted and complex personality. Yuma is a person with feelings, desires, likes, and dislikes that are not determined by her impairment. Her disability is portrayed as just one element in her life and not as her whole life. The tacky melodramatic techniques used in

normality dramas are put aside and leave space to the possibility of exploring characters in depth.

That the film is available in one the most popular streaming services, *Netflix*, is also a positive aspect. Independent films generally depend on recommendation from others and one's keen interest in a heterodox narrative structure. They are more difficult to be found and tend to be consumed by a limited audience. Whereas the availability in a streaming platform increases the chances of it being watched by a more heterogeneous audience.

As for *Two-legged horse*, Samira adopts a critical perspective of human relations under capitalism and delves into the limits of an exploitative relationship between two disabled boys. It is a film that is not afraid to shock audiences. The director unveils humanity's boundless cruelty when power and money are involved. In contrast with the other films analysed, this is not a film *about* disability, even though its protagonists are disabled characters. *Two-legged horse* is, therefore, a vital and eloquent representation of my arguments hitherto.

When Samira adopts a critical perspective of class to approach disability, she elucidates the intersection between these two aspects of the characters. She invites us to consider the intricacies in human relations. As complex beings, humans are more than shattered identities. We are a dialectic conglomerate of everything and everyone that surround us. Determined by the context, we act upon the world to transform it. As we seek to bend it to our will, it changes inevitably us too. Interaction is a two-way road. Every interaction is determined by preestablished contextual elements that cannot be ignored. How one interacts with, acts on, analyses, and describes the world around them is dependent upon the dialects of one's very existence and not just one or two elements of their identity. The relationship between the Master boy and Guiah clarifies my arguments. Their understanding of the world is not limited to their impairments. Their relationship is mostly conditioned by power and social class, not disability.

Hence, my final argument is in defense of the analysis class. It is about time we return to the analyses of the foundations of capitalism. While some have encouraged us to fight for the inclusion of disabled people, for gender, race and ethnicity equality within the limits of capitalism, human emancipation has been put aside. I am not at all suggesting that fighting for these things is not important. We also have to find ways to improve people's lives now. However, we should not forget that capitalism is a system founded on inequality. It depends on inequality to survive. We may even fix some structural issues in terms of race, gender, disability, and so on. Nevertheless, truth is that there is no capitalism without class

inequality, without exploitation, and without pauperism. Human emancipation can only be achieved when we surpass capitalism.

For the record, I must indicate that not all normality dramas of the dominant film industry share all of the characteristics elicited. The results of my analyses in chapters three and four, however, indicate that they tend to manifest most of these. Moreover, one must not jump to the conclusion that all films of the dominant industry are oblivious to the status quo. Despite their limitations, there are examples of resistance to the inequalities engendered by capitalist practices. In other words, films which invite us to critically analyse the symbols, meanings, and practices of capitalism. Likewise, not all films of independent filmmaking industry are critical. That they are independent is not a badge that exempts them from contradiction.

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