



Görüntü Toplumunda Bedenin Tüketimi Hakkında Film Aracılığıyla Düşünmek

Exploring About The Consumption Of The Body In The Society Of
The Spectacle Through Film The Substance

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EXPLORING ABOUT THE CONSUMPTION OF THE BODY IN THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE THROUGH FILM THE SUBSTANCE

ABSTRACT

This study examines the film *The Substance* through a semiotic analysis of the commodification of the human body within the framework of Guy Debord's theory of the society of the spectacle and Mulvey's concept of the male gaze. The spectacle a mechanism of the capitalist system manipulates social relations through images, fostering alienation, passivity, and the displacement of reality through representation. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" the analysis also explores how visual narratives in cinema reinforce patriarchal structures, gender hierarchies, and the objectification of women. Directed by a female director Caroline Fargeat, *The Substance* critiques societal obsessions with youth and beauty through its narrative and visual composition. The film's extensive use of macro shots accentuates the physical and emotional dichotomy between the protagonist's aged self Elizabeth Sparkle and her younger alter ego, Sue. These visual techniques underscore the destructive impact of societal pressures on the female body while also engaging the viewer in a deeper reflection on the protagonist's inner conflict and transformation. This study was written to highlight the limitations of contemporary cinema in transcending traditional gendered representations and to emphasize the need for alternative narratives that challenge the ideological foundations of the society of the spectacle. While the film critiques the commodification of the body and addresses the "female gaze" it ultimately fails to completely subvert classical Hollywood traditions. Sue's portrayal as an eroticized object perpetuates the patriarchal gaze, undermining the potential for a liberating cinematic language. This points to the traces of the male gaze Mulvey reveals in Hollywood cinema.

Keywords: Feminist Film Theory, Society of the Spectacle, the film *The Substance*, Film Analysis.

GÖRÜNTÜ TOPLUMUNDA BEDENİN TÜKETİMİ HAKKINDA FİLM ARACILIĞIYLA DÜŞÜNMEK

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Guy Debord'un gösteri toplumu teorisi ve Mulvey'nin erkek bakışı kavramı çerçevesinde insan bedeninin metalaştırılması ekseninde *The Substance* filminin semiyotik bir analizini yaparak incelemektedir. Kapitalist sistemin bir mekanizması olan gösteri toplumsal ilişkileri imgeler aracılığıyla yönlendirerek yabancılaşmayı, edilgenliği ve gerçekliğin temsillerle yer değiştirmesini teşvik etmektedir. Laura Mulvey'nin "erkek bakışı" kavramından yola çıkan analizde si-

nemadaki görsel anlatıların ataerkil yapıları, cinsiyet hiyerarşilerini ve kadınların nesneleştirilmesini nasıl güçlendirdiğini de araştırmaktadır. Kadın bir yönetmen Caroline Fargeat tarafından yönetilen *The Substance* filmi, anlatısı ve görsel kompozisyonuyla gençlik, güzellik gibi konularda toplumsal takıntıları eleştirmektedir. Filmde yoğun makro çekimlerin kullanılması kahramanın yaşlı hali Elizabeth Sparkle ile genç alter egosu Sue arasındaki fiziksel ve duygusal ikiliği vurgulamakta kullanılmaktadır. Bu görsel teknikler toplumsal baskıların kadın bedeni üzerindeki yıkıcı etkisini vurgularken, izleyiciyi kahramanın iç çatışması ve dönüşümü üzerine derin bir düşünmeye yönlendirmektedir. Çalışma çağdaş sinemanın geleneksel cinsiyetçi temsilleri aşma konusundaki sınırlılıklarının altını çizerek, gösteri toplumunun ideolojik temellerine meydan okuyan alternatif anlatılara olan ihtiyacı vurgulamak için kaleme alınmıştır. *The Substance* filmi bedenin metalaştırılmasını eleştirip “kadın bakışına” yönelmiş olsa da nihayetinde klasik Hollywood geleneklerini tamamen altüst etmeyi başaramamaktadır. Sue’nun erotikleştirilmiş bir nesne olarak tasviri, ataerkil bakışın sürdürülerek özgürleştirici bir sinema dili için oluşturulmak istenen potansiyeli yok etmektedir. Bu durum Hollywood sinemasında Mulvey’in ortaya koyduğu erkek bakışının izlerine işaret etmektedir.

Anathar Kelimeler: Feminist Film Teorisi, Gösteri Toplumu, *The Substance* filmi, Film Analizi.

INTRODUCTION

Visual culture is one of the most powerful tools shaping the thought and behavior patterns of modern societies. From Plato’s cave allegory to shadow plays like Hacivat-Karagöz, from photography to cinema, a common element emerges across these mediums: the images produced through reflection. From a communication standpoint, this can be seen as a form of transmission. The reflected or projected images are derived from a source. The person controlling this source assigns meaning to, alters, or eliminates the reflected image.

Visual culture, positioned at the center of cultural discourse, influences and is transformed by tools such as cinema, which is the focus of this study. As both a medium of communication and art, cinema encompasses various art forms such as literature, photography, music, and graphics, and its production cannot be thought of as isolated from society. This process gives cinema an international character, transitioning from its local societal roots to a universal scope. Consequently, this transition contributes to the creation of a common cinematic language, making the production of visual meaning within cultural frameworks significant.

The production of visual meaning necessitates a cinematic language. Image is the primary agent of this process, and every captured and displayed image facilita-

tes the transmission of this language. Since 1895, when the sequential arrangement of frames began creating meaning, new elements have been added to this process. The Kuleshov effect demonstrates the necessity of involving the camera as a tool in the creation of visual meaning, alongside combining a subject and an object. Thus, areas for generating meaning, such as camera angles, shot scales, sound usage, and visual effects, are opened. These elements are transformed into transmissions that ensure the continuity of visual culture. For instance, shooting a subject from a high angle diminishes them, while a low angle exalts them.

Every decision made by filmmakers during the production process serves not only their films but also the role of cinema as a cultural transmitter. Beyond its use as a propaganda tool, cinema also supports understandings that perpetuate consumption patterns suitable for the norms of the day. In this context, the works of Laura Mulvey, John Berger, and Guy Debord can be considered to explore how visual representation and culture are constructed and sustained through gender, power relations, and ideological structures.

This study aims to analyze the human body as a consumption object in the society of the spectacle, focusing on the film *The Substance* and Mulvey's concept of the male gaze. The film, directed by a female filmmaker, is examined through semiotic analysis using macro shots.

FROM SUBJECT TO OBJECT IN THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

Guy Debord, in his seminal work *La Société du Spectacle (The Society of the Spectacle)*, presents fundamental critiques of modern capitalist society, analyzing how the capitalist system transforms social relations and the alienation it creates for individuals. He examines the destructive impact of modern consumer culture and media influence on social dynamics.

According to Debord (2006), the spectacle, as an extension of the capitalist system, mediates social relations through images. The spectacle causes individuals to become disconnected from real-life experiences and perceive their lives through media, advertising, and consumer culture. Because the spectacle functions as a representational system, reality is replaced by images. The spectacle is not merely a media phenomenon but also a means of controlling individuals' perceptions within the economic system. It restructures social relations by eliminating direct relationships between people and replacing them with image-mediated interactions.

The spectacle can be characterized by three fundamental features. Through alienation, the spectacle causes individuals to become estranged from their own lives and real experiences. Rather than living their lives, individuals identify with the images presented by the spectacle. In passivity, the spectacle transforms indi-

viduals into passive consumers. Instead of being active participants, they become mere spectators who consume. Lastly, by replacing reality, the spectacle not only represents reality but becomes a substitute for it. Images are accepted as the truth itself.

Debord (2006) considers the spectacle a product of the capitalist production system. Capitalist society is not only built on the production and consumption of goods but also on the creation of a spectacle system to ideologically legitimize and make these goods desirable. The spectacle, as an ideological apparatus of the capitalist system, legitimizes the existing social order and encourages individuals to adapt to the conditions provided.

Through consumption, it integrates individuals into the economic system, ensuring the continuity of the capitalist economy. From fast food to cosmetic products and events like Black Friday, the wide spectrum of consumption habits demonstrates society's integration into the consumption chain. The focus shifts from the nutritional value of food to the act of acquiring or owning it. Recent examples, such as Dubai chocolates, can be included in this discourse. These food products are explained not by their necessity to satisfy hunger or sugar cravings but by the consumption processes defined by the society of the spectacle. By integrating into the consumption chain in this manner, society secures its position within the economic system.

This state of integration legitimizes and perpetuates the order mentioned above. Critical questioning is absent. Within the given examples, the taste of the chocolate or, in the study's context, the objectification of women through rejuvenation and aesthetic procedures are not questioned. This attitude also leads to the neglect of social inequalities and issues. The system operates to maintain its continuity by presenting consumption products. When a consumption object reaches the end of its life, it is replaced with a new one.

Debord (2006) reformulates Marx's concept of alienation for capitalist society. The alienation observed in traditional production processes deepens in the society of the spectacle as individuals become estranged from social life and themselves. Individual alienation causes people to perceive their experiences and lives through the images presented by the spectacle, reducing them to passive spectators of their own lives. In social alienation, relationships between people transform from direct and organic connections to mediated and superficial interactions shaped by media and consumer culture. Alienation processes lead to a society where individuals reduce their lives to the act of watching, identifying not with real life but with the images presented in the media.

The processes of alienation and dependency in the spectacle can be detailed by dividing it into two types. The first is concentrated spectacle, observed in totalitarian regimes, where individuals are tied to an oppressive ideology and leadership. The second is diffuse spectacle, prevalent in liberal capitalist systems, where individuals are made dependent on consumer culture. Media, as the most powerful tool of society of the spectacle, plays a significant role in both cases. Television, advertisements, social media, and cinema are used to shape perceptions and continuously reproduce the spectacle.

The film *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998) is structured entirely as a spectacle. The perception of reality is manipulated by the media, reflecting dramatically how individuals are controlled by the media and how the society of the spectacle suppresses reality. Truman's alienation and eventual escape from this system serve as a step towards resistance.

Despite acknowledging the passive effects of society of the spectacle, Debord (2006) believes that individuals can resist this system. Resistance to the spectacle is possible through developing critical awareness and establishing alternative social relations. The first step in this resistance is understanding the mechanisms of the spectacle, enabling individuals to break free from its influence. This is followed by direct action, where reestablishing direct relationships among individuals sparks the most effective form of resistance against the spectacle. Against the manipulative effects of the spectacle created through media networks, art and creativity offer alternative avenues for expression in the process of resistance.

The society of the spectacle provides a robust theoretical framework to understand how modern capitalist society controls individuals through images and representations and transforms social relations. The spectacle is not merely an element of media culture but also an ideological apparatus of capitalism. Considering the data obtained, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972), which examines Western art traditions and modern visual culture, can be included in the discussion. Berger emphasizes that the practice of seeing is a product of social structures and that critiquing images without understanding their ideological functions within these structures is not possible.

SEEING AND THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING

Berger (1972) argues that seeing is neither a natural nor neutral process. Instead, it is shaped by an individual's knowledge, experiences, and the social context they inhabit. Therefore, seeing becomes a cultural and ideological practice. The notion that seeing is an act emphasizes that an individual's perception of the world is socially determined. People perceive an object or image not merely through physical observation but also through learned meanings and social codes. This leads to

the process of meaning-making. Images are not only aesthetic or artistic elements but also cultural objects carrying meaning. An image is produced within a specific context and conveys the ideological values of that context.

Berger explains images and the production of meaning by discussing how Western art traditions, particularly since the Renaissance, have used them to reinforce power and ownership relationships. Artworks often perpetuate patriarchal values (Berger, 1972). While women are represented as erotic objects satisfying the male gaze, men are depicted as active subjects. During this process of positioning men and women, perspective is employed to create a sense of superiority and control for the viewer. This demonstrates that art is not merely an aesthetic tool but also a mechanism that legitimizes social power relations.

Patriarchal society's perception of women, built on the data that men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at, forms the basis of the dialectic of men and women. Thus, while the active male appears as a powerful subject in visual representations, women are presented as passive objects of beauty. Positioned as objects, women are expected to preserve and maintain their beauty. This leads to a continuous evaluation of women's existence. The idea that women must retain their youth and appear flawless is emphasized. The dominant viewpoint allows for the concrete penetration of women's bodies without their independent subjectivity being involved (Krips, 2010). This emphasis leads to the representation of the female body as an erotic object, legitimizing gender hierarchies. In media, as in historical artworks, individuals are encouraged to adopt a specific lifestyle and integrate into consumer culture.

This framework reveals that the practice of seeing is not impartial but instead shaped by historical, cultural, and ideological contexts, highlighting the societal impacts of both classical art and modern media. Berger's articulation of the semantics of seeing and the male gaze serves as a bridge to Mulvey's 1975 work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. It is important to understand that cinema, which is particularly based on representation, takes sides in meaning-making through the concept of gender. Attention is drawn to how narratives constructed from a male perspective led to the objectification of women.

VISUAL PLEASURE AND THE GAZE

Feminist film theorists such as Mulvey and Johnston challenge the representations of women presented by the media and highlight the problematic aspects of these representations. Using psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey analyzes how classical Hollywood cinema centers on the male perspective and objectifies women. In this context, she introduces the concept of the "male gaze" and explains the pleasure offered by cinema to the audience through two main concepts: scopophilia (pleasure

in looking) and narcissistic identification, based on Lacan's mirror stage theory. According to Mulvey cinema encourages viewers to identify with the male gaze and presents women as passive, erotic objects (Mulvey, 1975), thereby reinforcing the male viewer's perception of women as objects. Mulvey's study views cinema not merely as a form of entertainment but as an ideological apparatus that sustains patriarchal structures. Through its narrative structures and visual strategies, cinema reproduces gender hierarchies.

Mulvey contends that classical Hollywood cinema is structurally designed for the male viewer and that female characters are presented as erotic objects. She argues that cinema operationalizes the male gaze at three levels (1975). The camera's gaze is the cinematic camera functions as a tool reflecting the male gaze. It frames the female body as an aesthetic object and imposes this perspective on the viewer. The narrative gaze is male characters perceive women as objects of desire, and this gaze is integrated into the film's narrative. The audience's gaze is the audience identifies with the gaze of the camera and male characters, perceiving women as passive objects. Thus, the *male gaze* operates not only as an individual perspective but as a structural mechanism that reinforces patriarchal ideology and gender hierarchies.

Mulvey's analysis, rooted in Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytic theories, explores the relationship between the viewer and cinematic narrative through two central concepts. *Scopophilia* (Pleasure in Looking) is Freud's concept of scopophilia refers to the pleasure derived from watching others. Nelmes notes that the enclosed nature of cinema provides a voyeuristic space for this practice (1998, p. 78). Mulvey argues that cinema fosters this voyeuristic pleasure and identifies it as a fundamental experience for viewers of classical Hollywood cinema. The camera immerses the audience in the story, allowing them to observe characters from a distance. Female characters are often framed aesthetically and erotically to satisfy this pleasure, reducing them to objects rather than subjects. *Narcissistic identification* is drawing from Lacan's mirror stage theory, Mulvey posits that viewers identify with male characters, assuming their power and active roles. Women, in turn, are displayed by men, with the male character becoming an "ideal ego" for the viewer, while the female character remains the complementary object of this identification. Experiences involving textual and interpretative codes depend on perceptions shaped not by reality but by imposed processes (Tanrıvermiş, 2024, p. 64). The desire to see reality as a constructed whole, whether real or enforced, emerges.

Cinema functionalizes women in two ways (Mulvey, 1975). In the erotic objectification, women are presented as aesthetic and erotic objects to satisfy the male gaze, represented not as subjects but as "to-be-looked-at" objects. In the fetishism, utilizing Freud's concept of fetishism, Mulvey notes that the male viewer transforms the woman into a fetish object, suppressing the "castration anxiety" she symbolizes. This is first limited because the use of a threatening figure that can be moc-

king towards men can trigger this (Tanrıvermiş, 2024, p. 67). Highlighting specific parts of the female body (e.g., legs, breasts, lips) causes audiences to see women not as threatening wholes but as idealized, controllable parts. Because audience sees the female body not as a threatening whole, but as a controllable and idealized part.

Mulvey categorizes cinema's modes of producing pleasure into two primary approaches. First one is Voyeurism. The audience gains the right to control and evaluate female characters by observing them from a distance. Women are portrayed as passive entities serving the desires of the viewer. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) exemplifies this, as the main character voyeuristically observes a woman, reflecting the functioning of voyeurism in cinematic narratives. Second one is Sadism. The depiction of female characters as punishable or problematic figures within the narrative grants male viewers a sense of power and control. For instance, Catherine, the femme fatale character in *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992) is portrayed as a seductive and manipulative figure, reinforcing the notion of the woman as a source of trouble.

Johnston (1973) proposes *counter-cinema* as a response to the male gaze advocating for alternative visual practices that represent women as active subjects. This approach seeks to dismantle the objectifying structure of the male gaze. The *female gaze*, developed as a counterpart to the male gaze, represents a perspective in which women are portrayed as subjects, their narratives shaped from their own viewpoints. This approach focuses on presenting women as integrated individuals, emphasizing their independence, emotions, and perspectives. However, this concept is not merely an antithesis to the male gaze; rather, it offers a framework where women become subjects and the balance of power between gazes is redefined. The central focus is on subjectifying women. The *female gaze* shifts women from being *to-be-looked-at* objects to active subjects. Women are presented as characters who narrate their own stories, express their desires, and are represented from their own perspectives. Furthermore, it directs the audience not only towards a physical or erotic perspective but also towards the emotional experiences of the characters. This approach connects the audience to the inner world of the characters, offering a more profound engagement.

The *female gaze* critically interrogates gender roles and patriarchal structures focusing on the representation of women not merely as objects of male desire but as independent individuals. It emphasizes the creation of balance, highlighting the importance of addressing emotional and physical dimensions without entirely excluding sexuality or physical attractiveness. Instead, it reevaluates these aspects by situating them within an emotional context. Erotic representations are approached not solely as a source of physical pleasure but within a broader narrative framework.

Laura Mulvey's theoretical framework represents a turning point in feminist film theory. By analyzing how cinema reinforces gender hierarchies from a psychoanalytic perspective, her work reveals the ideological mechanisms at play within visual culture. Mulvey's study not only introduces a feminist approach to film criticism but also provides a broader academic framework for examining the impact of visual representations on social structures. In this context, Mulvey's work extends beyond cinema, enabling critical analysis of other visual practices, such as advertising, fashion, and social media, within this ideological context.

ANALYSIS OF THE FILM THE SUBSTANCE

Plot Summary of The Substance

Elizabeth Sparkle, a media sensation known for her stunning physique, overhears her boss searching for her replacement on her 50th birthday. Aware of the wrinkles on her face and the signs of aging on her body, she feels angered by the ease with which she is being replaced. While driving and looking at her old billboard ads, she gets into a car accident. As she leaves the hospital, an employee hands her a brochure for a drug that promises a new version of herself. She eventually decides to take this dangerous medication.

After self-administering an injection, Elizabeth transforms into a new and youthful body derived from her own. However, the drug's effects are temporary, and she periodically reverts to her old body. As Sue, her new identity, she quickly regains her former fame, becoming a media darling and an object of desire. Yet, danger looms. As the drug wears off and it becomes time for Sue to revert to Elizabeth, Sue refuses to relinquish her glamorous life. Sue begins stealing time from Elizabeth's life clock, draining her life energy, which accelerates premature aging on Elizabeth's body. This internal conflict between Sue and Elizabeth escalates into mutual hostility, culminating in their transformation into a grotesque creature within a single body. The story concludes with their ultimate destruction.

Method and Limitations

This study employs semiotics as a research method, widely recognized for analyzing cinematic content, television, and internet media. Within this framework, the film *The Substance* is analyzed through semiotic techniques. According to Roland Barthes, semiotics is within linguistics; that is, images convey meaning. Drawing on Saussure, he argues that the signifier directly refers to an object. This is called denotation. However, he also argues that signs contain a second meaning. This is a second level of meaning formation, formed by cultural references within

the society in which we live (Barthes, 1979, p. 1). A semiotic analysis of the film *The Substance* was conducted within this framework.

In establishing meaning, both denotation and connotation are utilized. Denotation refers to the immediate, literal representation of an object. A sign inherently carries a specific denotative meaning, creating a direct connection between the signifier and the signified. Connotation, on the other hand, involves the emotional and cultural associations evoked in the audience's perception. This aspect of meaning examines how a sign interacts with the audience's identity and values (Barthes, 2005, p. 50-51). In cinematic contexts, viewers interpret an image not only based on its denotative meaning but also through its broader cultural and emotional connotations.

This study focuses on the macro shots frequently used to emphasize key moments in *The Substance*. A purposive sampling method was used to select close-up shots from the film. The visual elements used in these macro shots were analyzed in accordance with Barthes's semiotic analysis method.

The Use of Macro Shots in Films

Macro shots, uncommon in content other than documentaries, are used to deeply explore or emphasize specific aspects of a subject. Often referred to as extreme close-ups, these shots reveal fine details invisible to the naked eye, creating meaning through intricate imagery. Macro shots aim to take the viewer from surface-level emotions to a deeper engagement.

The size of a shot correlates with its content. The more compact and intense the content, the more significant the depicted object or entity becomes within the frame. As the proximity of a close-up increases, fewer objects and smaller spatial elements occupy the frame (Özön, 1985, pp. 106-107). This technique directs the audience's attention to minute details, often unseen in ordinary observation, making macro shots a powerful storytelling device. During the act of viewing, we are not accustomed to seeing the excessively magnified details of any object, making it a highly effective method. Filling the entire frame with a single feature of the face directs the viewer's attention entirely to that feature, diverting focus away from any other elements present in the scene (Wineyard, 2010, p. 28).

Technically, extreme close-ups, referred to as macro shots due to the use of macro lenses, can employ either telephoto or wide-angle lenses depending on the size of the subject being captured. Both types of lenses create a shallow depth of field. Telephoto lenses, due to their structural characteristics, and wide-angle lenses, by reducing the distance between the subject and the camera, are used to create a narrow frame. In high-resolution and high-magnification shots, shallow

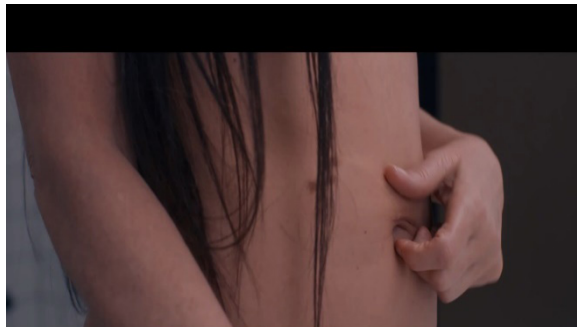
depth-of-field lenses ensure that only the focal area is sharp while the surrounding parts remain blurred. This effect highlights the intended subject and enriches the narrative by drawing attention to specific details. One crucial aspect of macro shots is careful lighting. Even when shooting something very small, the impact of such a shot can be significant, and the lighting must enhance the emphasis within the narrative (Marcedo, 2011, pp. 46-48).

Semiotic Analysis of Macro Shots in The Substance

Image 1: The Female Face



Image 2: Abdomen



Sign	Signifier	Signified
Female face	Wrinkled and tired face	Emotional turmoil, inner conflict
Female abdomen	Sagging, loss of elasticity	Emphasis on aging

In Image 1, the female face belongs to the character Elizabeth Sparkle, played by Demi Moore. Elizabeth, a television star, has aged, with visible signs of aging

on her face and body. The macro shot of Elizabeth's deeply lined face, her eyes, and subtle facial expressions visually portrays her emotional turmoil and inner conflict. Elizabeth Sparkle's view of herself also symbolizes the view of the media sector, which is engaged in "flaw hunting."

In Image 2, close-up shots of Elizabeth's abdomen emphasize the loss of elasticity and sagging skin, highlighting the physical manifestations of aging. The examination of the natural mark on Elise's body, which is supposed to be the normal state of aging, as if it were a "criminal element", depicts the patterns of the capitalist beauty industry.

Image 3: Female Lip

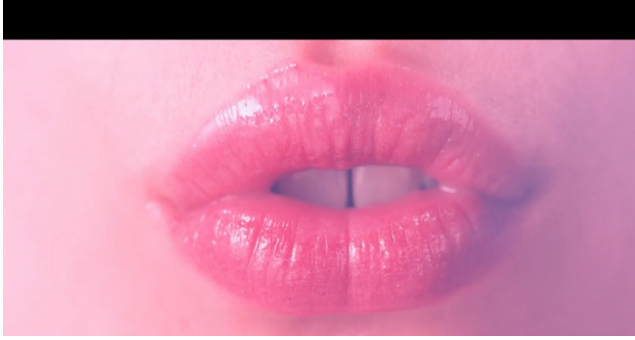


Image 4: Female Hips

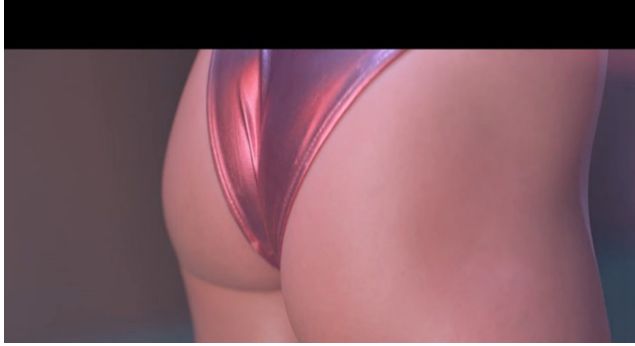
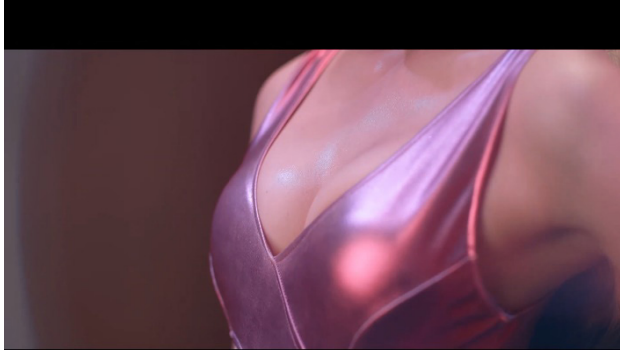


Image 5: Female Breast**Image 6: Female Legs**

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Female lips	Pink, youthful, fresh	Eroticism, sexuality
Female hips	Youthful, flawless, fresh	Nudity, sexuality
Female breasts	Youthful, firm, fresh	Eroticism, sexuality
Female legs	Youthful, smooth, fresh	Eroticism, sexuality

Images 3, 4, 5, and 6 focus on the perfect body of Sue, the youthful version of Elizabeth, emphasizing her youth and vitality through macro shots. Youth is shined macro photography as an almost divine perfection. But this perfection, rather than being natural, belongs to a sterile and plastic beauty culture. The film conveys an important message here: Today, youth is not a natural state, but a manufactured product.

Specific parts of the female body—lips, hips, breasts, and legs—are highlighted to encourage the audience to view Sue not as a whole person but as an erotic object. This framing reinforces the male gaze, portraying the female body not as a threatening whole but as controllable, idealized parts.

Image 7: Human Eye (Anomalous)



Image 8: Human Hand (Anomalous)



Image 9: Human Foot (Anomalous)



Image 10: Human Face (Anomalous)



Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human eye	One bright, one dull eye in the same socket (anomalous)	Physical transformation
Human hand	A hand with one finger appearing older (anomalous)	Physical transformation, destructive effects
Human foot	A foot showing both youthful and aged textures (anomalous)	Comparison of aging's effects on tissues
Human face	Extremely aged face and body (anomalous)	Aging's grotesque effects on the body

Images 7 through 10 depict Elizabeth's physical transformation into Sue, highlighting the destructive effects of aging on the body. The juxtaposition of youthful and aged features within the same frame starkly contrasts the physical changes. Especially in Images 8, and 9, an unusual comparison is made by presenting two different versions of the skin texture of the same limb within the same frame. In Image 10, macro shots vividly reveal the destructive effects of Elizabeth's pursuit of youth on her body, ultimately exposing her physical transformation. This transformation process materializes as a physical rupture in the identity struggle between a woman's "two selves." The idea that there might be a perpetually younger version of herself is an anomaly created by the identity crisis in postmodern society.

Image 11: Monster

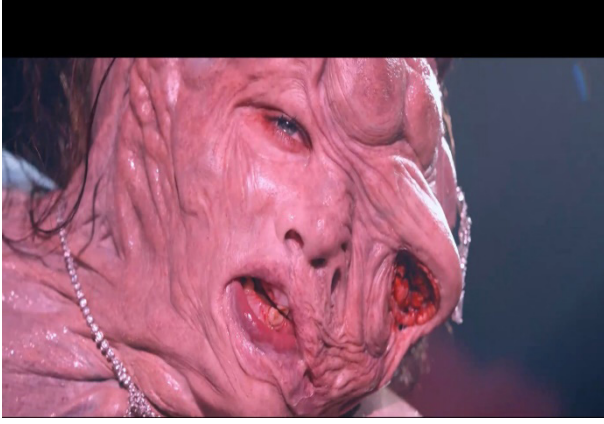


Image 12: Monster



Sign	Signifier	Signified
Monster	Intertwined, melting bodies	Grotesque (absurd, abnormal entity)
Monster	Intertwined, melting bodies	Grotesque (absurd, abnormal entity)

Images 11, and 12 show the intertwined and melting bodies of Elizabeth and Sue, evoking a sense of discomfort and abnormality.

In Images 11, and 12, the grotesque creature, composed of two intertwined bodies struggling for existence, resists by declaring, “It’s me (I’m Sue),” to survive. However, the two bodies ultimately destroy one another. The creature, formed from the bodies of Elizabeth and Sue, transforms into a monster. The final outcome: dissolution and annihilation. The result is disintegration and destruction. The female body has been so repressed, regulated, and shaped by society that what emerges is no longer human, but a “product,” even a “monster.”

CONCLUSION

Among the objects consumed today, the body stands out as the most beautiful, valuable, unique, and laden with the greatest connotations. However, the “rediscovery” and consumption of the body are governed by sexuality (Baudrillard, 2013, p. 149, 155). According to Baudrillard, the sexuality he refers to is the body as an object of desire within the society of the spectacle. To sustain the spectacle, the body is commodified and reduced to the status of an object.

In a world where every object is measured by its consumption value, excessive consumption is glorified, and individuals who lack consumable potential or the capacity to be objects of consumption are regarded as surplus. Consequently, there is no place in the world for the elderly, whose capacity for consumption is limited. Aging therefore becomes something dreadful, and when evaluated in terms of the body, it is perceived as grotesque.

Focusing on this idea, the film *The Substance* seeks to present a narrative that breaks away from traditional cinematic codes. Directed by Caroline Fargeat, the film offers a distinct perspective on how the obsession with aging and beauty can result in physically destructive consequences. In traditional cinema, women are often portrayed as objects of visual pleasure, overshadowing the depth of their characters. According to Laura Mulvey’s concept of the *female gaze*, audiences are encouraged to delve deeper into a woman’s inner world, recognizing her not merely

as an object of spectacle but as the active subject of her own story. The *female gaze* is not simply a reversal of the *male gaze*; rather, it embodies an approach centered on women's subjectivity, agency, and internal experiences. Within this framework, the focus shifts to portraying female characters as holistic individuals, emphasizing their perspectives, emotions, and independence.

The film *The Substance*, examined in this study, aims to foster emotional closeness with its protagonist, Elizabeth, to understand her experiences and evoke a deeper sense of empathy in the audience regarding the female body. To achieve this, the film frequently employs macro shots to emphasize the protagonist's internal transformation and physical changes. The film's emphasis on the body becoming a "must-have project" alludes to biopolitics. The value society places on women is a reaction to their alienation from their own bodies, allowing them to disintegrate.

Semiology is used to make the meanings of the changes visible, to be located and explained. In this way, what lies behind the narrative of the cinema, which first begins its narrative through images, is made visible. The macro shots of Elizabeth's aged self and the grotesque creature formed from her and Sue dismantle the notion of the female body as an object of desire. However, within the framework of Mulvey's theory, the film fails to fully present the liberating aspects of the female gaze. Although the female character, who transforms into a monstrous figure by the film's end, subverts the male gaze, it unfortunately does not deliver an egalitarian or profound female perspective. While the youthful body of Sue is presented to the audience through macro shots, the representation of the female body remains tied to the exchange value of desire. This approach reinforces the need to control the threatening and destructive aspects of femininity and ultimately fails to break with the traditions of classical Hollywood cinema. Throughout the film, the female body is depicted not as a threatening whole, but as fragmented into a controllable and idealized form, reproducing the spectacle as a product of the capitalist production system. Although the results obtained from the analysis of the film show that the bio-politics developed through the female body is still read with existing codes, it is thought that it will shed light on the studies to be carried out on presenting the body as a project.

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