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### A Dystopian Allegory of Modern Society: An Analysis of *the Bothersome Man*

#### *Modern Toplumun Distopik Bir Alegorisi: The Bothersome Man Filmi Üzerine Bir Analiz*

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#### ABSTRACT

For more than a hundred years, cinema has played an important role in the relationship of the people with the cultural sphere. As a reflection of societies, cinema is also a platform where today's problems and social crises are revealed. Based on pieces of reality, movies show the modern world to people who are also a part of it. Semiotics stands in an important place in the context of deciphering the meaning created in motion pictures. In today's world, we are surrounded by signs, each of which contains a meaning. Semiotics deals with this universe of meanings that surround human beings. It examines how these meanings are formed and tries to analyze them. We analyzed *The Bothersome Man*, directed by Norwegian Jens Lien in 2006, which deals with the crisis of meaning in the oppressive environment of modern man and the alienating effect of the consumer society. The film was analyzed by semiotic analysis method. As a result of the study, it is seen that the film deciphers the artificial means of satisfaction imposed on people through a universe of signs and gives the message that spiritual satisfaction can only be achieved through the real establishment of human bonds.

#### ÖZ

Sinema, yüz yılı aşkın bir süredir kitlelerin kültürel alan ile kurduğu ilişkide önemli bir yere sahiptir. Toplumların bir yansıması olan bu sanat, günümüz problemleri ve toplumsal krizlerinin de tezahür ettiği bir platformdur. Gerçek parçalarından hareketle çekilen filmler, modern dünyayı ondan hareketle yine onun bir parçası olan insanlara gösterir. Sinema filmlerinde inşa edilen anlamın deşifre edilmesi bağlamında göstergebilim önemli bir yerde durmaktadır. Günümüz dünyasında dört bir yanımız, her biri bir anlam ihtiva eden göstergelerle doludur. Göstergebilim de insanı saran bu anlamlar evrenini ele alır. Bu mefhumların nasıl oluştuğunu inceler ve onları çözümlemeye çalışır. Bu çalışmada, 2006 yılında çekilen ve yönetmenliği Norveçli Jens Lien tarafından yapılan, modern insanın içerisinde bulunduğu baskı ortamında yaşadığı anlam krizini, tüketim toplumunun yabancılaştırıcı etkisini tartışan Norveç filmi *Sorun Yaratan Adam* analiz edildi. Film, göstergebilimsel analiz yöntemiyle ele alınmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucunda, filmin bir göstergeler evreni üzerinden kitlelere dayatılan suni tatmin araçlarını deşifre ettiği, ruhsal tatminin ancak insani bağların gerçek anlamıyla tesis edilerek sağlanabileceği mesajını verdiği görülmüştür.

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## 1. Introduction

Cinema has accompanied the modernization process of humanity and has been an important part of it. It has been the most important art of a period in which the balance of power in the world has deteriorated, great wars, mass killings, genocides, climate crises, oppression, domination, and standardization of the public through mass media. As Tom Moylan says; “There is no question that we live in conjuncturally dystopian times, negotiating a dark matrix of catastrophic ecological destruction, increasing economic exploitation, constant war, intensifying impoverishment and displacement of peoples, and pervasive racism and xenophobia” (2021: 129). The meaning of dystopia in Greek is "dys plus topos", meaning "bad place", and although it emerged as a literary genre like utopia, it has also deeply influenced cinema (Fletcher, 1983: 130-131). Cinema has closely followed the world, documented and depicted its current affairs in both realistic and allegorical contexts. In a sense, cinema has been a medium where the fate of the world and humanity is discussed. Many films have been produced on the problems and dilemmas faced by humanity. Therefore, dystopian narratives have occupied an important place in cinema.

*The Bothersome Man* therefore offers an important opportunity for discussion. Filmed in 2006 by Norwegian Jens Lien, the film is a significant work for social sciences, offering opportunities for analysis from different perspectives. It questions the place of the individual in society and deals with the fine line between domination and individuality in modern society. According to Jung, there is an innate spiritual element in the human psyche. This element, called the collective unconscious, connects all humanity on a metaphysical level (1964: 23). The film establishes a dystopian universe, criticizes the standardizing and oppressive aspect of modern society and conveys the message that the collective unconscious of humanity is always at war with these apparatus. In doing so, the film utilizes the universe of signs. In this study, *The Bothersome Man* is analyzed both semiotically and in terms of Greimas' actantial model. This is because the movie is aimed to be analyzed in terms of both content and form. Semiotics was preferred because it has the power to reveal the process of articulation and production of meaning in various written and visual texts (Altınbüken, 2014: 240). Greimas' approach was also preferred because it allows a narrative to be analyzed through the actants within it. The message of the film was deciphered through the signs in it. However, the film also stands in an important place in terms of formal structure. Even though it is avant-garde in terms of content, the film adheres to the elements of classical narrative structure. There is a protagonist who acts for a specific purpose and a dramatic structure that is shaped around him. Likewise, the narrative progresses linearly. But in direct proportion to the dystopian universe it portrays, the movie inverts the hero narrative of the classical narrative structure. Catharsis does not occur. In contrast to the classical narrative structure, the protagonist's failure to achieve success, in other words, the lack of catharsis, becomes an expression of frustration with the catastrophic nature of the contemporary world. The movie gives its message both in terms of content and form. Accordingly, the movie was evaluated in these contexts.

## 2. Dystopias as Critique of Modernity

Dystopia as an artistic genre depicts the negativity that has the potential to emerge from existing social problems. It draws a future perspective that is negative. It is the result of a negative vision of the future of humanity. They reflect the opposite of an ideal social order (Schmeink, 2016: 12). Excessive versions of existing problems are visible in dystopias. Along with an artistic purpose, the motive to warn people against future negative problems is also effective in this (Lowczanin, 2021: 45). The perfect order sought to be achieved on the social scale has led to authoritarianism, which in turn has brought about an environment of oppression and domination. The term means “bad place” and as a literary genre appeared early twentieth century (Cuddon, 1991: 844; Abrams, 2009: 378)

Enlightenment thought was founded on the naive belief that the future of humanity would develop in the light of science and rationality. Analyzing society in the light of concrete data and accepting current reality as a phenomenon that will always be carried forward, the Enlightenment promised humanity freedom from ignorance and oppression while offering intellect and individual freedom (Privateer, 2006: 108). But as time passed, the opposite reality also emerged. As science progressed, individual freedoms were suspended or limited, and in the same way ignorance didn't vanish (Fitzpatrick, 2000: 55). While the desired situation could not be achieved in many social areas, bureaucratic politics increased its pressure on people in most cases.

Dystopian narratives brought this situation to the artistic field. The negative options that oppression and domination create for people were discussed. Dystopian texts discuss the ideals of modernism and expose its excesses and contradictions. For example, George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* suggest that the modern mind and the instruments of modernity can serve authoritarian regimes (Lewis, 2007: 86). As such, dystopias make visible the crises within modernism itself and offer a space for criticism.

There is also a strong relationship between dystopia and cinema. Cinema is a visual art and it is valuable for it to produce powerful visuals. In this context, cinema is an art that can be creative in constructing the dystopian universe. This is why powerful dystopian movies have been shot a lot and science fiction is among the main genres of cinema. Dystopian cinema makes extensive use of visual and thematic elements that deal with tensions between the individual and authority, surveillance society, biopolitical control mechanisms and technological alienation (Booker, 2020: 148-149). While Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) deals with the social inequalities caused by industrialization, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) questions the effects of technological progress on humanity with a cyberpunk aesthetic. *The Matrix* (1999) deals with the process of the individual's consciousness by blurring the boundaries between simulation and reality, *Children of Men* (2006) deals with social collapse and the migrant crisis in a chaotic future with a cinematographic realism. When contemporary reality faces a crisis, art makes this crisis visible and transforms it into a text to be discussed on a social level (Adorno, 2002: 6). Cinema is among the mediums that enable the people to do this. The film discussed in this study is a Norwegian production. The attempts to establish social order in the Nordic countries has been painstaking, often obsessive. The historical perspective tells us that there have been great attempts in these countries in this regard. Although these countries are now considered to be welfare societies, this is the result of long and determined efforts. The effort to achieve this result has often involved repression. The tension between individual freedom and collective order has always existed in these regions (Tyden, 2010: 363; Booth, 2014: 11-12; Storm & Fonneland, 2025: 80). The control of the individual, the internalization of oppressive rules by society, and the perception of freedom as a threat are frequently encountered patterns in the films of these countries. For example, Lars von Trier's films centered on authority and psychological oppression or Roy Andersson's narratives shaped by a cold and gloomy atmosphere. Scandinavian cinema criticizes the oppressiveness of contemporary reality through imagined futures. The movie discussed in this article also takes a place in this context.

## **2. What is Semiotics?**

A sign is considered to be any form, object or phenomenon that represents something other than itself and is capable of substituting itself for what it represents. In this sense, natural languages, various gestures, the deaf-mute alphabet, traffic signs, advertising posters, literature, fashion, music, and so on, are systems of various units. These systems, formed by the use of various media such as sound, writing, image, movement, etc., are meaningful wholes that function according to certain rules. The units of these meaningful wholes are called signs. In its simplest definition, semiotics is the branch of science that deals with the functioning of sign systems (Rifat, 2009: 11-12; Bignell, 2002: 1).

The works of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure were the source of semiotics. Ferdinand de Saussure challenged previous approaches to language and meaning. Before Saussure, this issue was approached in the contexts of immanentism and intentionalism. Immanentism is the idea that every entity, person, object or event carries its meaning in its own essence. This notion implies that the creator has given every thing he created its essence and therefore its meaning. Intentionalism, on the other hand, asserts that it is the author who creates meaning; meaning is determined by the person who uses it. According to Saussure, meaning is determined not by these two approaches, but by language. Saussure argued that there is no entity whose meaning exists in itself. As a social construction, language is not a passive medium that conveys meaning embedded in the external world or in the author's intentions. On the contrary, meaning is produced by language. Saussure stated that the basic unit of language is the sign and meaning emerges from the difference of signs. Structuralist language theory focuses not on who creates meaning, but under which circumstances and in which ways meaning is created (Çam, 2015: 288-289). According to Saussure's approach, language (*langue*) is a system and speech (*parole*) is the individual expression produced from this system. The aim is to analyze the system as a whole in which meaning is constructed. Semiotics examines the social role

of signs. The link between the "signifier", which has a physical equivalent, and the "signified", which is its equivalent in thought, constitutes the sign (Uçak, 2023: 76-77).

For Charles Sanders Peirce a sign "stands for something to the idea which it produces, or modifies. Or, it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without" (Buchler, 1955: 80). It is something that replaces anything in any context, of any quality (Rifat, 2013: 97-98). Peirce made a tripartite distinction of signs and established this distinction on the basis of the similarity of the sign with what it represents. "Icon" refers directly to the object it represents in terms of its resemblance to it. There is a direct resemblance, as in the case of passport photographs. "Index" refers to something other than itself, as smoke is a sign of fire, and loses its signifying characteristic if the object that makes it a sign disappears. The interpreter must be able to make the connection. "Symbol", on the other hand, is a sign whose relationship with what it represents is established as a result of a social consensus. It does not refer to a specific object, but to a phenomenon that is open to interpretation, which can be a specific object such as 'bird' or an abstract concept such as 'justice' (Özmkas, 2009: 39-40). Unless they refer to a specific object, terms exist as a result of a social consensus in direct proportion to the sociality of language.

Roland Barthes stated that semiotics can be applied to any system in which meaning is established. In his work *Elements of Semiology*, he put forward four main distinctions. The first of these is the distinction between language and speech. According to Barthes, language is a social contract and a system of values. It is collective. One person cannot create or change it. There is a social acceptance. Speech is an individual act. It is the individual use of language. There is a dialectical relationship between language and speech. One cannot exist without the other (1986: 14-15). The second distinction is between signifier and signified. A signifier is the sequence of sounds of a word that comes out of the mouth. In other words, a signifier exists in the process of hearing. The signified is the visualization of that image in the mind. But what is visualized in the mind is based on the meaning that the perceiver gives to that concept in his/her mind. A sign is a combination of the signifier and the signified. There does not necessarily have to be a linear connection between the signifier and the signified, the link that unites these two concepts is causeless. For example, there is no linear relationship between a sequence of sounds at the level of hearing and the object or concept to which that sequence corresponds in nature. The third is distinction between syntagm and paradigm. According to Barthes, while paradigm implies making a choice between similar or evocative concepts, syntagm is the selection of different elements to form a unity. While paradigm requires rules, syntagm requires succession and continuity. For example, choosing between shoes, slippers, boots, or sandals is a paradigm. But the flow of shoes, pants, shirts, coats and hats is a syntagm (Çam, 2015: 294-296). The fourth distinction is between denotation and connotation. In the denotation, the signifier and the signified combine to form the sign. In the connotation, the sign that constitutes the denotation becomes the signifier, combines with another signified and forms a different sign (Barthes, 1986: 89-90).

Following the explanation of what semiotics is, we need to specify why it is preferred as a method. The movie discussed in this article is a dystopia. Dystopias are essentially social criticisms, and in doing so, they are aided by symbols, images and codes. At its core, semiotics is an important tool in the process of unlocking codes, making sense of them and placing them in a specific context. In doing so, it reaches a holistic meaning from symbols taken in a singular sense. Every text is multi-layered, the important thing is to be able to open it, to get what it wants to give. Dystopian films often resort to allegories and metaphorical narrative methods. Semiotics plays an important role in deciphering allegories and metaphors as a method of analyzing subtexts.

### 3. Semiotics and Cinema

Film studies have been a fertile field for applying analytical methods developed in various fields of social sciences. Likewise, semiotics has been recognized as an important method of investigation in the context of film studies. "Cinema semiotics is fundamentally concerned with the ways in which discourse emerges in a film and the formal choices through which it is realized" (Yılmaz, 2020: 277). Christian Metz has put forward important views on film semiotics. His thought is based on Saussure's dichotomy of signifier and signified. But he does so through cinema's unique way of structuring meaning. He makes the distinction between denotation and connotation. There are visual and auditory codes that are constantly changing in a film. These codes can establish a meaning in a linear sense. For example, the image of a house can be the equivalent of the idea of a house. But image and sound can also create connotations. For example, a pen can indicate that the protagonist

will be killed. He accepted the symbolic narrative as an achievement in the context of modernist cinema (Metz, 2012: 107). Metz said that the path to cinema having a language of its own was paved by filmmakers who did not leave the meaning entirely to editing, but experimented with features such as plan sequences. According to him, we cannot speak of a syntactic order in cinema as accepted by semiotics. To accept it as such would be to simplify it, like the Soviet films of the 1930s, which were based on editing. Directors like Stroheim<sup>1</sup> and Murnau<sup>2</sup> had a great contribution to its becoming a language. "...the ability to produce filmic utterances depends on talent, training and access. To speak a language, in other words, is simply to use it, while to 'speak' cinematic language is always to a certain extent to invent it" (Stam & Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 37). Those who saw it as a language, such as Soviet montage directors<sup>3</sup>, tried to use it as a contemporary language. However, cinema is not systematically structured like the language of thousands of years. According to him, the original language of cinema is seen in contemporary films such as *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*<sup>4</sup> (Metz, 1991: 55-56). Peter Wollen has also carried out important studies in the same way. Unlike Metz, he shaped his thought in the context of Peirce's theory. He argued that Peirce compressed Saussure's concept of sign into the concept of symbolic sign (Wollen, 2013: 103). He stated that the three categories put forward by Peirce, namely symbol, index, icon, are also found in cinema. He stated that each of these dimensions exist and none of them should be excluded (Sivas, 2012: 534-535). He attributed the reason why cinema is an advanced language to the use of all three titles.

#### **4. Algirdas Julien Greimas' Actantial Model**

Semiotics offers a powerful framework for analyzing cinematic texts. Algirdas Julien Greimas' approach is a powerful tool to reveal the structure of narrative. Literary theorist and structuralist Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992) aimed to create a grammar of narrative. He developed his study in order to understand the basis of the structure of any narrative through a structuralist approach. Russian fabulist Vladimir Propp's book *Morphology of the Folktale* written in 1928 played a major role in the emergence of Greimas' approach. While Propp studied only fairy tales, Greimas made his model adaptable to all narrative forms. Propp conducted a formal analysis and focused on the order of the roles in the narrative. Greimas, on the other hand, did not deal with these actants only in terms of the formal aspects of narratives. Through their role in the meaning-making process, he tried to reveal their deeper meaning in the story and what message was intended to be conveyed. In his book, Propp analyzed thousands of fairy tales written in different parts of the world and discovered that there are unchanging patterns in them. According to Propp, regardless of the geography of origin, fairy tales have similar characterizations and turning points. Although their names and forms change, they have similar functions in the narrative (Propp, 2018). There are thirty-one functions in Propp's work. Based on this, Greimas defined three types of narrative syntagms. These are; tasks and struggles, the establishment or breaking of contracts, departures and arrivals. According to Greimas, narrative themes and characters are based on three basic binary oppositions, corresponding to the three narrative syntagms. These are subject-object, sender-receiver and helper-opponent (Chandler, 2007: 118-119).

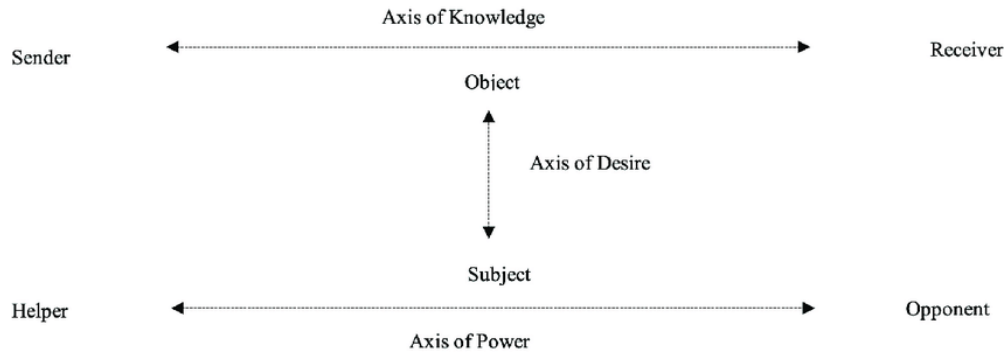
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<sup>1</sup> Erich Von Stroheim, Austrian-born director. He lived between 1885 and 1957. He is one of the first names to enrich the language of cinema (Booker, 2011: 395-396). He achieved this by trying to stay away from commercial concerns, going beyond the standard use of the camera, and adding characters with complex personalities to the story of his films (Koszarski, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, German-born director. He made important films in Germany and then in the USA. He pushed the possibilities of the language of cinema and made films far ahead of his time (Gray, 2010: 12-13).

<sup>3</sup> Directors who experimented with the language of cinema in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s: Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Dzigo Vertov, etc. Their experiments were in line with the ideology of the period. Along with their technical experiments, they also carried out theoretical studies (Kenez, 1992: 52).

<sup>4</sup> Directed by Alain Resnais in 1961. It is one of the most important films of the French New Wave.



**Figure 1.** Actantial Model of A. J. Greimas (Source: Vermishyan, 2021: 27).

He builds his model on six actants. What the Greimas means by the concept of actant is not only people. Objects, expressions and abstract concepts can also be actants (Yılmaz, 2021: 33). These are subject, object, sender, receiver, helper and opponent. The sender is the one who encourages/tasks the subject to take an object/achieve a goal. The object is the thing/goal to be achieved, and the subject is the one who aims to get the object/achieve the goal. The receiver is the person who will benefit from the achieved goal. While the helper is the person who helps the subject to reach the goal, the opponent is the person who aims to prevent the subject from reaching the goal (Vandendorpe, 1993: 505; Uçak, 2023: 91). On the subject-object syntagm, the subject struggles for the object to reach the receiver by overcoming the obstacles. On the sender-receiver syntagm, sending and receiving take place, the receiver gets what he feels missing. On the syntagm of helper-opponent, the subject finds the power to act. In this direction, there is both a support that enables him to obtain the motivation to act and an element that prevents him and also affects him negatively (Yücel, 2005: 148-149; Jackson, 2005: 35). Greimas' model, as seen in the image above, has been used in this study, both individually in terms of the function of actants and in the context of exploring binary syntagms in narrative.

### 5. The Bothersome Man (Den Brysomme Mannen, 2006)

*The Bothersome Man* is directed by Norwegian Jens Lien in 2006. The movie begins with the image of a gas station in a desert. Andreas arrives at the gas station in a bus with himself as the only passenger. A man hangs a "welcome" sign on the wall greets Andreas and takes him to the city by car. Andreas receives a key of his own house and a piece of paper with his work address is written on it from the driver and tries to make sense of it all. He examines his home, the city full of sharp-edged buildings, goes to his workplace and meets his boss and coworkers, who greet him insincerely.

Andreas does not remember his past. He experiences things in the city that he cannot comprehend. Although life seems to go on in an orderly manner, mysterious events also occur. The townspeople are indifferent to a person who commits suicide in the town square. No matter how much Andreas drinks, he can never get drunk, and the food is tasteless and odorless. When the paper machine severs his hand, the finger heals in a way he cannot understand. Although he tries to explore the city's borders, he fails and cannot leave the city. But he continues to quest. Follows a person named Hugo to his home and thinks that he is like him in a quest for truth. This is the only person whose house is filled with the sounds of music and who is also the only person with human feelings. During this process he starts to live with a woman named Anne. Although Anne and Ingeborg, the woman he will later meet, bind him to where he lives for a while, his dreams and other human emotions prevail and he continues to question the city and his own life. He tries to commit suicide but fails. He goes back to the house where the music is coming from. As he follows the source of the sound by breaking the wall, he is sent back by the workers who work there. After a while, the rulers of the city decide to send Andreas away and put him on a bus that will take him to a glacier-covered region.

### 6. Semiotic Analysis of the Bothersome Man

The director depicts a city whose inhabitants live in a hyper-reality universe (Güzel, 2015: 68), detached from epistemological reality. This is a city shaped according to the capitalist world order. The most important thing

in this city is productivity. In the same way, human virtues are also tried to be hidden and ignored. Therefore, almost all city inhabitants are members of the consumer society, satisfied with the system they live in. Some of them also have an inner distress that they cannot define. But they try not to make this visible. In the city, integration into the system is essential and people are both convinced and forced to do so.

This way of life and governance depicted in the movie is presented to the audience through signs. In one scene of the movie, two people play badminton. A wide angle is used in the plan. Half of the screen is in lush, vibrant colors while the other half is in a dull, oppressive color. The colored part is close to the two people playing, while the oppressive part is the sky that covers them, encompassing a larger dimension. In this scene, it is understood that the ground on which the two people playing badminton step on is an illusionary surface, but in fact, when viewed in the big frame, that colorfulness, that vibrancy is surrounded by something dark, but the people playing the game do not notice this. These two people symbolize the people in the city. These are the first people seen from the city. The people in the city are also happy in their small lives, but they are actually surrounded by a malevolent force.



**Figure 2.** Scenes from *The Bothered Man*

In another scene, the body of a person who has committed suicide is lying in the middle of the street while the city inhabitants rush to their work as if nothing had happened. The workers in charge of maintaining order in the city calmly remove the body. People do not know how to react to events that occur out of the ordinary. They live happy, business-oriented lives where they cannot contemplate their own existence. Mass media plays a big role in this. Through the media, luxury consumption is encouraged. People are constantly kept motivated to have expensive and flashy things. In direct proportion to this, the inhabitants of the city are shown dreaming of buying a new car or a new house.

In the same way, people feel uncomfortable when Andreas dares to question the system or tells them about his dreams. The dream phenomenon is important. Because it is an indication that city inhabitants do not dare to confront something like a dream, which is internal, uncontrollable, and has some connection with the metaphysical universe. People in the city avoid even basic human virtues such as thinking about their dreams, being alone with themselves, contemplating. Because they are so involved in the means of consumption that such inner things are frightening them. They choose a persona that suit them and try to live accordance with it. However, what is dangerous is the individual's identification with his own personality. Then a person lives in his own biography. Even the smallest task cannot be done spontaneously; he lives in fear of what others will say. Persona is not what a person is, but what others and himself thinks he is. In any case, people are inclined to be what they appear to be, because usually the persona is rewarded with cash (Jung, 2005: 55-56). The most important reason why city inhabitants are so workaholic and callous is the fear of losing their class position. They are afraid of being relegated to a lower class. This enables them to create personas that they will be accepted in society that they are moral and hardworking.

**Table 1.** Signifier and Signified Table of *the Bothersome Man*

<b>Sign</b>	<b>Signifier</b>	<b>Signified</b>
Nature	Desert	Not having a history
Place	Giving Andreas a home and a job, a living space without his permission	People not being able to make their own choices, personal space being kept under control
Architecture	Sharp shapes of buildings and objects	The establishment of social hierarchy on a vertical axis. The existence of a capitalist social structure
Job	Every person living in the city works in non-creative jobs	Initiatives to meet people's spiritual needs are undervalued and prevented
Dress	People wearing suits	Daily life is business and capital-oriented
Beverage	Alcohol	Preventing intoxication, stopping people from doing something out of control
Music	A music sound coming from an unknown place	Accepting music and art as a means of interpreting life and expressing emotions
Broadcasting	TV commercials	Encouragement of consumerism through mass media. The media being under the control of the capital
Consumerism	IKEA catalog	Consumption-oriented social life

Andreas was brought to this city against his will. Paranormal events occur here. There are no children in the city. People are not allowed to express their emotions. No one can get drunk and no food has any smell or taste. One day Andreas goes to the desert and follows the bus that brings him to the city. At some point, first the bus and then its tire tracks disappear. The road symbolizes Andreas' inability to find his past. Andreas tries to find his origins, his existence, but he can not be successful. This is a territory whose inhabitants have been brought here by forcing them to forget their past and to work without emotion in order to serve capital. As an allegory of the modern world, the film makes a social and cultural critique. In this way, it also paves the way for a interpretation based on the views of figures from critical theory. The universe established by the film appears on a discourse in which meaning does not remain on a fixed plane, is built on a slippery ground, and the strong and powerful will always prevail. The film constructs this through signs. Daniel Chandler (2007: 271) states that from a poststructuralist perspective, the relationship between the signifier and the signified can be subjected to illusion by the dominant ideology. In this context, a poststructuralist approach can also be used in a semiotic analysis. The movie can also be analyzed in this context. For example, the film shows us the highest point of biopolitics<sup>5</sup>. Beyond the known world, it is a place where a capital-oriented life is built, devoid of emotion and everything humane. Andreas searches for human emotions. During this search, he realizes that

<sup>5</sup> Developed by Michel Foucault, this concept deals with the functioning of power structures in modern societies. It implies that the domination over people goes beyond repression and control and involves biological issues (Ferguson, 2019: 110).



the place he lives in is a pure simulacrum<sup>6</sup>. Throughout the movie, he attempts to get out of this capitalist system into which he is being pulled. Andreas deliberately cuts his finger on a paper cutting machine at work. One of the reasons for self-harm is that "in response to the pressure created by one's inability to fit into the environment, the person relieves himself by cutting himself" (Aksoy & Ögel, 2003: 227). Here we understand that Andreas feels himself under pressure and realizes there is something wrong in the city, even if he cannot fully understand it. This pressure leads him to harm himself. Similarly, after realizing that he cannot escape from this place, he tries to commit suicide by throwing himself in front of a moving subway. But he cannot die even though he is hit by a total of three subways at very fast speed. The workers who maintain order in the city pick him up from the tracks on which he was lying and take him home. Death is the separation of a person from the world. In other words, a person finishes his trial in the world with death. He cannot do good deed or sin. After death, as far as is known, there is no concept of free will like on earth. The city in the movie is also like that. In the city, too, choices are only at the level of choosing the color of the furniture to buy.

The film depicts music, art and dreams as a way to escape from the capital-centered world system. This is actually not a new feature for European art cinema. As can be seen in the movies of Polish Krzysztof Kieślowski, Swedish Ingmar Bergman and Russian Andrei Tarkovsky, the acceptance of dreams and art as a means to break the universe of domination is quite common (Botz-Bornstein, 2008). In an environment where what is humane is scraped away, art carries within itself the possibility of rebellion against the environment shaped in accordance with capital. When Andreas goes to the source of the music he hears on the street, he realizes that it comes from inside a wall. The more he pierces the wall, the closer he gets to the source of the music and the closer he gets, the more he embraces human emotions. But his struggle will be fruitless. The workers who maintain order in the city will dig him out of the tunnel and close the place where the music comes from.



**Figure 3.** Scenes from *the Botherome Man*

The film uses the classical narrative structure as a basis. A protagonist struggles to achieve a certain goal. There are forces that support and oppose him in this struggle. But the hero's effort in the movie does not end successfully, he fails at the end. This failure is undoubtedly a commentary on the contemporary world. We will examine what the film wants to say with the narrative structure it uses in the context of Greimas' Actantial Model. According to this model, the actants of *The Botherome Man* as follows;

**Subject:** Andreas is the person who is at the center of the narrative, who moves towards a specific goal, who keeps the narrative dynamic.

**Sender:** Andreas' subconscious, dreams.

**Receiver:** Andreas is on a journey for his own freedom and when he achieves what he wants to achieve, he will be the receiver. The subject and the receiver are therefore the same person.

**Object:** The goal of the movie is individual freedom. Andreas envisions a world where he acts with his free will, where its inhabitants are not addicted to consumption and where human values are not forgotten.

**Helper:** Hugo is the driving force for the subject's goal in the movie. He reminds Andreas about the basic human values that are no longer accepted and covered up in the city, and this becomes a trigger for Andreas.

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<sup>6</sup> The last stage of the relationship with reality in Baudrillard's simulation theory, which he examines the relationship between modern societies and reality. At this stage, the connection with reality is completely severed, simulation has completely replaced reality. (Baudrillard, 1994: 6).

**Opponent:** The whole city can be shown as an obstacle to the subject's main goal. Everyone except Hugo acts as an obstacle for Andreas in one way or another. People who have no problem with the oppressive rule in the city try to convince Andreas to adapt to the system. This can be verbal or physical.

On the subject-object syntagm there are Andreas and individual freedom. Andreas is the subject and is trying to reach his goal of free will. Here, Andreas represents today's people who are being turned into consumption maniacs within the capitalist system. On the sender-receiver syntagm, the conscience of Andreas, and therefore the conscience of humanity fights for individual freedom. The sender is Andreas' conscious. It is the human essence that cannot be dominated or conquered. Even though an external force tries to suppress and dominate it, it somehow makes itself visible. On the syntagm of helper-opponent there are Hugo and the people who live in the city. Although there are workers who ensure the continuity of the order, the inhabitants of the city also fight for the sake of the order when necessary.

## 6. Conclusion

Norwegian Jens Lien's *The Bothersome Man* (2006) centers on issues of capitalist system, individual freedom, oppression and consumer society. There is an allegorical narrative in the movie. The city symbolizes the contemporary world and its inhabitants symbolize the modern people. People are being brought into the city. Andreas is one of them. They are made to forget their past. In order to maintain this state of forgetting, people are encouraged through the mass media to be interested in things like home decoration, sexuality and hard work. Television is one of the important tools of this imposition. So why is this done? The reason for this is production. The most important thing in the city is work. In this way, it is aimed to make production in the most efficient way. Everything is organized for this reason in the city. Therefore, a life without art and love is imposed on people. In this way, people who are alienated from their human virtues turn into emotionless consumers. This system is like a bottomless pit. As the system based on production, performance and profit develops, human values decrease. The system does not make itself visible. It is in the details. It shows itself in vertical architecture, television programs, expensive and colorful things. People are preoccupied with details and are not allowed to analyze their environment in a holistic way, and are unable to contemplate their own lives. It allows them to enjoy a pleasurable life in their small world. The difference of Andreas from other people is that he asks questions and tries to understand, but the system is so fragile that it cannot even absorb these questions. The more Andreas asks questions, the lonelier he becomes, and eventually he is fired from his job. Andreas searches for reality. He realizes that the world he lives in is a simulation and tries to escape from it. He even comes close to succeeding at the end of the movie. But he is prevented.

Since Aristotle's *Poetics* (1996), catharsis has an important place in studies on narrative. In other words, justice is served at the end of the story. This is the case in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004) as well as in the works of Propp, who influenced Greimas. This film is also formed according to the classical narrative structure. In other words, deconstruction is not preferred in the narrative context. The story progresses in a straight line. As in the classical narrative structure, there is a subject, a goal that the subject is trying to reach, an opponent, a supporter, a sender and a receiver. So, although it relies on the conventions of classical narrative cinema, the film breaks it at the end, it does not establish a catharsis. But in doing so, it does not rely on the conventions of art cinema, it uses the thousands of years of narrative tradition of humanity. Thus, it creates a hole in the social subconscious by using the traditional narrative structure in which the protagonist becomes successful at the end of the narrative and justice prevails. The reason for this is to convey the message that the capitalist system corrupts and dominates individual freedom, human qualities and humanity in general. In this respect, the film makes its message by relying on classical narrative conventions and criticizes the system through that. This increases the sense of realism and makes the message of the movie more powerful and realistic.

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