

**Ageism and gender through the mirror:
the case of *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022)**

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Abstract

In the tradition of western film sector, the mirror has played different roles, from displaying representations of the female body that subsumes into the satisfaction of the male eye to projecting gendered standards that have taken part in the construction of Western social imaginaries. Since the motion picture sector is a form of public discourse that influences and shapes beliefs, imagery and cultural practices of a given society, this thesis puts under scrutiny the relation to the mirror in both symbolic and material perspectives through the case study of the main mirror scenes of *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022). By combining gender sensitive analysis and compositional interpretation methodologies, this thesis shows the potential of the mirror as an instrument of change and empowerment in relation to gender and ageism. It demonstrates that employing the mirror through a feminist lens enables the de-normalisation of negative stereotypes of bodily appearance that are scarcely represented onscreen, as it is the case of aged female bodies. Simultaneously, it renegotiates the relationship between youth and adulthood and disrupts hegemonic representations of masculinity. This master's thesis offers a new feminist perspective of non-normative bodily appearances using the mirror as the main source of analysis.

Introduction

Reflections in relation to bodily representations have been part of a large trajectory in Western visual arts. Myths such as Narcissus, or literary works such as *Dorian Gray*¹ and its implementation, reflections in the Western audiovisual sector acquiring different uses. Interestingly, what they all have in common when we look closely in a gender-based perspective is that most of the mirror scenes where the presence of a woman is at the heart of the scene is the figure of beauty, Western gender normativity and youth.

This master thesis shall focus on, firstly, the analysis of the evolution of the use of the mirror as an instrument and extension of public discourses that displace social identities that do not fit in westernised societies where the existence of a correlation between beauty and youth is fraught with tension and even power relations. Western film industries have built their narratives around young characters in its majority, rendering impossible the space for other representations to take the lead of a narrative. As it happens with gender where women appear as a marked identity while men are unmarked, a similar analogy can be done in the dichotomy youth/old age. Older age in the film industry is denoted by negative connotations, instilling a reductionist approach of elders. As such, audiovisual product contribute to social constructions; firstly, as a reinforcement of the previous idea exposed, as it instills negative assumptions and discriminating practices in audiences, resulting in its extrapolation to real life cultural practices and perceptions of such social categories pejoratively depicted and ultimately leading to their exclusion and oppression. Secondly, in recent years those representations and social constructions are being redefined. As societies change, the emergence of new and oppressed voices, which are being unearthed, finding their space in the sector. As part of the creative sphere, different instruments can serve as potential strategic tools to change, subvert taboos, negative images traditionally gestated and the gendered use of certain instruments, such as the mirror. An interesting case of audiovisual production that responds to an intersectional representation of such oppression is *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*. This audiovisual production strives to redefine ageism and gender through the use of the mirror. The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how the use of the mirror displays the

¹ Both pieces of literature are part of materials that rely on the association between beauty and youth, leading them to tragic ends. *Dorian Gray*'s obsession for his youth hides an absolute aversion of the old age (Hao Li, 2017).

generalised discrimination of older age and simultaneously, how it is used for the disruption of conventional cultural assumptions. As such, the following research questions have sprung from these reflections:

- **How does the figure of the mirror impact on the representation of the aging female body?**

- **Can the mirror become an empowering tool for representation?**

- **Does it reinforce and/or generate a turning point in public discourses about older women?**

- **And, conversely, can the reflection in the mirror create a different masculinity?**

An intersectional perspective plays an important role in this thesis. Yet, intersectional aspects do not only concern individuals, but attain non-human entities, such as the mirror, as well. In this regard, the mirror itself functions as an intersectional instrument, materially and symbolically due to the idea that it can address different oppressions that fall into both the protagonists and the dynamics they have between them and with themselves simultaneously.

These above research questions intend to address the idea that, depending on the gaze adopted by the director, the mirror can become a potential instrument of change.

I shall mention that this master's thesis focuses solely on the Western socio-cultural context due to my own positioning. As a Western, white, cisgender, young woman, I acknowledge, even in such a context, my typically privileged position in relation to ageism and how youth is at the heart of the majority of Western audiovisual products. It is noteworthy to clarify that the mention of such a privilege of youth is framed in an audiovisual context, since in other fields where long professional careers are needed, youth is a category that is marginalised. In addition, I primarily focus on Western film industry due to the specific nature of *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022), which addresses such a particular theme.

This master thesis shall be divided into six chapters. In Chapter 1, I shall discuss the background previously displayed related to the mirror and the audiovisual sector, that is,

Literature that has tackled the mirror as an instrument of analysis and what bodily representations have been depicted in order to give context to this master thesis contribution. In Chapter 2, I address the methodology that shall be employed throughout the thesis, having two main methods for analysis: “gender sensitive analysis” and “compositional interpretation” along with an introduction of the material employed. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the theoretical framework. Although a wide number of theories are unpacked in this chapter, each theory is diligently applied in the analysis of the movie. All of them are needed in order to incorporate the feminist contribution that *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* and the mirror provide. In Chapter 4, I strive to introduce an short analysis of five different movies to show the different aspects of the mirror that have been used as well as representations of the female body and masculinity addressed. Chapter 5 draws a detailed analysis of the movie and evincing the importance of the mirror through the different theories and methodologies presented in Chapters 2 and 3 as well as referring to the other movies tackled in Chapter 4 to underline the feminist and innovative perspective of the movie. Finally, Chapter 6 summarises the main points of the thesis, answering in turn to the research questions, mentioning the limitations this work has had and suggesting other possible research works that could be done to complete other widen the perspective of this master thesis.

Chapter 1: Background

Representation of the female body in visual art has historically followed a heterosexual narrative where the female body has been at the mercy of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). In the audiovisual sector, notably in film and TV shows, the appearance of older women onscreen starring as a main character barely happened. Film scholars Martha M. Lauzen and David D. Dozier (2005) state that this lack of presence onscreen adds more weight to the negative definition, generalisation, reductionism to the image gestated in audiovisual consumers which is ultimately extrapolated to real-world demeanour towards them. That is, it influences in intergenerational and intragenerational perspectives. Deepening this idea, Bazzini, *et al.* (1997) study evinces the perpetuation of stereotypes of such scarce representation of elders by comparing younger characters' personalities. Put differently, after analysing 100 motion pictures between the 40s and 80s, the study elucidates the presence of a specific and fixed personality pattern in elder characters involving negative connotation as they tend to be more obstinate, grumpy and socially odd. Notwithstanding, women's presence has been increasing in different cultural fields including the audiovisual sector over the years. This has welcomed "innovative images of older women, mainly in the film and television industries" (Lemish, 2012, p. 173). This is translated into a prelude for the subversion and disruption of the negative stereotypes that have been disseminated in public and cultural discourses about the images of older women onscreen that give room to not relying on those patterns but to go further and explore older female characters making them multidimensional, complex ones and exploring as well other topics that do not centre in motherhood for instance.

As it has been mentioned, the female body has had traces of erotism and fetishism for the male gaze and critically argued, for other women being spectators but having as the solely reference the male, heterosexual lens, it has had also an impact on the way they look at it in movies. Young, beautiful and therefore normative female bodies are at the centre of Western social imaginaries, despising any other type of female bodies as it is the case of older bodies. The mirror has been employed in films notably in relation to trans experience in aspects of self-discovery, identity and self-acceptance (Lorenz, 2016; Toscano Alonso, 2018; Cole,

2022). That is, the mirror has an introspective and psychoanalytical component. In this sense, the mirror is not only an object *per se*. An individual sees their reflection through others, influencing and eventually distorting the perception of themselves. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's theory purports that the infant forms their ideal "I" within a phallogentric control. As mentioned by feminist scholar Nina Lykke in her chapter "Making Corporealities Matter: Intersections of Gender and Sex Revisited" (2010), although Lacan did not directly associate the symbol of the penis and the phallus, feminist linguist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray challenged Lacan's statement in her understanding that the symbolic order was built on male's signifiers, symbolic order and language. This results on the idea that the formation of the "I" is already being constructed within a phallogentric frame.

Nonetheless, the mirror has also been employed in other literature as a symbol of rejection of one-self in relation to bodily appearance. The despair of witnessing how your own body is aging in a society that prioritises youth and beauty accentuates negative assumption socially constructed (Chivers, 2003; Whelehan, 2009). That is, the mirror has been read symbolically as the reflection where beauty, youth and one's reflection are melted together, as it happens in the myth of Narcissus falling in love with his young reflection, which is adopted in Dorian Gray's despair to keep that youth intact, as if time could be stopped (Craft, 2005). Moreover, the reflection of the mirror also engages the psychological pressure on younger women that are imposed to have normative bodies in areas of arts.

With the exception of a research article that tackles the subversive nature of *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*, displaying an analysis in the relation of film narratives and themes that are still taboo concerning older women (Casado Gual and Oró Piqueras, 2023), no other literature involving the mention of this movie nor its study has been found. For this reason, this master thesis modestly contributes to feminist film studies introducing the mirror as a new element of analysis.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter is dedicated to the exposition of the methods selected to conduct the analysis of this master thesis' material. Two main methods have been targeted due to their different approaches. In the first place, gender sensitive analysis and its feminist lens is crucial for the contribution that this works intends to provide. In the second place, compositional interpretation is a method that shall give shape to the context of the movie scenes analysed and thereby create a base from where the analysis can be deepened. Lastly, the chapter provides a brief summary of the material analysed in chapters 4 and 5.

1 - Gender sensitive analysis

Similar to multimodal analysis in its way of studying “many visual resources and their ideational and interpersonal aspects” (Boréus and Bergström, 2017, p. 8), gender sensitive analysis deepens the dissection of visual and audiovisual products by providing a feminist reading. Bearing in mind that the aim of this thesis is to study the role of the mirror and its impact, materially and figuratively, in older women's bodily, psychological and social image through different semiotic angles, Buikema and Zarzycka's (2011) use of gender sensitive analysis is also considered to understand and explore different gendered readings, either explicit or implicit and how it is articulated to create a certain influence in the audience social imaginary in real-world social and cultural practices.

2 - Compositional interpretation

The methodological approach involves the use of the compositional interpretation (Rose, 2016) which enables the reading of a myriad of images that are essential to the critical feminist analysis employed in this thesis. Although this method has been employed in the analysis of visual productions such as paintings, audiovisual products are also part of the artistic and creative sector in which the method in question certainly finds its place. It englobes different factors to take into account at the moment of analysing a scene such as the space, content, sound or the expressive content. Certainly, images, scenes and audiovisual

products as a whole involve a certain degree of active role, that is, it lurks a specific message that combining both form and content that has an impact in the way audience perceive the image since “It is important to acknowledge images as both meaningful (representational) and active (intentional)” (Hook and Glaveanu, 2013, p. 356). Employing this method shall enable a contextualised analysis if the scenes chosen for this thesis. Indeed, it would not be possible to gather enough evidence nor information from the scenes if an overall study of gestures, dialogues, attitudes of the characters and shots of the scenes is not carried out.

3 - Material

For this master’s thesis, audiovisual material is put under scrutiny. The movie par excellence I shall focus on is *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022). Directed by the Australian female director Sophie Hyde², the movie is set and produced in the United Kingdom, distributed by the English film company Lionsgate. Considered a semi-mainstream film, it has been considered as a transgressive and innovative movie, “the first great movie, in a long time, for the invisibles” (Zacharek, 2022), in the way the film displays a female aged body and thus, contrasting with other mainstream films. Other reviews depict the astonishing interpretation of Emma Thompson in Nancy’s —the main character— skin, revolving the character a more disrupting and needed character for the film industry (Crespo, 2022).

This motion picture follows a very specific situation of a 55-year-old woman and now retired schoolteacher, Nancy, who is trying to seek and discover what sexual pleasure truly is after an unsatisfied sexual life with her deceased husband. For her aim to be accomplished, she hires a sex worker, Leo Grande, a young and normative boy. This movie tackles different thematics throughout its development such as the problematic of legalising sexual work or not, but also about perceptions of oneself and society in relation to appearance and self-acceptance. Two scenes are selected as the centre of this thesis. In both of them, there is the presence of the mirror entailing different roles and readings. The first scene engages both the protagonist, Nancy, and the co-protagonist, Leo Grande. Leo invites Nancy to follow him in front of the

² Sophie Hyde is known by addressing topics such as transgender relationships and family in *52 Tuesdays* (2013) and feminist agency in *Animals* (2019).

mirror, making her face her own reflection. With a glimpse of anguish in her expression, she comments on her own reflection while Leo ponders if he can unbutton part of her blouse, to which she agrees.

The second mirror scene, and final scene of the film, opens up with Nancy appearing with a bathrobe that is completely and slowly removed afterwards. She then stares at herself, at her complete nakedness with a satisfied expression drawn on her face.

Furthermore, as the case study involves the movie as a whole, two more scene shall be pointed out, being Leo Grande the main focus of it, always in relation to the female protagonist. In the first scene, which happens at the beginning of the movie, Leo is heading to Nancy's apartment and in his way, he takes a moment to stare at himself in the reflection of a shop window. Later in the plot, he encounters himself on his own in the apartment while Nancy is in the bathroom. This scene shows the vulnerable side of the male character.

Notwithstanding, a succinct analysis of other movies is needed to understand the ideas of social constructions and theories of representation. I have considered necessary the mention of five different movies that address, explicitly or implicitly, the projection of cultural standards instilled in Western societies and the diverse meanings they have acquired, which shall be unpacked in Chapter 4. For instance, the use of the mirror in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) not only evinces the relationship between the mirror and the villain but shows how spectators' social imaginary is affected since childhood. Through another lens, *Black Swan* (2010) reflects mental health and the concept of beauty as oppressive whilst the mirror also shapes the redefinition of one-self through self-discovery, self-acceptance and self-exploration, which has its importance in *The Danish Girl* (2015). Last, but not least, at the core of my master's thesis is the function of the mirror in relation to the bodily appearance and attitude in a gendered, comparative perspective. In this regard, I shall mention the sexualisation of the female body in *Mirrors 2* (2010) which contrasts with the reaffirmation of masculinity in *Taxi Driver* (1976).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter is devoted to the different theories selected for this thesis. After settling on a post-structuralist contextualisation, theories of intersectionality, masculinity and collective feelings among other theories are expounded with the aim of applying them to the analysis of this thesis' case study.

From a post-structuralist feminist perspective, Western societies function and guide themselves through binary identifications that are opposed —and confronted—. Looking closely, there is always a relation of power lurking behind each binary. One of social categories composing those binaries is connected and is part of the normative standard rooted in the cultural imaginary and consequently, the second component of a binary acquires the role of the Other positioned in the margins and thus denoting negative traits. That is the case of white/black, young/old, man/woman, abled/disabled, fit/fat and so on. The interaction of our bodies with others are articulated around those appearances underlying the idea that in reality the normative and first identities belonging to the privileged sphere in Westernised cultures cannot exist on their own, that is, they need the Other and marked identities to acquire remain as the hegemonic categories to exert their power over the others. These are understood as the hegemonic practices as feminist scholar Judith Butler (2011) mentions in relation to how heterosexuality is thought as the normative, hegemonic and real base of sexuality within Western public discourses. It is not only a matter of the reproduction and imitation of an imitation itself —to preserve heterosexuality in its construction of originality, but public discourses among others also strive to generate new ways of maintaining such a hegemony—. This might also be extrapolated to other binaries previously enumerated, that define and are englobed in the same public discourses and which complement in many ways the idealised imitation of heterosexual mould (Butler, 2011). In this sense, there is always the same base which the socio-cultural imaginary cultivated for centuries and that, even though it varies according to the historical period, under no circumstance is the phallogentric backdrop different. For that reason, public discourses reinforce such patterns and hegemonies at the expense of performing the same verbal and behavioural repetitions of other social identities that are recognised as different from the norm. This is notably present in movie narratives

where the presence of characters historically subordinated to a protagonist with normative attributes are constantly marked by dramatic backgrounds, are criminalised or become the target of offensive jokes. These traits send a clear message to the audience subconscious, creating a collective imaginary that intensify political discourses for instance. The idea behind this imaginary is to create a cultural imaginary that, through images repeated in an array of film genres and framing non-normative characters into stereotyped manners and appearances bearing negative connotations, it results in the reproduction of the same exclusive patterns visualised and projected in the big screen to then extrapolate it to the daily routine of each spectator and thus articulate the same interactions around those discourses and images. Therefore, their impressions are, to a certain extent, conditioned by those representations. Additionally, it shapes figure of the monster (Shildrick, 2002) contrasting with the normative, leading to a vulnerable state of social categories found in the margins “that opens the self to the potential of harm.” (Shildrick, 2002, para. 1).

This is intermingled with feminist scholar Margrit Shildrick’s other work on “Dangerous discourses” (2009) where the author ponders on the difficulty of changing such a Western social imaginary addressing the particular case of disabled identities. In this sense, it is not possible to redefine social margins in a materialistic, pragmatic lens without “contesting the underlying attitudes, values, and subconscious prejudices and misconceptions that figure an enduring, albeit often unspoken, intolerance.” (p. 5). Rather the challenge of taking agency for a real change commences by reshaping the Western cultural imaginary that has educated Western societies in conceptions of bodily perfection.

1 - Intersectionality

Intersectionality involves the interaction between two or more social variables that define an individual. Bearing in mind the different situated contexts—in geo-political terms—, those social factors change and can eventually put the individual in a privileged position or in an unsafe, precarious situation creating power dynamics and thus, social inequalities. The term “intersectionality” was originally coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in a context where African American community suffered discrimination and violence until today. Crenshaw contemplated three social axes that determined and evinced the poverty-stricken conditions of

inequality experienced by African American women which were class, race and gender. These three social categories mark a same individual from, an intersectional perspective, in a country where white supremacy, a high economic status and a patriarchal system take precedence outline the lack of opportunities given to poor African American women and show how laws are unjustly elaborated through the implementation of these categories separately, depriving black women of “help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1246). Not only was she critical of American socio-political and judicial panoramas, but she was also critical of feminist theorists as well. According to her, they “need to take both gender and race on board and show how they interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s experiences” (Davis, 2008, p. 68).

This can examine how power dynamics, structural inequalities and discrimination function but also how oppressed social categories empower themselves as well —as Crenshaw (1991) proposes, intersectionality does not only involve a negative situation of discriminated social identities, but it also gives them a perspective of empowerment challenging those who have a direct access to socio-political privileges.

2 - Representation and identification

Since the focus of this master thesis is on the audiovisual sector, especially cinema, the concept of representation becomes an essential concept at the core of the theoretical framework and the analysis of the case study.

When cultural imaginaries are mentioned in a sense of change, from feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti’s (2006) perspective, shifting and reshaping is an arduous task assuming that a previously established imaginary that has been cultivated and repeated for centuries — although varying its form but maintaining the same principles and structures— still monopolises social imaginaries. The project of new political and cultural imaginaries are crucial within the collective implications that the concept itself entails, and this may be extrapolated to the audiovisual sector once it is considered part of a social discourse that strives for a change in the cultural imaginary of Western societies. As Braidotti (2006) defines it, the social imaginary is a “[...] System of representation by which a subject gets captured or

captivated by a ruling social and cultural formation: legal addictions to certain identities, images and terminologies” (pp. 85-86). Thus, cultural or social imaginaries refer to the construction of meanings, images, beliefs by a given social collective (Arruda, 2015). Due to their fictitious nature, these creations give room to the shape of different social representations that are spread from a non-realistic point of view but are held as referents by societies. These are constructions that are frequently repeated and present in audiovisual products which are, nowadays, one of the most important sources of consumerism, entertainment and even education in Western social environments. The way language is employed, the way characters’ attitudes and demeanour are represented permeates in spectators, absorbing and reproducing those same patterns in their daily life and in the majority of cases, which connects with the notion of identification. On this matter, as subjects influenced by an array of images, we have acquired a sense of dependence when it comes to representative patterns —here englobing behaviours, attitudes, speeches and so on— presented in motion pictures that are socially accepted in our socio-cultural overlook, which implies reproducing a specific norm and rigid hetero-patriarchal, white privileged structures. According to psychologist Jerome Kagan (1958),

“[...] The term "identification" to those imitative behavioral sequences in which the motivation for the act was anxiety over self esteem, Sanford emphasized two points: (a) mere similarity in overt behavior between a subject and a model was not necessarily a measure of identification, and (b) the motive for the imitative behavior was one of the defining characteristics of an identificatory response.” (p. 296)

As previously mentioned, the audiovisual sector can be conceived as an extension of socio-political discourses that affect spectators’ interactions with and impressions of others as well as it shapes the language that they employ creating thereby a collective social and cultural imaginary based on a few models that monopolise such a sector. Based on Kagan’s perspective, the notion of identification seeks, in its greater number, social acceptance. In this sense, let me take for instance the representation of female characters in the majority of movies —even though in recent decades, this perspective has changed, we still encounter the trace of a same prototype of female character—. Taking as a base the idea of identification as

a model to be followed to feel accepted in Western societies, it can be suggested that women imitate the representative model shown in movies. That is, if a female character adopts the role of a sexualised good girl subdued to the male protagonist —thus, the male gaze as a whole—, then female spectators articulate a similar conduct, shaping their identity in their daily life based on the premise that they shall have the same outcome as the female character showed in the big screen. That is, attracting the male character. Such as desire of social acceptance constructed from a male gaze entails the female internalisation of such female prototypes facing the lack of real and diverse representation of women, liberating them from being a marked identity. If the equation is taken further, as capitalistic Western societies prioritise young female bodily appearances onscreen, older women revolve into representations that have no space in such an area. Since their appearance is denied —and if not, they fall into incessant negative images— the result is the projection and adoption of rejection coming from both their social environment and their own selves. This is evinced, for instance, through the concept of *not to be looked at* (Whelehan, 2009) which is addressed more in-depth in Chapter 6.

Addressing the concept of *representation* and *identification* shall help to analyse to what extent the main character of the film analysed in this thesis is part of a conventional model of representation for a determined audience or if, on the contrary, it strives to represent character traditionally neglected in the audiovisual sector from a feminist perspective, subverting and rejecting myths and deconstructing the character to understand its psychology.

3 - Collective feelings

Furthermore, Sara Ahmed's (2004) phenomenological concept of *collective feelings* focuses on how bodies —meaning subjects and their living bodies interacting with other bodies— are able to group themselves based on a scale of particular emotions felt, conditioned by their lived experiences but also by public discourses as I shall mention more in-depth later. Ahmed's perspective puts into the spotlight in the first part of the essay the idea that emotions, rather than being generated from the inside, that is, from within the own individual, they are created in the outside to then sink in and be inscribed into a body. Although shaped in

diverse forms —since each body lives and feels differently— they find a trace of the same emotion as the foundation of the collective. Consequently, bodies are grouped in a collective way of feeling that is gestated from the outside. The outside is thus considered to be the convergence of an array of public discourses emerging from different areas of power —as it is the cultural, political, audiovisual, educational— defining and impacting in the way individuals create their surface and thereby, their impressions in relation to others. In this regard, when feelings coming from outside are at stake, there is already a social imaginary influencing their impressions of others and reinforcing their prejudices that have permeated in their unconscious. As it has been already mentioned, it already conforms sensations a determined predisposition towards other individuals perceived as different and even abject bodies. Such emotional inclinations have thus a certain “instinctive” reaction and attitudes resulting in the formation of groups or collective that group those feelings of rejection, abjection among other negative sensations. This causes the movement of bodies to those spaces that expose an array of reactions towards the Other. To illustrate this idea, Ahmed chooses to reflect on the feeling of hate —taking the form of racism— constructing a Western nationalist feeling from a white privileged position against the immigrant and racialised people —since it can be a discrimination coming from the first perception of the skin colour but also from language, for instance—. I shall reiterate that this might spring from cultural practices unconsciously instilled in a particular social category that feels represented by those hegemonic discourses, creating dynamics of power, privileges and ultimately translated into violent reactions —physically and/or verbally— against those social categories identified as intruders, polluting the Western hegemonic and normative imaginary still maintained. This theory can be complemented with another perspective that is developed later in Chapter 5, where the lens is intermingled with the idea that since the same oppressed social categories are raised with the same educational values based on those normative criteria, they may also adhere to the same collective feeling of rejection towards themselves. In this sense, the mirror acquires thus the role of the double.

Not only does function from a negative perspective as explained above, but it also springs from positive emotions. The idea that associations, new structures challenging reactionary conventional institutions and mindsets might aid to reorient those negative collective feelings

and eventually detach individuals from those emotions, creating thus a positive, inclusive, intersectional and feminist spaces. Both directions shall be present in the analyses of the film in question and would give insight to another understanding of the concept through a detailed argumentation in its respective Chapter 5.

4 - Haraway's "figurations"

Donna Haraway's (1997) concept of *figuration* shall be developed in relation to the mirror. The latter can be analysed as a figuration, a figure that functions as a physical object and simultaneously conveys meaning in the way cultural practices play the game and are inscribed in the reflection of a body.

Figurations tend to be described in a context where human beings are not placed at the centre of all analysis and studies but rather as a part of a whole space where environment, technology and other aspects of life connect with humans. Individuals are constructed from the interaction with inanimate objects, virtual spheres and other living beings that shape each individual. In this sense, Haraway's concept of figuration has its importance in this master thesis when it comes to the analysis of the mirror. Such an object cannot be understood as a decorative item where its solely function is to show a reflection. Rather, it has a deeper meaning that is unearthed in the interaction made between both the inanimate object and the human. The ontological perception of the world shifts depending on the mental, social construction that individuals shape throughout their life experiences. That is why the mirror ought to be analysed from such a perspective but connecting it with other concepts chosen for this analysis.

5 - Surveyor and surveyed

One of the key theories of representation would be Berger's (1972/2003) notion of *surveyor and surveyed* where John Berger displays the implications of patriarchal discourses in the way women are represented in visual productions which emphasise the lack of visibility of older women as the core of the patriarchal gaze is precisely put the female body at expense of masculine (as it does not only englobe the male eye) appreciation and pleasure.

Before delving into the concept, I shall mention that his works tightly connected to other works —Mulvey's (1975) perspective of the male gaze in Hollywood cinema—that address and complement his work in relation to the theme developed in this master thesis.

In *Ways of Seeing* (1972/2003), Berger analyses how Western artistic sphere has its roots in a patriarchal embodiment and representation of women, evincing it through several painting images instances. In his reflection, he puts into the spotlight the meaning and practices produced in Western societies that monopolise and feed those patriarchal ways of perceiving women. According to Berger's comment:

“By contrast, a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her. Her presence is manifest in her gestures, voice, opinions, expressions, clothes, chosen surroundings, taste—indeed there is nothing she can do which does not contribute to her presence. Presence for a woman is intrinsic to her person that men tend to think of it as an almost physical emanation, a kind of heat or smell or aura.” (p. 49)

In other words, women have identities reduced and marked by a combination of manners and social skills which limit them to a frame based on the goodness, silence, obedience. This certainly contrasts with being assertive and verbalising their own opinions and beliefs as men are conceived to be the only ones with such a privilege. Women are therefore deprived of their own freedom in all senses owing to the fact that they are tied to a third eye steadily judging them. This third eye mentioned is the privileged, unmarked identity, that is, the male eye. Here, Berger begins his development of the concept in question. The surveyor is the man whilst the woman is the surveyed. The man is the one exerting power over the woman, having its roots in the idea that the sole aspiration of a woman is to attract and be chosen by a man, and eventually be spend her life in the private sphere. Such a cultural conception women reduced them to a mere object anthropologically perceived but who ought to content the male look since, as previously mentioned, men are the judges and are the ones bearing the last word at the moment of analysing a woman's attitude and demeanour. As a result, the fact that the man is the one taking the action of looking and choosing and the woman is the aim and object having a passive and submissive behaviour “determines not only most relations between men

and women but also the relation of women to themselves” (p. 50). In this respect, the surveyed, being under a constant scrutiny and evaluation of her moves, loses all capacity of self-identity to ultimately be instilled and adopting the role of the surveyor but from the male perspective. That is, the woman eventually revolves into her own judge based on what the male perspective would observe from her and the impression she would create based on the male criteria.

It is not only through her manners, but women are also conditioned, as the object to be observed and surveyed, by her bodily appearance shaped by male fetishistic constructions of the female body. Berger explains the differences between the nude and nakedness. Indeed,

“To be naked is to be one self. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object.) Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display.” (p. 51)

What Berger suggests is that women ought to adopt a specific type of “disguise” (p. 51) that functions accordingly with men’s idealised and sexualised construction of women’s body.

Through the intersectional complexity of *Good Luck to You*, *Leo Grande*’s female protagonist, this approach shall help to shed light on the construction of mentalities at different levels. Such an observation shall give insight in the ways western societies prioritise others’ opinion, thoughts and judgements rather than giving importance to the construction of an individual without being constrained to societal normative standards. I shall clarify that this idea is layered. Since I focus in the Western context, I emphasise in some common patterns and practices that exist in Western societies (at least when United States, central Europe are thought of on a general basis). These patterns are presented in contexts where freedom of expression is considered to be at the core of an individual’s life. However, this may differ when some non-Western cultures are referred to, where individuals are hugely constrained by societal norms that may lead them to severe, life-threatening punishments for transgressing the norm.

6 - Hegemonic masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is another aspect that ought to be dealt with in the essay. It is important for this master thesis to address this concept that shall be developed in Chapters 4 and 5. Hegemonic masculinity is rooted in the idea that through a reiterative projection of certain patterns springing from figures, images, discourses overall produced in different social contexts of a society, they sink into the cultural imaginary, ultimately idealising and adopting the same role and behaviours of such projected and said discourses. As scholars Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) comment, this sets up a hegemony that creates a prototype assumed as the standard and is positioned at the top of a social and gendered social hierarchy. Furthermore, “hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities” (p. 832) creating thus inequalities with the different masculinities that are said to be subordinated and eventually generating a logic in which any form of violence exerted on women and other masculinities are justified.

Hegemonic masculinity is thereby part of the dynamics of power rooted in patriarchal systems where bodily appearance is particularly important. The male body is influenced by different discourses —from the Western context as it can be the case of United States— where

“Images, myths, discourse, and practices all construct an idea of the male body: sport, advertising, art, medicine, law, religion and the military, for instance, all depict male bodies in a way that inflects what we think the body is or should be” (Reeser, 2010, p. 93)

This is what shapes the hegemonic masculinity which has a predominant characteristic based on violence and lack of emotional aspects —since it is associated with femininity and in turn, has conventionally been understood as the opposite to masculinity³.

Employing the concept of hegemonic masculinity in this thesis allows me to demonstrate that hegemony does not only apply to masculinity. It can be applicable to femininities as well

³ This state is framed in an understanding that common traits exist in and connect different Western context. It is noteworthy that not all Western societies have an identical conception of masculinities and practices.

(Hamilton *et al.*, 2019), as it shall be discussed throughout the analysis of the movie, especially in Chapter 5 and also to illustrate that there is a hegemonic bodily representation in movies that are incessantly reproduced and referred to using older bodies to reinforce the hegemony of younger bodies (Calasanti, Sleving and King, 2006). Furthermore, it gives insight of the disruption of the traditional understanding of hegemonic masculinity and its link to violence, which shall be illustrated by the analysis of the male protagonist in *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* and a brief comparison with *Taxi Driver* (an example of hegemonic masculinity). This comparison is made with the objective to highlight the difference between the two male characters and how in *Good luck to You, Leo Grande* masculinity is represented through a feminist reading. Also, it shall reinforce the importance of mirrors and reflection as strategic tools to disrupt the hegemonic masculine representation.

7 - “Queering”

Lastly, the concept of queering is also part of the theoretical framework that is worth employing in this case study. Indeed, queer theory shall help to analyse a different dimension the mirror acquires as a figuration. Queer theory has as a base the idea that it “debunks the stability of identity categories by focusing on the historical, social, and cultural constructions of desire and sexuality intersect- ing with other identity markers, such as race, class, and gender, among others, queer theory has been influential both in the academy and in cultural politic” (Gust Yep *et al.*, 2004, p. 2). Such a definition sets the base of what queerness is though the lens of gender and sexuality. However, another tendency has been developed, focusing on the de-normalisation and questioning of the normative (McCann and Monaghan, 2020). That is, the expression of “queering”, used as a verb, brings a sense of transforming and processing outside sexuality and gender themselves. Acquiring a verbal stance denotes the freedom to give to environments and objects different readings, interpretations.

Brennan (2017) notes that “queerness is a phenomenological experience” (p. 83), connecting with Ahmed phenomenological framework and thereby focusing on the idea that such queerness intersects with oneself and seek the deviation from the norm, from what forces individuals to perform in a determined manner read as hegemonic and standardised. The will

of being out of the norm, “also generates possibilities” (p. 83) which, thought from an anthropocentric point of view, widen and openness to new perceptions of human and their relation to the rest of the world are constrained to a one-dimensional, normative relation to the rest of the environment. In other words, understanding it from a post-modernist viewpoint, enables a wider ontological reading and a different production of knowledge where objects also play a role in the way they are positioned in space. In this respect, Ahmed (2006) mentions that “we are affected by “what” we come into contact with” (p. 2). In associating this approach to queerness, this might be also tightly connected to collective feeling as well, as it involves the way in which an individual interacts with the environment, a space or an object.

Using the concept of queering affords me to show the potential of the mirror as a queer object in the film. By exploring to directions of such a concept in Chapter 5, the connection of all these concepts merge together. For instance, by queering the mirror, a different aspect of masculinity emerges and it thereby questions hegemonic masculinity and disrupts concepts of surveyor and surveyed as well as the most popular representations of older women in mainstream movies. Furthermore, revolving the mirror into a figuration enables all these concepts to be visible through the psychology and attitude of the female protagonist of the movie.

Chapter 4: The mirror and its cultural significance in Western filmography

This chapter serves to set the ground of the role the mirror has adopted in different movies, contrasting and highlighting the analysis of *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022) in Chapter 5. Each movie tackles a different use of the mirror, from the dissemination of a negative stereotype of older women to the reiterative connection between violence, superiority and masculinity through the application of theories such as *hegemonic masculinity* and Berger's *surveyor and surveyed* among others.

1 - A gendered role of the mirror

As it happens worldwide, in most of Western societies, patriarchal systems have monopolised every aspect of socio-cultural contexts, in the movie sector a repeated pattern that has been adopted through the notion of the gaze. Indeed, the gaze adopted by a director through the camera and the different angles employed in a scene gestates a gendered projections of roles that male and female characters project. As a result, it permeates in and is interiorised by the audience which, in turn, tends to adopt such roles, conceptions and demeanours exposed in motion pictures. If female characters are taken for instance, the gaze generally adopted frames women within the concept of voyeurism and according to film theorist Gertrud Koch (1985), this “makes the woman the object and the man the bearer of the look” (p. 142). From a heterosexual perspective, two paths can be discerned. As the gaze adopted is englobed in a male gaze, the male spectator generates a self-identification with the camera and thus conceive the woman precisely as a sexual object that is present to fulfil “the scopic needs of the male spectator in offering up to his view what does not exist: the phallus” (p. 142). This evinces how the film sector is part of a patriarchal public discourse that has an important impact in our mundane acts. On the other hand, the female heterosexual spectator would tend to internalise her role as an instrument for the sake of male pleasure, depriving herself of any sort of agency or independence on the way she perceives herself. That is, she is marked by a sexualised and fetishised look, having no real representation to be identified with that is not dependent of a male scoping.

Such a reflection is not only illustrated by the lens of the camera, but the gaze also influences the use of the mirror in an array of movie scenes where there is the unjustified necessity to expose a female body wholly sexualised. For instance, in *Mirrors 2* (2010)⁴, the female character's naked body fits the previously mentioned patriarchal pattern in question. Certainly, she stares at herself in the mirror before taking a shower. Such a mirror scene does not convey any meaningful message that might subvert the normative representation of a female body. Rather, it lacks meaning since a plausible intention of the gaze used is to expose fully a naked, idealised female body, using the mirror as a visual extension of her naked body to satisfy the male eye. Therefore, the mirror is solely a figure of a gendered reinforcement of women as object to be looked at, not to mention the reiteration of the specific female body that ought to be represented as an example of hegemonic femininity.

2 - The reaffirmation of hegemonic masculinity

Following the same line in terms of hegemonic femininity reinforcement, it contrasts with other mirror employment conveying the same idea, though in this case, reinforcing a particular type of masculinity that has been dominating the big screen for decades. Close to the end of the movie, *Taxi driver* (1976)⁵ depicts the male protagonist in front of a mirror with holding a weapon. Shirtless, he stares at his own reflection with a defiant gaze, pointing at the mirror as if his own reflection was a double, external to himself. Whether the scene is taken as a part of the whole movie, taking into account its context and position in the film or looked at it separately, the existence of a hegemonic masculinity trace is present in both angles. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity is a concept that engage men in practices that are considered toxic, the use of physical violence among other examples. It is the case in this scene as the audience witnesses the explicit and implicit violence the male character attempts to employ. His aim seems to be finding a solution to a conflict through violence, which would reaffirm his place as a man in a hostile world. Not

⁴ *Mirrors 2* is a semi-mainstream supernatural horror movie directed by Victor García. Produced and distributed by 20th Century Fox, it is a film that is set in the United States.

⁵ Directed by Martin Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* is a mainstream film produced by Columbia Pictures in the United States.

only does such a reaffirmation of his masculinity reside in his gestures, but his verbal repetition “you talkin’ to me?” denote a sense of aggressiveness while showing his weapon. Furthermore, scholar Todd Reeser (2010), researcher in the field of masculinities, purports that “the psyche can also imagine the body in which it is housed somewhere else, displacing it onto other objects that allow the psyche to represent the body in ways in which it wants it to appear.” (p. 99). That is, certain objects can be read as an extension of the male body, instruments that remind to the phallus as such and thus conveying a meaning of virility and domination. In this case, the object used is the weapon that is present from beginning to end in the scene, bearing a phallic symbolism behind. Once again, the sole action of performing a masculinity that is constructed within the idea that men ought to act as such to preserve his masculine integrity, otherwise they lose they status as such reaffirms the protagonist’s manliness. Thus, it disseminates the same message to male spectators. In other words, what this is related to the mirror is the message that the mirror conveys a gendered employment in both movies. Whilst a female character remains a passive object to be “admired”, posing and showing a superficial facet based on vanity (Berger, 1972/2003), the mirror is articulated around an active, aggressive and dominant attitude relative to a male character.

3 - Beauty and self-reflection

The mirror is also an instrument that acquires a symbolic meaning of self-discovery. In *The Danish Girl* (2015)⁶, the mirror scene is an example of how the protagonist comes into terms with her own identity, evincing through a performative act in front of the mirror, the construction and inscription in her male body what Einar was obliged to act as to be socially accepted and read as a man. However, “by over-stylising the behaviour of Einar’s hands and shaping them into what I would call exaggeratedly feminine, they henceforth become the symbol of his transformation from male to female” (Lorenz, 2016, p. 1). Therefore the mirror is a sort of figuration that adopts the role of unveiling the different social constructions in this case in Western societies that are part of the oppression of different individuals. Not only that, in the same performative act, the mirror plays a role of change as well.

⁶ Directed by Tom Hooper and set in United Kingdom, *The Danish Girl* is a mainstream film produced by Focus Features and Working Title Films.

4 - A construction instilled since childhood

Such Western social constructions that are disseminated in form of movies that condition an individual's cultural conception since childhood. Bearing in mind that United States film sector is particularly influential in the majority of Western societies, it is noteworthy that Disney movies are part of the projections and embeddings to which the majority of Western children are exposed. Putting under scrutiny *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)⁷ the young audience is presented with a type of villain that falls into different myths and stereotypes including ageism. In this brief analysis, the focus is drawn to the villain and her relationship with the mirror. The audience is shown a female villain that is obsessed with beauty and her solely will is to remain the most beautiful woman of the territory. In order to do so, she constantly asks the mirror she possesses who the most beautiful woman of the country is, with the intention to receive the same answer. However, as the movie progresses, she seems to be despised and warned that a younger and prettier girl has appeared to usurp her position.

At first sight, the message that the audience is exposed to is that women and beauty is intrinsically associated to physical radiance, which relies on the misconception of women's superficiality and their objectification.

Moreover, the aspect of the female physical appearance is connected to the male gaze in this movie. The relationship between the villain and her mirror gives the impression to be her who is in a position of domination. Notwithstanding, it is the contrary. The villain is subdued to the mirror. First of all, she does not even perceive her reflection in the mirror, which might connect to her constant anxiety and denial of the old age. The audience witnesses a villain that embodies the myth of aging as a negative trait associated with ugliness and doomed to the dependence of a third eye, an external agent/gaze. In this case, the mirror represents such an external agent which is materialised through a male voice, and it is responsible of judging her beauty. Once the mirror focuses its attention on Snow White that triggers and threatens the villain's position as the most beautiful woman, marking the latter as old and pointing out that she is no longer needed for the eyes of men. The materialisation of a male gaze through the

⁷ *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is a mainstream animated movie directed by David Hand and produced by Walt Disney Productions in the United States.

mirror emphasises the Western patriarchal priority of female youth in detriment of matured female bodies.

It is noteworthy that the villain does not seem to fit the aged body as she does not appear with aged features. Therefore, the message lurking behind such a character is that getting older and passing the twenties is read as their value as women does no longer exist. The mirror thus is here used as a symbol of subjugation of women and a incessant judgement toward the older age and female appearance as Berger developed in his work. Rather than having the villain's own reflection, the spectator is exposed to a patriarchal reading, a male perspective of the movie always relying on the masculine surveyor to transform the female body into the object to be analysed and stared at anew. Considering that the main audience targeted with this movie is children, it is evident how negative constructions of the older age impact on the collective imaginary of children and how they grow up influenced by such assumptions and stereotypes.

5 - The mirror and mental health

Black Swan (2011)⁸ is another film that contains a diverse range of mirror scenes involving a female character as the protagonist. The movie entails a different reading from the horror movie *Mirrors 2* (2010) mentioned previously since the mirror has a more sensical role and explores the psychology of the protagonist. The mirror symbolises the horror and deterioration of the mental state of the female character in order to show the difficulties and even the dynamics of power lurking behind each scene. To contextualise, the protagonist successes into starring as the main protagonist of a ballet performance. She becomes obsessed with the idea that other female participants seek to threaten her position by attracting the male director —with whom she has to be sexually involved—. She thus becomes delusional of what she sees when she stares at her reflection in the mirror. Certainly, one of the multiple mirror scenes of the film displays the protagonist sensing that her appearance is completely normal, seeming to be satisfied with her normative body until she looks at her back. Suddenly, a stain of blood appears generating in her a feeling of anguish. The female character gives room to the audience to perceive that it is an illusion coming from her mental anxiety,

⁸ *Black Swan* is a mainstream movies directed by Darren Aronofsky in the United States and produced by companies such as Fox Searchlight, Phoenix Pictures.

distorting her own body and turning it into an imperfect one. This movie embeds the pressure and expectations of women taking part in elite sports and performances such as ballet suffer. It is a world that lies in beauty of all types, not only in the performance itself, being delicate, but also performers. Through the mirror, beauty becomes the chief reason for the horror and stress rather than remaining a positive trait. Her position as a lead female performer is not focused on but most by the beauty the director sees in her. This is ultimately manifested in the mirror scenes. When she is in front of the mirror, she recognises herself but from a male/patriarchal gaze and therefore a third part that is evaluating her beauty to the extent that her position as a main performer depends on it.

Presenting a brief analysis of these five movies serve as a background of how Western mainstream movies have approached the mirror and how they have used it indifferent ways. These approaches thus contrast with the study of *Good Luck to You*, *Leo Grande* and the feminist perspective adopted oof the mirror.

Chapter 5: Mirror, mirror... in *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022)

After elaborating a short analysis on the role of the mirror in other movies, I proceed now to the main focus of this thesis, that is, a meticulous and systematic analysis of the selected mirror scenes in *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* with the use of a specific set of concepts—introduced in Chapter 3— which serve as my theoretical lens: *collective feelings, figurations, hegemonic masculinity and queerness*. These concepts, combined with a feminist intersectional approach, will enable me to examine and discuss ageism and gender, as they are interwoven in the selected scenes of the film. In this way, I will be able to address the four research questions that drive this master’s project.

The present chapter is divided into two main sections; the first one addressing the impact of the western social imaginaries on an aged, female body through the mirror while the second section focuses on the potential aspect of change and empowerment that the mirror harbours.

1 - An oppressive function...

1.1- Rejection of the older body

As it has been previously commented, the mirror adopts different figurative readings according to the context in which it is used. Although its use varies and can acquire a hopeful and positive reading as it is the case of self-discovery and acceptance, in its majority of sceneries the mirror still adapts to an introspective way of self-discovery within oppression. In other words, the role of the mirror revolves around the idea of a certain type of masquerade or a double that the individual in question staring at his/her reflection seems not to be aware of its whole consciousness until she/he strives to look at the mirror. In the case of women, Berger (1972/2003) suggests that the mirror in relation to women was “used as a symbol of the vanity of woman” (p. 51) as women were reduced to an identity marked by superficiality. This entails a symbol of oppression and eventually subjugates women to the image they project in a third person, how they look, overall, their appearance for a third party, notably the man. In this sense, Berger goes further in reflecting on the concept of the surveyed and surveyor. As it has been mentioned in Chapter 3, such a concept involves the manipulation

generated by a privileged position of the man in relation to women and how they appear and act in front of them. It is as if they are evaluating women in order to judge if they are apt for them. Women are positioned in a level of inferiority, been considered and perceived as a trophy or object for the sake of male interest. That is why women have to be careful of their own attitude and appearance, being policed by the male eye in every movement. This idea has thus a correlation with the hegemonic femininity that has been shaped throughout years and reproduced in different audiovisual productions, which helps capitalistic discourses about the female body and the type of female body that has to be consumed to prevail (Dimulescu, 2015). If this is extrapolated to the example of this case study, and from a gender sensitive analysis, Nancy is precisely oppressed by such an image that monopolises visibility and the social imaginary of Western cultures. Indeed, the privileged male gaze that puts the female physique in the spotlight generates not only a cultural habit in the perception of the bodily appearance of a woman, but also through the repetition and projection of such demeanour, it eventually permeates and inscribes those practices and beliefs in their own way of behaving and perceiving themselves. That is, bearing in mind that the Western conception of the female body is founded on a white, thin, delicate figure and that every female body is thereby measured in relation to such imposed standard, Nancy's perception of herself is manifested through her own facial expressions and through her own comments as well. She is "aware of what's wrong with it" (min. 0:48, 2022), which entails several implications. The negative statement directed to her own body when she stares at her physique demonstrates to what extent youth is prioritised as a normative standard. Accordingly, feminist scholar Imelda Whelehan (2009) expresses that Western cultures are prone to develop a phobia towards the old age, including the body as it has a negative association with death and decadence. Certainly, she enlightens this comment by putting the example of Madonna and music videos in which she appeared in her fifties. Although she is taken as a revolutionary and empowered symbol—as an aging woman—exposing a fit, strong body, she nonetheless "demonstrates the deferral of the conventional signs of ageing and the rebranding of middle age in the new millennium to 'middle youth'" (p. 171). Thus, Nancy is far from having an ideal aging body that can be associated with a youthful one. She gives the impression to be unable to perceive herself in a positive way taking into consideration that even aging female bodies and

celebrities that are thought of as referent still frame their bodies in such a patriarchal and capitalistic model.

Moreover, the same idea can be approached from the comparison between Nancy and Leo Grande. Certainly, both characters have a different interaction with their own reflections. The first reflection showed in the beginning of the film displays the male character in the street. He stares at his reflection proudly and seems confident in his looks and bodily appearance. Leo Grande is the character that embodies youth in this movie. He is represented as a character that embodies somehow a prototype of man close to the hegemonic and standard image of what a young man ought to be—that is, fit, abled, and all in all showing a healthy and strong appearance of masculinity. Symbolically, Nancy and Leo Grande’s reflections take place in different locations, which acquires a particular reading. Leo Grande first glance in a reflection is situated in a public space. There are people around and the shop in which his reflection appears is also occupied by other bodies/individuals. This contrasts with Nancy’s glance at her reflection in the apartment. She feels insecure after what she manifests through her behaviour, gestures and strives to pose in different ways aiming at finding a pose she can present herself to Leo Grande. Therefore, she is visualising herself to prepare for a third person, not for herself. Thus, Leo Grande is located in a public space could be then read as a sign of confidence. A public space allows a normative body to be exposed. Leo Grande is perhaps a body shaped to be looked at, from the outside but also from the inside, that is, in public and the private spaces. Meanwhile, Nancy is marked by older age. She is limited to the private sphere symbolising that non-normative bodies and that are not so visible or not paid attention to outside of such a space. It could thus be interpreted as a sign of how, in this case, ageism is perceived. That is, unvoiced, silenced and hidden from the public and different looks.

1.2 - A bidirectional perspective of “Collective Feelings”

Regarding gestures, Leo Grande shows, as previously mentioned, a masculine pose, proud of himself and confident, giving no room to insecurities nor paying attention to the people that might be staring at him. Nancy is the contrary, even in a space where there is no one around,

she manifests insecurity and self-awareness in relation to herself but looking from the perspective of an outsider. This might create an impact in the way younger and old age are perceived in Western societies; youth being seen as a positive factor whereas older age and above all, bodies remain abject. This idea intersects with the complexity of ageism and gender. Once again, Leo Grande in the very first glance at his reflection look just to his bust, the camera not showing a whole image of his body. He is thus not concerned about his whole appearance as he assumes he looks good enough. Nancy's jeopardy relies on her whole body. She looks at herself from head to toe. Hence, with a female body, she is mostly constrained to analyse and study her whole reflection and bodily image to appear perfectly in front of another person, notably men. She is a prisoner of the way she looks and how the female body is measured, valued and the way she performs and poses creates a positive impact on the other individual as she needs a double acceptance in her femininity.

Moreover, Ahmed's (2004) concept of *collective feelings* can acquire a different interpretation in this sense. As it has been tackled in Chapter 3, Ahmed proposes that emotions are not generated *per se* from the inside. Rather, different popular and political discourses among others have a crucial impact in the way emotions begin to meet inside an individual. If I focus on violent and negative emotions such as hate towards the other, its manifestation can be shaped in different ways. Certainly, Ahmed argues that "emotions do things, and work to align individuals with collectives" (p. 26). This reflection leads to the thought of gestating a collective where the same emotion, although manifested in different forms, has the same base. Additionally, Ahmed employs the expression "*doing things*" (p. 26) providing emotions with agency, action and movement. In this regard, I shall suggest that it can acquire another sense. Not only does it generate and group a particular group of people that have a common identity trait—in the case of racial supremacy in white dominant countries, the grouping normally englobes white individuals against racialised others—but can also have an impact in the oppressed individual, taking part of the same group functioning as oppressor and therefore letting the same discriminating emotion sink in. This is a result of the target's own instilled socio-cultural background and the level of oppression they suffer. As Shildrick (2009) explains in "Dangerous Discourses", such an alignment connects both the oppressed and oppressor because "both categories share a psycho-social imaginary that disavows

morphological imperfection” (p.5). If this overall notion is intermingled with the first mirror scene in question, in terms of non-verbal aspect, Nancy is reluctant to look at herself in the mirror and when she does so the presence of uneasiness is apparent. There, it can be seen how Lacan’s mirror stage in the infancy, where the ego is formed, is fragmented in the older age. (Woodward, 1983). Nancy, after being exposed to the symbolic world in her Western situated context (United Kingdom), she has acquired and internalised cultural assumptions and discourses that have impacted in her own perception of herself, especially in her reflection. Her supposed “I” that was formed in her infant period has been, throughout time, fractured in pieces making visible those insecurities, complexities, oppressions that are, here, manifested through her psychology and bodily demeanour in front of the mirror. This is reinforced by the idea that “bodies are individual ecosystems related to and influenced by others in society” (Juárez-Almendros, 2017, p. 19). The perception of herself in the mirror gives room to interpret it as a distortion constructed throughout her life experiences as a woman raised in a western context that relegated her to content her husband without finding an alternative for her own sake.

In the scene, there is a particular emphasis on her eyes. The pause and the long moment taken in this camera shot before expressing an appreciation about herself is significant in the way she acknowledges the loss of her young bodily appearance and the older body she is seeing on front of herself. This culminates in her comment:

“I’ve always been ashamed of myself. My body, I mean. [...] Always been aware of what’s wrong with it. You know, stubby tights, fat tummy.” (48:26).

She thus correlates negative aspects of her body such as “stubby” in a way that signifies the wrong parts of her body which do not fit in the canon and standardised conception of what a female body ought to be. This is elucidated by the fact that in the dominant Western representations, the existence of a diversity of bodily references —either in fiction, literature, images, marketing and so on— is lacking and the solely way of comparing herself is to a young female possessing a hegemonic body. As Lemish *et al.* show, “as women mature, they diverge from the hegemonic sexy body by which women of all ages are measured” (p. 169).

This is the reiterative message that is disseminated in different shapes in public discourses in which the way a prototyped, idealised body is rewarded and prioritised and eventually reproduced in an array of audiovisual productions —TV shows, motion pictures, ads, magazines, comics— and consequently, it renders invisible other types of realistic bodies. As a result, it creates a sense of rejection, not only from others but from oneself as well. Nancy's own perception of herself shows how she takes part in the same collective feeling springing from disdain that could notably involve other types of bodies —that is, those that are closer to a hegemonic bodily appearance and the ones who perpetuate the oppression the female character in question has suffered— Not only that, but Nancy is also part of this collective feeling towards individuals of her same social category. Indeed, she clarifies that her chances of having intercourses and emotional ties/connections with men is tangible. Nevertheless, she rejects the idea due to her will of experiencing sexual pleasure with younger men. In this sense, Nancy falls into the same stereotyped conception of ageism regarding older men. This has its roots in the idea that Nancy has been raised in the same cultural context as the ones who put forth the same discriminating practices against her and overall older women. It is thus bidirectional oppression, that is, towards herself but also also towards older men —an idea further unpacked below—.

In the same vein, according to Shildrick (2009), the fact that the same excluded, marginalised and marked identities that are raised having the same cultural imaginary permeates in their conceptions of bodily appearance and in the search of youth as well. This explains the reason why Nancy also falls into the same stereotypes that modern, capitalistic and westernised societies have inscribed in people's imaginary. She seeks youth because it is culturally connected to vitality, excitement, naivety and sexual activity as well as beauty. For this idea to be further developed and for the sake of understanding the context and shape the perception Nancy has with her body and with other bodies and how she interacts with them, it is important to scrutinise dialogues found in between the main mirror scenes analysed in this thesis.

From a compositional interpretation methodological approach, both Nancy and Leo Grande are in bed having a discussion about Nancy's sexual life. The male character explicitly

ponders why she opted for a young man like him and thus pay for a service rather than having casual intercoursing with other men, to which Nancy confesses:

“They are old. Old men. I don’t want an old man. I want a young one, a young body and, no offence, I have to pay for that.” (min. 20:08).

Here, the bidirectional reading of such reflection unearths two ideas. Firstly, Nancy makes clear that she is willingly to choose a young body. Secondly, she implies that she forcefully needs to pay for a young man. In these reflections, she is the one excluding her same social category but she also emphasises that she is no longer desirable and she cannot afford having access to youth and young bodies without depending on sexual workers since she is aware that her body lacks sexual desirability and she is not able to awaken such a sensation in male young bodies. She thus lacks that same youth and freshness she is seeking. As a matter of fact, the older body can also be associated with disability since its bodily rejection is shaped in the same form a disabled body is. As mentioned earlier, disabled people are considered, from western ableist societies, monstrous bodies (Shildrick, 2009) that do not have the abilities to be included in the social imaginary from a positive perspective. This can be paralleled with aged bodies since both bodily appearances base their discrimination in the deterioration of the mental and functional aspects (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2021).

Likewise, she remains enclosed in an “outsider” view on herself. The social pressure she feels as a woman being unexperienced in a sexual context due to a traditional gendered trajectory based on satisfying her husband’s sexual needs and being unaware of her own connects with Berger’s concept of surveyed and surveyor. This does not only rely on the male gaze and the patriarchal conception of women, which certainly shapes Nancy’s viewpoint of herself and others as a woman raised in a patriarchal and capitalistic western society. Since Western societies have built their collective imaginary in both constructions, the surveyor is thus society itself and the social pressure emanated from it. This is precisely what Leo Grande suggests in a concrete scene located before the first main mirror scene. Nancy elaborates a list with the sexual practices that she is seeking to experience, willing to do them all on this particular day. Leo Grande, astonished, invites her to change her mind and not to force herself

to something that she does not want to do as he senses that she is doing it not so much for herself but for how she would appear to the outsider world and third eyes once she accomplishes such a list. She gives the impression to be imprisoned in a situation where the external world judges her. This is elucidated in her response to Leo Grande's offer:

“Christ, if I let go of that, anything might happen. That's the only thing keeping my life together, keeping it ticking along” (min. 35:37)

In this statement, she displays her fear of not being up to scratch with the current modern and contradictory society where feminism does not only become a tool for real agency and change but also revolves into a commercial product under which women's bodies and practices are obliged to accomplish expectations imposed. Put differently, Nancy feels the need to draw level with the evolution of society evolution. This collides with the obliviousness of her own will. The audience in the end does not know if it is exactly what she wants, whether she is willing to accomplish the list she gives to Leo Grande for herself or for the sake of being accepted by other afresh. She feels pressured by the contrast between an older generation that relegated women's sexual needs and pleasure to a second angles, not to say that it was inexistent in detriment of men's sexual needs, and a new a younger generation where women's sexuality is being more visible but rather than creating a space where every woman has her own discovery, time and path to walk through, consequently becoming a hegemonic femininity in that sense. Therefore, that list thus revolves symbolically into an instrument of hegemony.

2 - ...yet a potential instrument of change

2.1 - Empowering the female body

Forms of oppression emanated from the mirror and the character's psychology have been emphasised in the first mirror scene. However, unlike other movies discussed in the previous chapter, *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022) goes beyond the oppression with the aim of giving it an aspect of change. This is accomplished in the second mirror scene.

The mirror conveys the idea of empowerment it possesses. Feminist scholar Carolyn M. Morell (2003), taking as reference other scholars, asserts that empowerment is connected to “the ability to define oneself rather than accepting definitions provided by dominant others” (p. 71). This is where the dynamics of power are clearly elucidated and discerned between the oppressed and the oppressor. The dominant social beliefs of Western cultures create a social pressure and judgement towards herself. But this is subverted in the second part of the film, along with the overall context — dialogues, other scene that focus not so much on the mirror but act as steps to take into account to then reach the peak of Nancy’s change in the second mirror scene—, in the empowerment the mirror radiates when she stares at her naked body. Nancy thereby defines herself differently and in a more feminist perspective at the end, where she is no longer afraid of her nakedness and her age. This is particularly important if Berger’s notions of nudity and nakedness are taken as a reference since the mirror in this scene conveys a feminist reading of redefinition and change. Traditionally, nudity was not the solely way of representing female bodies in visual arts and the audiovisual industry but it was a popular approach. According to the film theorist Laura Mulvey (1975), nudity was intentionally created for the visual pleasure of men. Such a reiteration of nudity resulted in “the aesthetics of narrative cinema on the patriarchal orchestration of the look” (Koch, 1985, p. 142) . This is illustrated by the Romano’s nude in *Mirrors 2* (2010), whose naked body served the purpose of satisfying the male eye, which contrasts with the transgression of Nancy’s naked body in *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022). As such, it could give the impression that Nancy’s naked body comply with the same purpose as there is a third person observing her (Berger, 1972/2003). However, there is no place for an aspect of voyeurism nor an implicit male gaze to be found in this scene. Rather, the director of the movie shows a purely naked body, for the female protagonist’s own satisfaction. As a result, rather than being victimised and represented as such, she decides to take agency by apprehending cultural oppressions that have limited her life experiences and thereby free herself from judgements. This is accomplished by her final act of looking at herself in the mirror completely naked. Her satisfactory smile at the end of the scene with the scene and the idea of acquiring a sense of desiring and being desired had been accomplished for the female character, satisfying her needs rather than being used as an object to the sexual alleviation of a man. Following this idea, it could be said that the change begins right before the second mirror scene which

becomes the epitome of such a change in the character and the idea of being desirable. Indeed, Leo Grande, during the last sexual intercourse he maintains in the movie with Nancy, gives the impression to do it merely for pleasure, not because it is his job. The scene acquires a different reading where now, Nancy as a body, as a figure, as an individual that has been closeted and limited to a very narrow-minded conceptions of life and sexual experiences, carries a message of freeing one-self, which goes hand in hand with Nancy's embodiment of desirability. She has overcome the judgement Leo Grande mentioned before and that is the point where she has become desirable, wanted. Because it is something that she wants to do and it is not imposed. That is why the final mirror scene acquires a freeing message. The moment she has embraced her old age, her contradictions, traditions and has subverted them through her new sexual experiences, along with the detachment from her fear of the new, of age, of rejection, is key and is embodied in the way she is able to look at her whole naked body. This is also reinforced by actress Emma Thompson in an interview for *Elle*, where she comments that she sought Nancy "to stand there in a completely relaxed fashion and accept what she saw because it's become hers again" (Thompson, Mackelden, 2022).

Furthermore, the mirror in the first scene not only presents a situation, an emotional, psychological oppression from Nancy's perspective, but it also conveys a meaning of change in a different way. Youth is at the centre of the Western societies' consumerism and has a privileged position in, for instance, advertisements or movies. Young girls are protagonists of perfume advertisements or movies, making invisible older people's representations. This tension is blurred by Hyde's lens on how in a symbolic reading, almost as a synecdoche, youth embraces older adulthood. Certainly, in the first mirror scene, after Nancy's derogative impression of herself, Leo nuances her thoughts by saying "Your body's beautiful. I wish you could see that" (min. 49:36, 2022). Leo is the one that is a key element to make Nancy see the positive aspects of her body. He functions as a counterbalance of her own distorted perception of her bodily appearance, which is the result of the constant exposure to popular discourses of perfection, youth, beauty and hegemonic femininity overall. Leo is thus not an identity that is present to judge an older body. Rather, he is present in the scene to subvert assumptions constructed by younger generations based on Western cultural beliefs.

Additionally, Morell (2003) notes as well that the empowerment related to older women should be listening to them and their narratives rather than taking them from the perspective of the dominant⁹. In *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*, the change is not only in making the protagonist be an older woman but it also explores the difficulties that are generally present in the majority of women of the same social identity. The mirror thus plays an important role of such an exploration of a complex character and problematise the dynamics of powers that are firstly seen in the first mirror scene and then the change itself, the alternative to the normative. In addition, it does not stand for the fantasies nor distorted assumptions confectioned by such a young, dominant culture. Nancy also becomes a referent in the silver screen in what Morell (2003) affirms that eventually older women “refuse to be the repository of others’ fears and denials, or to see themselves through the ageist lens that others do” (p. 74). Such assertion gives a fresh perspective to the audience, understanding that older women take agency through the thought of deviating from the western cultural conceptions of older age, usually rooted in the North American cultural imaginary.

2.2 - Queering the mirror

Connecting with the latter idea, Hyde’s film and her employment of the mirror can be said to be queered. In this movie, the existence of two different readings of the mirror can be shed light on. The mirror is the main vehicle for the female character to be considered a queered character. But the mirror itself is also queered in the sense that it is an object that de-familiarises and de-normalises the function that the mirror has traditionally acquired in the film industry. Consequently, the mirror is a double carrier of a queer meaning in this movie.

As Ahmed (2006) states, “depending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view” (p. 15), implying that the way objects and humans come into contact and interact between them is diverse and do not have the same outcome every time. If a video game is taken for instance, rather than having the objective to complete a mission given in the game narrative —as it has traditionally been the case mainstream games, although the players

⁹ In western cultures, the privileged is youth and the reading of older age in motion pictures is positioned from such a gaze.

have the possibility to complete secondary missions, there is a major and obligatory objective to accomplish— without giving room to explore the environment and interact with anything in the game that is not created for the overall purpose of the narrative. Queering a video game and its narrative means not only that certain video games have subverted such a traditional narrative by making accessible and explorable places in the game so that players have the freedom to explore, spend hours playing with the aim of queering might also be perceived in the most trivial details. Nancy is a woman seeking youth, a young body, something that culturally, is ethically inappropriate for women (Warren, 1996) whereas for older men it is socially acceptable. And to a certain extent it might create a conflict since it still has a component of awareness of older women that have to depend on sex workers, as previously mentioned. However, the film director —apart from seeking a discourse for defending sex work as a job morally acceptable— might be seeking the contrast in the intragenerational and gendered level. In other words, the female protagonist is the one taking that lead and reappropriating a role that has traditionally been the position of older men in relation to desirability and youth. The mirror takes part of the process of revolving Nancy sexually desirable by a young man.

Equally, as Ahmed (2006) notes, “space then becomes a question of “turning,” of directions taken, which not only allow things to appear, but also enable us to find our way through the world by situating ourselves in relation to such things.” (p. 6). In this sense, the term “orientation” employed by the author is crucial to understand the reading of the different positions of a body in relation to objects and how the former interacts, experiences, takes agency with such objects. It clearly marks a different path as the idea lying behind this theory might be based on the problematisation and questioning of the diversity of ways existing to explore a single object or space. This can be illustrated by the same example of video games developed above. Going further, through the different ontologies acquired by a wide scope of bodies, an object of space that might have been essentialised and is used in a standard, normal way might also be questioned by picturing other ways of approaching it. Players can ask challenge the controls and narrative of the game by, for instance, if a character dies at a certain point of the narrative, they try other ways to see if they can save the character in question, even though the character dies forcefully. The mere attempt of avoiding and questioning the established objective of the game can be understood as queering the narrative.

This is therefore the case of the mirror. By merging corporeal appearance, gender and age with the mirror, positioning them within a feminist viewpoint and unmarking that female aged body through its reflection, it might undermine conventions and eventually queers the mirror. Furthermore, the mirror is the object showing two different selves of the same individual and is said to be the vehicle of such a progression between the two mirror scenes. It is the object that allows the audience to see the differentiation of the character and her growth and self-acceptance. While the mirror shows a binary between oppression/freedom, the overall picture blurs the binary, for instance, between youth/older age. To illustrate it, it is essential to return to the first mirror scene where Leo Grande emphasises that such a dichotomy does not exist. The male character's demeanour and interaction with Nancy shows that he does not conceive such a separation as he emphasises how Nancy's body is completely valid. Although this implies the idea of a third-party validation over Nancy's body, it does not seem to be a form of judgement or control. Rather, it is a form of creating in Nancy a different opinion of herself to help the progression of her bodily acceptance. Whilst the female character tends to mark such difference between the her and Leo Grande throughout the movie—for instance, when she contemplates Leo Grande's naked body and she bursts into a rage expressing her discontent of the younger generation not having any worries and living in a society that perhaps is freer than the one Nancy went through in her younger age—he believes that every body is worth of pleasure (min. 1:03). This might refer to how she ought to follow a normative structure and be inscribed certain patriarchal conceptions that in the current western society are much more disrupted and ignored. She also points out her will of feeling young again because to her maturity and older age seem to adopt the traditional meaning of losing such sexual enjoyment. In this sense, the movie could suggest that the relation between specific terms that have shaped the conception of age culturally is blurred from an intergenerational perspective, here being youth—materialised by Leo Grande—who does not follow the same patterns observed in the long normative trajectory, which relies on youth confronted in the majority of case to older characters.

It is not not only queering the mirror, but also the space and the lace in which the mirror itself is situated also takes part of its importance. From a compositional interpretation approach, the mirror is situated at the centre of the room, where either Nancy or Leo Grande are forced to look at their reflection one way or another. This happens for instance with Leo Grande when

Nancy is in the bathroom (min. 0:38). He contemplates himself, he takes time to feel himself, letting the audience see his vulnerable side. That is what the mirror shows, an aspect of masculinity that does not fit into the western hegemonic masculinity displayed in a majority of western audiovisual products.

It is necessary to understand that the chosen movie depicts a heterosexual relationship. This could make the reader think that the concept of queerness should not be employed when it comes to the representation of the protagonist as a heterosexual woman. However, it is essential to understand queerness from a wider viewpoint. In “Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” (1997), political scientist and feminist Cathy J. Cohen puts emphasis on the need to not circumscribe queerness to the own community that identify as such. Rather, the concept of *queering* should also be read as a concept where every social identity that is being oppressed should be integrated and thus, criticising in a sense queer activists that do not widen the spectrum in this sense. Cohen asserts:

“However, beyond a mere recognition of the intersection of oppressions, there must be also an understanding of the ways our multiple identities work to limit the entitlement and status some receive from obeying a heterosexual imperative. For instance, how would queer activists understand politically the lives of women—in particular women of color—on welfare, who may fit into the category of heterosexual, but whose sexual choices are not perceived as normal, moral, or worthy of state support? Further, how do queer activists understand and relate politically to those whose same-sex sexual identities position them within the category of queer, but who hold other identities based on class, race and/or gender categories which provide them with membership in and the resources of dominant institutions and groups?” (p. 442)

It is thereby implied that heteronormativity, although being the “primary system of power structuring our lives” (p. 448), it does not have necessarily a fully privileged impact to every heterosexual individual as intersectionality plays an essential role nuancing such a hegemonic category. Queering embeds the idea that, even in the case of the protagonist of the movie

analysed in this thesis, she is marked by the intersection of gender and age, two social identities that socially generate rejection and abjection. This is the reason why Nancy could be, although being presumably a heterosexual woman, she could be read as a queer character. Overall, the presence of the mirror allows the representation of a female character intersecting and struggling with age and its cultural reading highlights the role of the former instrument, functioning as a figuration. It is through a feminist lens that this use of the mirror can be employed.

2.3 - Changing masculinity

From Leo Grande's approach, the mirror disrupts a psychological part of the character that redefines some traits of a normative social understanding of masculinity in a young male body, subverting partly the hegemonic masculinity constructed and thereby, opening a new path for another concept of masculinity.

The meaning of change in the following reflection has a different sense of "liberation", in this case for Leo Grande and the gaze proposed by the director. Although the audience witnesses Leo's own introspective exposition to the same mirror and intimate environment as Nancy, he acquires a different level of self-awareness. That is, if we can compare to a sense of the concept of masculinity and the reaffirmation of such a social construction as it happens in *Taxi Driver*, where the protagonist reaffirms the association between masculinity and violence, it can be observed that, eventually, the spectator acquires a different reading of masculinity in *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*. The gaze of the director is crucial at the moment of understanding the reading of this performance of masculinity; in *Taxi Driver* the audience witnesses an intimate moment of the male character seeking reaffirmation of himself not only through a violent act, but also through the use of a weapon—which conveys a phallic meaning. This projection of masculinity where insecurities that the protagonist hides behind the weapon and that is part of a constructed social image and attitude of what men should behave and thus, what they ought to like (since the weapon also plays an important gendered role) contrasts with the case of Leo Grande. Certainly, this male character lets the audience understand that he also has insecurities, that, even with a normative body, he is still prisoner of a socio-cultural context that prioritises appearances and might be worried about

the perception of Nancy in relation to him. Through the mirror then, there is a glimpse of change in the perception of masculinity, something that ultimately affects and makes the spectator reflect on such behaviour.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

1 - Discussion

The mirror certainly plays an important role as a bearer of meaning in multiple aspects, answering in turn to the research question presented in the introduction of the thesis. Indeed, the mirror shows an oppressive component elucidated through the psychology of the female protagonist. The social imaginary is surmised through the psychology of the aged female character at the moment of facing her own age body in the mirror. From its reflection, there emerges a sense of rejection of the old and non-normative female appearance as different social connections existing in a social imaginary are inscribed in a body. Notwithstanding, in this movie the impact of the mirror goes further in the acceptance of the non-normative, non-familiar body. Indeed, it creates a positive impact in a sense of self-acceptance, empowerment and individual agency. The aged female body is thus reflected as a body capable of experiencing the same feelings as any other normative body. It thus breaks with its fixated perception.

In the same line, the mirror therefore revolves into an empowering element in this movie. In Chapter 4, the movies presented give the impression to solely focus on the approach of the woman as victims, as it is seen in *Black Swan*, or subduing to an oppression built on nudity and male pleasure, as in *Mirrors 2*. Instead, in *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*, the mirror is transformed into an element of change and empowering agency. It takes part in a process of change in the female character's identity and thus challenges the negative depiction of aged female bodies.

Audiovisual product as part of the public discourses, movies such as *Good Luck To You, Leo Grande* are can create change in the perception of older women's representation onscreen. Its de-familiarity with the traditional depiction of it can create a turning point in its perception and as a result, as Yoav S. Bergman (2022), researcher in the field of ageism, highlights "positive self-esteem and/or a positive perception of one's body in old age can serve as a personal resource which may mitigate psychological distress associated with ageism" (p. 840).

Lastly, the mirror also displaces patterns of hegemonic masculinity, and simultaneously puts in the centre a different masculinity built on vulnerability. That is, violence and superiority are not the traits that other mirror scenes such as the *Taxi Driver* depiction recreates. Leo Grande shows a more insecure side of himself.

Furthermore, this thesis encounters some limitations. The objective of this essay has been to analyse a movie in relation to the mirror, its contextualisation within the film and how it interacts with the characters in order to understand and analyse how cultural imaginary sinks into an individual that belongs to social categories historically oppressed and silenced in Western cultures. It might give an interesting insight of how the mirror contributes to the rejection or self-acceptance of an individual. Notwithstanding, it would have been suitable to draw the study to another direction, that is, for instance, by using a different methodological framework. For future research seeking to complement this master thesis, qualitative and quantitative interviews could be carried out, focusing on the audience rather than in the movie itself. From a phenomenological approach, a qualitative interview might shed light on, firstly, the life experiences of older women in relation to Thompson's character and to what extent they resonate with such a representation or how it makes them feel. Secondly, qualitative interviews could target younger generations and analyse what sort of impact the movie has on them and if their conceptions culturally assumed have changed after watching the movie. From a quantitative point of view, data from a bigger picture could be collected and a survey could be elaborated targeting changes in mentality of participants, based on this movie.

On the other hand, other studies could investigate the impact of the mirror, pondering how the concept of the movie resonates with the audience. That is, for instance, outing under scrutiny whether older women see themselves differently in the mirror or if they fall into the same patterns of not looking at themselves in the mirror. This could connect with younger participants so as to observe whether the mirror in the movie symbolises a positive change for them, which could open the possibility of subverting and redefining the western social imaginary. As a result, it would also make them take agency in their own bodies and look at themselves in a different way, which would allow them to have a different interaction and relation both with others and themselves and thus, to challenge the status quo imposed by a

society that rewards youth. That is precisely what at some level the movie shows through Thompson's character: freeing herself and seeing the positive side of herself through her sexual pleasure and her search for youth, conveying the message that the readings/terms associated with it does not belong only to them—as it happens with binaries, always a good one and the Other, the abject and negative block—but it also applies to older age.

2 - Conclusion

This master's project has attempted to contribute to feminist film studies. By analysing *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*, it can be concluded that the film harbours a feminist perspective and is a product within the audiovisual sector that seeks the disruption of stereotypes in the traditional narrative of films. Through the connection and application of different theories, it can be said that such an audiovisual product conveys a message of change as a bearer of a feminist public discourse. The representation of older women in movies has been so scarcely present onscreen that movies such as *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022) take a step forward and could be conceived as a referent in its intersectional depiction of ageism and gender, dismantling stereotypes and unveiling the need of inclusion of older women. This is observed more transparently through the role of the mirror that becomes an empowering instrument in the understanding of the different phases that the female protagonist experiences. The methodology and the different theoretical concepts used in this thesis help to understand how western patriarchal cultures tend to devalue older age and prioritise female young bodily appearance as a product of consumption and fetishism in detriment of other corporeal, non-normative representations. Nevertheless, Thompson's aged body still relies on and is perceived as a normative body within the audiovisual industry. The issue resides as well if starring Thompson in this movie is a possible strategy to attract different audiences as well as making the discourse more powerful because of her fame. Perhaps this conflicts with the thought of giving the role to a woman who might be a bit further of the standard femininity even in older age. In addition, it is certain that much still needs to be done for real change in the film sector. That is, older women represented in most films—notably mainstream movies—nowadays are still presented as “white, rich, and remain beautiful”

(Lemish *et al.*, 2012, p. 173) and thus it still reinforces the privileged white position of women from an intersectional and feminist perspective.

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