

Topic 1

Title – ‘The maintenance - How the image and the perception are capable of maintaining subjugation and securing the power’

The human society is fundamentally based on images. Whether they are in the tangible or the idea realm, as Plato would say, it is the foremost pillar behind thinking – one cannot have the image if not for the perception of it, which would come from rationality. The images, however, are deeply settled in ingrained meanings we almost unconsciously perceive; a book is not a book if not by our quintessential, platonic understanding of what a book should be. As Aristotle puts it, in a very hedonistic view, the rational soul, that is, the human mind, associates the image with either good or bad – pleasure and pain. Nevertheless, in a post-modern, globalized world community, the image is not only the discernment within an individual, but rather a collective mind. If the meaning behind the image is something given and directed by a system, then it may as well be used as a manner of withholding the discourse; after all, who determined what would be perceived as ‘good’ or ‘bad’?

Aristotle puts it in a universal perception; as in the soul chases what the soul affirms, and the soul avoids what it denies. For that, Aristotle could be indirectly abiding to the notion of essentialism. The rational soul would perceive what good and bad is, for the image would be essentially foreseen as pleasurable or not; it can be argued that the image would have an ingrained meaning inside the rational thought. On the other hand, Aristotle clearly puts the notion of ‘perception’, so that each one could be affirming or denying based on the soul particular understanding of the world.

However, what can be understood nowadays is the loss of the perception itself. If the soul never thinks without an image, all images must have a meaning. According to the philosopher, the meaning would be presentable by the rational soul perceptions, in a way that it would be either discovered throughout experiences or within an essential insightfulness, as discussed before. He does not propose in any way in this excerpt that the image is – or can be – the consequence of discourse. Addressing the Foucaultian understanding of the capillarity of power, what we see as an image would not be the perception of our rational soul, but the projection of power in society. In that way, perception would be nonexistent, for the power, and not the ‘rational soul’, would be the one providing the meaning for the images; the individual would then think not for itself, but rather for the ones who secure the speech within the system.

The soul never thinks without an image – and all the images secure meaning. Going further from Aristotle’s hedonist assessment, not all images necessarily provide a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ significance. For once, the question of gender performativity is a great example. Following Simone de Beauvoir’s notion that women are become rather than born, it is possible to identify in day-to-day activities what would make a woman. If a woman, for an instance, cuts her hair, and then she’s told ‘You’re looking like a man’, that indicates a social acknowledgement of the image perceived to gender – in that illustration, that woman should have longer hair, and man, shorter. When a baby is born, it is a ‘it’, for it is not yet put inside the society. Nonetheless, just by looking to its genitalia, the doctor will be saying, for instance, ‘It’s a girl’ - and by that performance, putting in place the image that is associated with the female, the Other sex. By trying to adequate Aristotle’s thinking to the gender trouble, it could be said that based on

perceptions of the rational beings, it would be adequate to affirm woman in one place and man on the other. In hindsight, however, where do these perceptions would come from? Based on social experiences, or on the individual reasoning of the world? That could be seen as a faulty argument, for we are inside a society which convey the image for gender, as for everything else – woman are told to dress, act, and be a certain way by, above all, men's discernment of what a woman should be. To have a life experience in which woman was observed as an object does not mean that this is 'the image of the rational soul', but rather the diffusion of oppression via speech; the diffusion of a perception that would provide the continuing of the subjugation of woman. More than affirming or denying images as 'good' or 'bad', the human mind sees for what it is articulated for it to see – therefore, it would not exist an individual, rational 'perception', for we would all be the results of the discourse in that certain structure. In that way, it would be blameworthiness to justify prejudices, for, in the grand scheme, they all exist to secure stability for the power inside the system.

The image also only exists because of the speech. Without the word, the language, the image is unconceivable. If 'the soul never thinks without an image', hence the soul would not be able think without the speech. The book '1984', by George Orwell, gesticulates a dystopian society in which the government bans certain words as to prohibit certain thoughts, and by that, maintain order. Returning to the matter of gender performativity, most languages oblige the person, when referring to someone, to infer their gender; making use of the social constructions on gender images to almost obligatorily denote a person as a 'he' or a 'she'. Bringing up the philosophical and literary notion of post-constructivism, language is power - if language is how we can perceive images, deforming the language would also distort the way certain images could be discerned.

It is also important to recognize that, although during Aristotle's period there was already social statements in a way to secure power – for example, in the Ancient Greek democracy, women were not allowed to vote -, the philosopher had not lived in a globalized world. In that sense, the perception Aristotle refers to, if it hasn't become nonexistent – or perhaps, if it wasn't nonexistent all throughout history -, it is now the means to sell the image.

The image is what defines you. Why would we have social media, if not to share with our friends, family, and unknown people, what we want for them to perceive of us? With the image of a person, comes the social establishment of what an ideal person should be, which is constantly reinforced by the media and the cultural industry; the internet is then the perfect place to share yourself not as what you are, but rather what would you like to be perceived as. The matter of what we are intrinsically is another plausible discussion – are we really capable to perceive another human for what it is, or even ourselves? Aristotle, according to the extract, would probably be agreeable to the thought that, if the image is the thought, and all thinking is rational, the image perceived is true in that certain reality. But then, as Jean-Paul Sartre would put it, you are not what the society made of you, but rather what you made with what the society tried to impose to you – in that sense, the action of making your image more of what is conceived as ideal, idyllic on the perception of others tells more about you than about the others. That action, however, would only take place in a society like ours, which demand everyone to adequate in pre-conceived sublime notions, like happiness, or beauty. The image then is the product of us to the

demands of society, which would be paid by social recognition – an essential thing to the post-modern being, manifested by likes on Facebook or Instagram.

This demand from society is directly associated with Foucault's disciplinary power. The disciplinary power is within the body – which is related to the image. The body, the gender, the language – it all comes down to a capitalist system which incorporates people as another form of merchandise, an organization which searches to create a competitive system founded on constructed prejudices and social inequalities. The disciplinary power, in that way, is what 'forbids' us from running away from the system – running away is a choice, but since we don't know what would await for us on the 'outside', and we are not only afraid of discovering and regretting, but also buying the image that the situation we live in is the only possible – or rather, the best – in our world, we adequate to it, and resume our lives as they are. Moreover, this demand also has to do with how much we need to be productive. The platonic image of happiness, for an instance, is an impossible concept within the system boundaries; then, in almost a way to justify the way we live in, or perhaps in a way to maintain this certain way, it is conceived that working hard will lead to financial success, which would then lead to happiness. However, as it is exemplified in nowadays society, the rate of depression and suicide has never been that pronounced, independently of wealth. The necessity to be productive in all senses – not only economically, but socially as well – leads then to the pursue of an inconceivable image, which is told for us to become.

Aristotle, in the extract, introduced how the image is essential for the rational thought, and how we humans associate the image to certain paradigms – good or bad, as he wrote. This essay, however, analyzed how we associate the images with social constructions, built with the disciplinary power in order to maintain a ludicrous society. In that way, this essay disagreed with Aristotle that the perceptions of images come uniquely from the rational thinking of our existence – the perception is not from our thinking, but rather from the projection of power in society, which spreads, whether via image itself or language, the maintenance of prejudices concerning race, religion, social class and, as exemplified in this context, gender. The perception in nowadays society can also make the image a product – we need to be within the discernment of perfection in all senses for then receive social acknowledgment, and all that leads to impossible, unachievable images; consequentially, to depression – the epitome of unproductiveness based on the impossibility of manifesting yourself in a system that searches constantly for your flawlessness and your productivity. In conclusion, images are the maintenance of the social order – our system, as it is, is unthinkable without them.