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Lighting the Invisible.

Representation of the real: The equivocal approaches on the digital medium and the critical part of arts.

Models of Construction: The *Shadows* and the *Phantasms*

“The model of Disneyland”

The place where we can see a concrete example of the model of society as formed by the influence of the digital medium, is in “The Model of Disneyland” as it is presented in Baudrillard’s book “Simulacra and Simulation”. More specifically, he shows a plan of illusions and an imaginary world having as its core a desire to entertain the visitor. Upon entering Disneyland, it is part of a different reality based on certain operations. It is like entering in the objective profile of America, to its way of life, values, ideas and face of reality.

“...Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra.

It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms...

This imaginary world is supposed to ensure the success of the operation.

But what attracts the crowds the most is without a doubt the social microcosm, the religious, miniaturized pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys...”

(Baudrillard, p.12)

As Baudrillard suggests, Disneyland is intensively presented as imaginary so as to misdirect attention from the real illusionary world of America. It is beyond a copy, a manipulated reality, and another mechanism for altering real facts.

“This world wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the "real" world, and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere - that it is that of the adults themselves who come here to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness.” (Baudrillard, p.13)

We have created a civilisation as a duplicate, designing a copy as similar as possible to the original, avoiding what is real, natural and authentic. For Baudrillard, the real has been “killed” by simulation, and the airbrushed models of adverts are driving the culture, demanding more and more time, money, mind and mental activity. We have been educated to switch from one level of reality to another, between blurred boundaries of narrative and ontological reality. The hallucinatory resemblance of the real to the “phantasms” of reality has transferred the observation from the all to the small, from the world of humanism and the quest of the true nature to a theatre of shadows.

The Plato’s “Allegory of The Cave”

“Plato has exerted a greater influence over human thought than any other individual with the possible exception of Aristotle; this is due both to the intrinsic vitality of his ideas and to the fact that he appears at a comparatively early stage in Western culture.”(Demos, 1955)

Plato’s philosophy, in general, is an exploration of reality in its entire field, and an effort to reveal and present a hidden truth and the idea that could liberate the human being from illusions. Plato’s example of the cave was probably the first-ever inquiry into the possible effects of our world’s illusions on the human mind. It is written as a fictional dialogue between Plato’s teacher Socrates and Plato’s brother Glaucon.

In brief, Plato lets Socrates describe a group of people who have lived chained to the wall of a cave all their lives, facing a blank wall. These people could only watch shadows projected onto the wall in front of them by things passing in front of a fire behind them, and they begin to ascribe forms to these shadows. He let us imagine that the people at

the back are carrying things along behind the wall. At the same time, sound was reflected from behind, matched with the shadows and making them appear real to the prisoners. Socrates then supposes that someone is released and taken out of the cave. Even if they might find it difficult at first to look directly into sunlight, and bright light would hurt their eyes, afterwards they would be able to look to the real world without having to look at reflections in water or any other medium. Only then he can realise that the outer world is the real world and that inside the cave the prisoners can only see shadows. In order to gain an insight into that allegory, we have to illustrate some interconnections, which will help us to see the outcome of the allegory and find the contribution to this essay.

The prisoners, even if they see only shadows, are totally unaware of the hidden truth. They are not aware of the fire. The light they perceive inside the cave from behind them is just an illumination produced by the fire but not a source of the real, natural light. They do not have any relationship to the true light as this only comes from the sun, outside the cave. They have never had the chance to be released from their prison, so it is impossible for them to try to reach any other kind of light and thus the truth about their world. In the allegory, light has been presented as a symbol of freedom, representing the essence of understanding and illuminating view of the world. However, between the artificial light of fire and the illuminating one of the sun lies a significant discrepancy that needs to be addressed. It can be seen that the first one can be connected to a distorted source of information, producing a world of delusions. The light of the sun, on the other hand, gives value to the true source of knowledge. For that reason, that source has been placed out of the cave and has been identified with the sun, to make a connection with the natural source of light, not only far away from the artificial one but also to a point difficult to discover without guidance.

Another vital factor that is worth presenting is the liberator, the one who released the prisoner and forced his out of the cave guiding him to the light of the sun. Plato pointed

out that education and philosophy can welcome man to the world of truth, beyond the shadows of a fake reality, giving to them the role of the releaser. For Plato, education has been identified as the soul that can heal humans. An accurate translation of the Greek word for education (παιδεία), needed to be clarified at that point, as it is different to the interpretation we give it today. Platonic education is the moral and spiritual formation of the individual and the development of man in a way that will lead him to find the truth, free from illusions, ignorance and obfuscation. This constitutes important safeguards to help remove the man from the variability of the senses in an imperishable world of ideas.

The Potential Escape From Illusions

While for Baudrillard, *Disneyland* is a representation of the world of illusions surrounded by phantoms, in a similar manner for Plato the world inside the cave can be identified with the realm made of shadows. On one hand, for Baudrillard it is an illusion within the fake world outside of *Disneyland* that is trying to persuade us of an endless pattern of delusion, like a helpless laboratory experiment that is unable to be aware. On the other hand, Plato reveals a way out of that fractal delusionary world through knowledge, giving humans the power of realisation of their true nature by virtue of awareness of the structure of the deception. It seems that the first vital step is to be able to walk out of the hidden truth so as to move forward to a “cure” under the light of knowledge (in terms of Platonic education).

Finally, there is another crucial area worth examining that has adapted, inevitably, the digital technology and can be reasonably considered as part of the platform of representation and manipulated reality. Art, as part of the cultural platform, can play a key role, not only as a device for simulation of real but potential liberator and educator of

the masses. Plato had never provided a solid framework of thought about art, however, it is well known that he held a certain critical position about realism in art, presenting it as imitative and illusionistic, responsible for phantoms. Nevertheless, Plato gave a certain respect and direction about the power of art, to such a degree that he proposed it become part of the education of young citizens in his ideal republic while, at the same time, he proposed that it should be strictly censored to present, at first, only the good and highest ideas. His primary apprehension appears to be that art may act as a veil to the truth, rather than a clarification of it, to the point where it does not serve a higher purpose or idea. Consequently, most scholars point out that Plato perceived art as the main representative of the world of delusions. However, why would Plato have seen art as the shadows on the wall of the cave, rather than as shining symbols of the true spiritual world outside? The answer is that he saw both potentials. It is most likely that the prisoner represents the contemporary human, tied to a (TV or computer) screen, and identifying as real the images and myths purveyed by the culture of advertisement, mass media or even the movie industry. Therefore, a fundamental point to be defined is the significance of the core aim behind the artistic creation. The values they represent and their commitment to serve a higher objective separate it from the aesthetics of digital advertisement or the Hollywood movie industry (the illusionistic, imitative art, as was stated by Plato).

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