



Nude - the Nihilistic poetics in Mike Leigh's *Naked* (1993)

Desnudo - a poética nihilista em *Naked* (1993), de Mike Leigh

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the film *Naked* (1993) by Mike Leigh, highlighting the complexity of the protagonist Johnny, played by David Thewlis, a character who embodies feelings of anguish and self-deprecation. The justification for this article lies mainly in its novelty, *i.e.* its high degree of originality, since a search in the CAPES catalogue of theses and dissertations on 14 May 2025 found no record of any kind relating to Mike Leigh, best exemplifying, no thesis or dissertation on the director. The social and scientific relevance of the research is also justified by the fact that there is no work on the subject in Brazil, either in Intercom or Compós, explaining the innovative vein of the text. The research, by its nature, required the use of the qualitative method for its improvement, whose singular characteristic establishes the analysis of textual and imagery data as the starting point. The following can be cited as basic works *Naked and Other Screenplays* – Mike Leigh, 1995, *Introdução à Teoria do Cinema* - Robert Stam, 2013, *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus* - Jean-Louis Baudry, 1974-1975.

Keywords: Naked, Mike Leigh, nihilism, eternal return.

RESUMO

O presente artigo analisa o filme *Naked* (1993) de Mike Leigh, destacando a complexidade do protagonista Johnny, interpretado por David Thewlis, um personagem que reflete sentimentos de angústia e autodepreciação. A justificativa do presente artigo repousa mormente no caráter de ineditismo, isto é, no acentuado grau de originalidade, porquanto em pesquisa realizada no catálogo de teses e dissertações da CAPES, em 14 de maio de 2025, não foi encontrado qualquer tipo de registro relacionado a Mike Leigh, melhor exemplificando, não há trabalhos de tese ou



dissertação sobre o diretor. Justifica-se, ainda, a relevância social e científica da pesquisa pelo fato de não haver no Brasil trabalho relacionado ao tema, tanto na Intercom, quanto na Compós, explicitando o veio inovador do texto. A pesquisa, por sua natureza, demandou a utilização do método qualitativo para o seu aperfeiçoamento, cuja característica singular estabelece como ponto de partida a análise de dados textuais e imagéticos. Podem ser citadas como obras bases *Naked and Other Screenplays* – Mike Leigh, 1995, *Introdução à Teoria do Cinema* - Robert Stam, 2013, *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus* - Jean-Louis Baudry, 1974-1975.

Palavras-chave: *Naked*, Mike Leigh, niilismo, eterno retorno.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza la película de Mike Leigh *Naked* (1993), destacando la complejidad del protagonista Johnny, interpretado por David Thewlis, un personaje que refleja sentimientos de angustia y autodesprecio. La justificación de este artículo radica principalmente en su novedad, es decir, en su alto grado de originalidad, ya que una búsqueda en el catálogo de tesis y disertaciones de CAPES realizada el 14 de mayo de 2025 no encontró ningún registro relacionado con Mike Leigh, mejor ejemplificando, ninguna tesis o disertación sobre el director. La relevancia social y científica de la investigación también se justifica por el hecho de que no existe ningún trabajo sobre el tema en Brasil, ni en Intercom ni en Compós, lo que explica la vena innovadora del texto. La investigación, por su naturaleza, exigió para su perfeccionamiento el uso del método cualitativo, cuya característica singular establece como punto de partida el análisis de datos textuales y de imágenes. Como trabajos de base se pueden citar *Naked and Other Screenplays* – Mike Leigh, 1995, *Introdução à Teoria do Cinema* - Robert Stam, 2013, *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus* - Jean-Louis Baudry, 1974-1975.

Palabras clave: *Naked*, Mike Leigh, nihilismo, eterno retorno.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the film *Naked* (1993) by Mike Leigh, concentrating on the intricate character of Johnny, portrayed by David Thewlis. Johnny is depicted as a solipsistic figure, radiating feelings of distress and self-loathing during his eloquent and rhetorical exchanges with others. The film's uniqueness secures its distinguished position within Leigh's body of work, particularly as his films often delve into social and familial dramas from the vantage point of the British working class.

Exploring Leigh's cultural influences reveals that his theatrical background significantly contributes to the vibrant and emotive portrayal of characters. This narrative captures the dualities of human experience, seamlessly intertwining episodes of empathy and pain. Furthering



this exploration, Leigh uses filmmaking to encapsulate life's essence, where character interactions are layered with subtlety and irony.

On another facet, the article explores Johnny's nihilistic nature, who lives in a cycle of self-destructive behavior. Despite realizing he is trapped in the mundane flow of accidents and fragmented life plans, he appears incapable of transcending his so-called spiritual spectrum. Similarly, the concept of nihilism is discussed on two levels: the primitive, represented by Johnny, and the transcendental, which seeks a higher altruism. Meanwhile, the physical and psychological brutality permeating the film exemplifies the character's internal struggle and disconnection from society, as he seems always to be searching for a revelation for himself, a moment of epiphany in his interlocutor, provoked by the sharpness of his broken concepts, thus satisfying his craving for answers to his unasked questions, and ultimately undermining the psychological integrity of those he targets.

(...), Johnny is extremely complex and multi-faceted and driven by compassion, angst, hatred, and self-loathing. (Mike Leigh, *Naked and other screenplays* (First part – Interview) pg. xxxvi, Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

The justification for this article lies mainly in its novelty, that is, its high degree of originality, as no records related to Mike Leigh were found in the CAPES thesis and dissertation catalog as of May 14, 2025. Hence, no thesis or dissertation work on the director exists. Additionally, the research's social and scientific relevance is justified by the absence of work on the topic in Brazil, both in Intercom and Compós, highlighting the innovative vein of the text.

Thus, the academic contribution derived inaugurates the study spectrum of this director's work, who has been honored with numerous awards, including the Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 1993 Birthday Honours for services to the film industry ("No. 53332". The London Gazette 11 June 1993. p. B12), and in the film industry: 18 Academy Award nominations, 2 Academy Award wins, 32 BAFTA nominations, 7 BAFTA wins, 6 Golden Globe nominations, and 2 Golden Globe wins.

The research, by nature, demanded the use of qualitative methods for its refinement, whose singular characteristic establishes textual and imaged data analysis as a starting point, under various approaches here consistent with free analytical comparison, whether correlations are derived from the author, being his creation, or adapted to a broader context, are equally his responsibility.



The objective of this article is to bring to light a seminal work of philosophical-discursive cinema, represented by the portent of *Naked* (1993), still untranslated into Portuguese, in conversation with the nihilistic universe, in such a way as to elucidate the character's fatalistic dynamic with the chaos that inhabits him and around him.

Within this complex framework of understanding, despite the character's recognition in a specific passage that he is entrenched in the endless vicious cycle of nihilism (the problem of eternal return), and even considering his intellectual stature, he proves unable to discern any hint of a solution to the problem. This ultimately renders the protagonist's redemption impenetrably elusive. Foundational works that can be cited include *Naked and Other Screenplays* – Mike Leigh, 1995, *Introdução à Teoria do Cinema* – Robert Stam, 2013, *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus* – Jean-Louis Baudry, 1974-1975.

2 FORMATION AND INFLUENCES OF MIKE LEIGH

In the mid-1960s, Mike Leigh began his career as a theatre director and playwright, before producing plays and films for BBC Television in the subsequent decades of the 1970s and 1980s. The director/screenwriter always sought to create characters capable of capturing reality and conveying it through "emotional, subjective, intuitive, instinctive and vulnerable films" (apud Charlotte White, 2013).

A confessed avid reader of Samuel Beckett, Mike Leigh cites *Endgame* as a significant influence on his early television works. It was during this period that he began to implement the idea that writing and rehearsal could be part of the same process, experimenting with this fusion through lengthy rehearsals and allowing actors permissive lapses of improvisation.

The dynamic verve of dialogues and the fluidity of ideas, frequently found in Leigh's films, are largely due to his training in classical British theatre at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), not to mention the Camberwell School of Art, the Central School of Art and Design, and the London School of Film Technique.

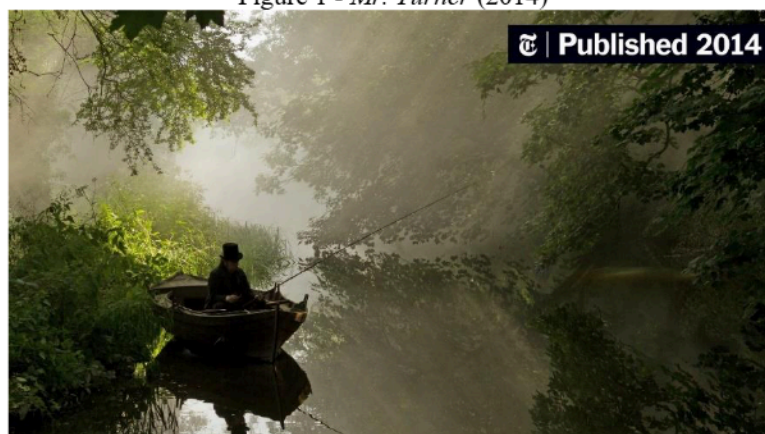
His solid background in performing and television arts endowed him with a distinctive *savoir-faire*, characterized by sober elegance combined with a theatrical discursive heritage, where dialogues express both substance and emotion. Aware that every artist reaches the maturity of their work at a certain period in their life, this stage is often accompanied by the desire to



document their autobiography, whether directly through literature or through subtler means, such as excerpts drawn from the "self" and sewn into characters of original creation. It is in this sense that Johnny was born for the cinema, albeit with moral and cordial reservations, as the character frequently displays despicable conduct in social interactions.

It is important to emphasize that *Naked* (1993) is an atypical work by the director, truly one of a kind, not for its visual beauty—which is clearly not the intention, as seen in *Mr. Turner* (2014), a biopic about the later years of the painter who lends his name to the title— but neither for the exploration of familial and social dramas, especially through the lens of the English working class of economically underprivileged roots, as seen in *Vera Drake* (2004) and *High Hopes* (1988). These themes are indeed constant in Leigh's body of work.

Figure 1 - *Mr. Turner* (2014)



Source: Frame of the film.

Figure 2 - *Naked* (1993)



Source: Frame of the film.



(...) Johnny in *Naked*. They are outsiders in a way that is related to me, though not literally. That sort of character, that outsider position, that role is an important one that does come from something implicitly autobiographical. (Mike Leigh, *Naked and other screenplays*, pg. xxii, (First part – Interview) Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

It is evident that the connection between the character and his creator, that is, between Johnny and Leigh, can only be understood through the analysis of autobiographical fragments, rather than as an inspiration to form the spherical and complex subject, as the creature represents the extreme behavior of the impossible individual, the virulent gentle fraud, which spreads cancerously until it consumes the reserve of civility of its interlocutor.

3 CONTEXTUALIZATION OF *NAKED* (1993)

The general plot of the film follows Johnny, an apocalypse prophet in a figurative sense, given that the film's theme carries socio-realist nuances, in search of an unspeakable, hidden purpose, apprehensive at the edges of deconstructed social conventions and the breakdown of the comfortable acceptance of a chaotic reality.

The opening scene features a couple in the midst of a sexual relationship, although violent, consensual, until the escalation of the man's mistreatment of the woman takes on pure pain contours and ceases to be consensual.

Having been driven away by the assaulted woman, Johnny aimlessly wanders through the alleys of Manchester, looking for a likely escape, when he stumbles upon a fully unlocked car, with groceries to be unloaded, and takes advantage of the situation to steal the vehicle and flee to London, the city of his ex-girlfriend.

It is notable that, to emphasize the character's bewildered escape, the sound of stumbling and hurried footsteps is overlaid in the scene, acting as a sense indicator, imposing the need to know where to go in the 'Minotaur's labyrinth.' The soundtrack also plays a part in setting the climate of exasperation, as it bundles the narrative's conduction, decanting a classical composition of low notes (bass) performed by string instruments played with a bow, and in counterpoint, high notes (treble) from the piano, in a tempo somewhere between *Largo* and *Adagio*, contrasting tension and elegance.

Upon arriving in London, Johnny simply abandons the stolen car, not even bothering to turn it off, demonstrating that the intent was not criminal (from the character's perspective), but



merely served the purpose of moving from one point to another. At Louise's address (ex-girlfriend), Johnny accidentally meets her housemate, Sophie, and starts a conversation somewhere between interested and bored. In this *rendezvous*, the protagonist's wit and sharp irony become evident, when asked if he was Louise's "mate," he retorts "primate," possibly a blend of "prior" (previous) and "mate," along with the obvious reference to primate. To which Sophie, witty, concludes by saying, "You must be the missing link, then." This casual insinuation by the character has a devastating effect on his "prey," creating such an obsession in Sophie that, after Louise enters the house, and with her still present, she cannot resist and physically and sexually gives herself to Johnny.

The house occupied by Louise and Sophie, in truth, has Sandra, a nurse and ex-girlfriend of Jeremy (described below), as the main tenant, who is absent for almost four-fifths of the film on a safari in Zimbabwe.

From then on, sketches with random characters are presented, sometimes forming what could be called a philosophical essay, sometimes provoking questions about the reality in which they find themselves circumscribed.

In parallel, and as a way of presenting a sort of *doppelgänger* of what would become the worst of Johnny, the character of Jeremy, also known as Sebastian (his alter ego), is introduced into the story. Jeremy epitomizes cruelty, not only misogynistic but a complete misanthrope. And, to give vent to this kind of character's desires, Leigh characterizes him as a wealthy young man, landlord of the house where Louise, Sophie, and Sandra live.

The pinnacle of psychological terror occurs when Jeremy invades Louise and Sophie's house, and the latter, alone with him, succumbs to the man's force in her company. Despairing, she abandons herself to Jeremy's will, who, after raping her, throws a sum of money on the floor as if paying for services rendered.

In the conclusion of his ill-fated adventures, Johnny realizes he is in an insoluble state, justifying to himself, utterly disillusioned, "It's not my fault!" Through this lens, despite his undeniable character flaws, unable to rid himself of his contradictions and complexities, which end up conferring an impenetrable lacquer to the protagonist's redemption, he shines as a memorable symbol of the human condition.



Written and directed by Mike Leigh

Actors:

Johnny - David Thewlis

Louise - Lesley Sharp

Sophie - Katrin Cartlidge

Jeremy (alter ego Sebastian) - Greg Cruttwell

Sandra - Claire Skinner

Brian - Peter Wight

Archie - Ewen Bremner

Maggie - Susan Vidler

Woman in window - Deborah Maclaren

Café girl - Gina McKee

Masseuse - Carolina Giammetta

Elizabeth Berrington - Giselle

Poster man - Darren Tunstall

Chauffeur - Robert Putt

Victim - Lynda Rooke

Car owner - Angela Curran

Sr. Halpern - Peter Whitman

Woman in street - Jo Abercrombie

Girl in Porsche - Elaine Britten

Tea bar owner - David Foxxe

Man at tea bar - Mike Avenall

Man at tea bar - Toby Jones

Bag Lady - Sandra Voe

A brief introduction to the awards and nominations garnered by the film serves well to elucidate the greatness of the work. These include:

- Cinéfest: Best International Film (1993);
- Cannes Film Festival (1993): Best Director;
- Cannes Film Festival (1993): Palme d'Or (nominated);
- Cannes Film Festival: Best Actor - David Thewlis (1993);



- New York Film Critics Circle Awards: Best Actor - David Thewlis (1993);
- Toronto International Film Festival: Metro Media Award (1993);
- Evening Standard British Film Awards: Best Actor - David Thewlis (1994);
- London Critics Circle Film Awards ALFS Award: British Actor of the Year - David Thewlis (1994);
- National Society of Film Critics Awards: Best Actor - David Thewlis (1994);
- BAFTA Awards Alexander Korda Award for Best British Film (1994) (nominated);
- Independent Spirit Awards: Best Foreign Film (1994) (nominated).

4 EXISTENCE AS EXPERIENCE

The films are, at the same time, a lamentation and a celebration of the human experience as I feel it. I haven't made a film, including *Naked*, that doesn't include moments of warmth and compassion and sharing and giving. And I have not made a film that does not include plenty of the opposite. (Mike Leigh, *Naked and other screenplays*, pg. xxxiii, (First part – Interview) Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

After considering that there is a certain autobiographical reverie in his films (cf. *Naked and Other Screenplays*, 1995), Leigh approaches the art of filmmaking as the ultimate experience capable of bringing together profound human sufferings and sincere celebrations within the shortened time span inherent to a feature film.

The radical nature of the experience does not stem from the immersion of the spectator-subject within the cinematic apparatus (Jean-Louis Baudry – *Apparatus*, 1974-1975), similar to what occurred in Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, where there is no distance between actor and audience, and the process encompasses everyone simultaneously (Antonin Artaud – *O Teatro e o seu Duplo*, 2006). This is partly because such a conception would demand an excessively heightened abstraction, bordering the fine line between lucidity and rapture.

The aim is not to overwhelm the audience with transcendent cosmic concerns. The fact that there are profound principles of thought and action by which every show is interpreted is not something that concerns the average spectator, who is not interested in it. Nevertheless, these keys must exist, and that is our concern. (Artaud, 1935).

In this vein, Leigh chooses to deposit a myriad of contrary and contradictory feelings in the film, moulding this emotional vortex that emerges as the creation of the ceramist who masters



the shapeless clay. With specific regard to the film dealt with here, Mike Leigh, in 1995, pondered:

In many ways, the film is inconclusive and ambivalent. It's about a world in which people largely don't know each other and don't relate – ships that pass in the night. Therefore, by definition, I felt it had to be more enigmatic, because life out there on the street is enigmatic.

(Mike Leigh, *Naked and other screenplays*, pg. xxxvi, (First part – Interview) Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

More than a question of the ambivalence of speech, dialogues are often connected *per saltum*, in the belief that a mere response or direct interaction would leave a sense of platitude, of discursive obviousness. Thus, symptomatic and inconclusive digressions are used as part of the evidence of the relationship, which ceases to be banal and becomes proscribed with intellectual refinement.¹

What emerges from the filmic narrative does not correspond so much to a linear story, despite Johnny's existential circularity by ending the film in the same manner as he is presented in the introduction —deliberately abandoned in marginal solipsism— but rather to a concept of life grounded in high cerebral digressions and gratuitous social affronts.

The protagonist of *Naked* (1993) teaches through cynicism and sharp humor against his interlocutors, rewarded with execration and vilification of his physical integrity. Despite the protagonist's behavior generating indignation and an expected and desirable detachment,

¹ Ambivalent speech (with gradation of dialogic meaning) or inconclusive speech (in exasperated invective to communicate desires) lacks stability of meaning. Not only must the utterance carry the same spectrum from the speaker to the recipient, meaning the identification with the subject at hand must be precise, but also for both parties involved in the message, the value attributed to the semantic load must be close or very close to each other.

In this regard, temporal, geographical, and social isolation (e.g., categorical groups or subgroups within a given society sharing exotic meanings for sometimes prosaic terms) is not sufficient to arrive at the real meaning of the pursued word or sentence. It is necessary to expand the composition of language beyond mere writing to a sound-based writing.

This involves thinking not from intonation, cadence (quantitative, frequency or speed of repeated movements), rhythm (qualitative, variation, and organization of cadence), or voice modulation, but from the mental sound hollow. Every word of work, meaning a word committed to erecting a thought or idea, rather than simply relating equivalently to an object, holds within the mental sound hollow a powerful significant component.

Thus, textual reading, even when silent, has its abstract vocalization occurring *pari passu* in the mental plane, and as it progresses, it creates the vocal-sonorous field of its meaning, unrelated to phonetics but solely to the resolution of meaning.

Similarly, the work of idiomatic translation of a word or sentence of work must consider that there will also be a mental translation of the sound hollow, composing, along with the word's meaning, the significance of the word. In the film in question, the protagonist's appreciation for rhetoric and profound knowledge flows from their words of work, necessitating, before an idiomatic translation, a translation to English vernacular, as they more closely resemble a dialect from some industrial-factory region.



paradoxically, it leads the audience to an astonishing sympathy, to empathize with his misfortunes, the logical consequences of his extreme behavior.

This is where the extravagant enigma of the work lies, that is, a problem outside the film, the manner in which the audience's identification with the protagonist begins to take shape, considering that he reveals himself as the antithesis of what is pursued by the *Übermensch*—the Nietzschean superman. The question posed, being quite open, finds elements for its solution in the latent potential of the character; to put it more precisely, in Johnny, one glimpses the desire and potential for the construction of an evolved being, combined with the transparency of one who suffers and repents, moving enough to provoke compassion. In this lies the link that elevates the repugnant to the *status* of existential, of nihilistic ultimately.

5 THE CONTEXT-ARGUMENT AMALGAM

(...) the entire past, present and future of the universe and of mankind bursting out of his head. He's a guy (Johnny) who is preoccupied by these epic, absolute ideas, but who also has some kind of idealism.
(Mike Leigh, *Naked and other screenplays*, pg. xxxv, (First part – Interview) Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

The faded tonality of the film imparts a feeling of languor to the viewer, evoking an idea of uncertain yet tangible antiquity, given that the construction of the diegesis is filled with elements contemporary to the film's release date, namely 1993. Subsequently, the intention to transform the material sequence-plan, tactile, into an atemporal discourse becomes evident in each dialogue constructed from anacolutha. That is, in order to answer a specific question, the protagonist offers arguments, imbued with sadism, that address much more essential and prior questions to the one posed, such as when asked how he arrived in London (coming from Manchester in the North), he retorts:

“Well, basically, there was this little dot, right? And the dot went bang, and the bang expanded. Energy formed into matter, matter cooled, matter lived, the amoeba to fish, the fish to fowl, the fowl to froggy, the froggy to mammal, the mammal to monkey, the monkey to man. *Amo, amas, amat, quid pro quo, memento mori, ad infinitum*, sprinkle on a little bit of grated cheese and leave under the grill till doomsday.” Johnny's line.

Within this context, the discursive entanglement is further intensified by the addition of other hyperbolic characters, capable of causing astonishment through their eccentric behavior.



Jeremy, the epitome of scorn and brutal authoritarianism, embodies a direct intersection of narcissism and mechanistic seduction; Louise, Johnny's naive ex-girlfriend; Sophie, Louise's flatmate, a hopeless and depressive drug addict whose *joie de vivre* lies in her inexpressible ability to derive pleasure from the abuses inflicted upon herself, demonstrating a complete surrender to the vicissitudes of life without exerting any influence or interference.

6 CHARACTER NARRATIVE ARC

Leigh chooses not to develop his character through a transformation arc, known in literature as a coming-of-age novel, or *Bildungsroman*. Instead, he conceives the character as a whole and gradually reveals his idiosyncrasies, detailing the hardships and sorrows that Johnny endures.

Johnny's complexity is startling; it shifts the perception of the center of gravity responsible for his balance. Melancholic and sullen, he refuses to succumb; aggressive and compassionate, he resists being understood. His erratic behavior finds its driving force in his broken psyche, of which he has a slight awareness, rather than in the consequences of his social transgressions and deliberate antagonisms.

What makes Johnny so fascinating is that he disguises his need for power as honesty. Johnny is on a mission to “free” people from the hopes, illusions, and expectations that a hypocritical society foists upon them.
(Taubin, 2011).

The entire story is formed from sketches, structured interchangeable blocks that, while adhering to a chronological line, do not necessarily need to follow the listed arrangement. Despite the potential division of the film into structured parts, the protagonist's fate seems to repeat, as exemplified by the final sequence. In a conversation with Louise (his ex-girlfriend), they decide to reconcile; however, after a night's sleep, she leaves for work, and he, upon waking, unscrupulously steals the money that Jeremy threw at Sophie when he raped her, thereby reviving his initial state of solitude and planning erratic steps that indicate the condemnation of living the problem of eternal return.

The failure to overcome the issue of eternal return drags along the universe of nihilism shaped by the abandonment of inextricably human values, primarily civil, and the belief in social



institutions (primitive nihilism) at one extreme, and at the other, the transvaluation of what was previously abandoned, drifting into a sigh of absolute morality (meta-moral and hyper-moral, prerequisites of transcendental nihilism). For classification purposes, Johnny can be better understood if placed in the first stage.

Given this context, the protagonist of *Naked* (1993), despite basing his existence on mental terms, through the incessant pursuit of knowledge (demonstrated even by the scene where he steals books), carries out his acts with distinct brutality, whether physical or psychological. Thus, by employing cinematic language, the choice of a self-destructive character proves coherent with the level of sophistication within which he is placed in nihilism, namely primitive nihilism.

Thus, anticipating the concepts developed below regarding absolute morality (meta-moral and hyper-moral), Leigh had initially considered as a filmic solution the whims and misadventures of a homeless person. However, the idea did not captivate him content-wise, as he believed it would not held enough breath to sustain the structure of an entire feature film.

I had the notion at one point to do a film about homelessness, but I had nothing remarkable to say about that. *Naked* stumbles across homelessness a bit, and it has the look and feel of being a film about it. But, in fact, you see Johnny walking out of his house at the beginning of the film; it's the only time you see someone in his own home, and he's the central character. (Mike Leigh, *Naked and other screenplays*, pgs. xxxvi/xxxvii, (First part – Interview) Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

Therefore, it is evident that the germ of the plot was planted, and all that remained was to nurture the idea to make it bloom.

7 PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BRUTALITY

With abrupt impact, the film's opening scene depicts a sexual encounter between a heterosexual couple, occurring in the early hours of the dawn in a shadowy alley, devoid of any signs of life. Although they remain mostly clothed, it becomes evident to the viewer that the act is consensual —at least initially. As the sequence progresses, the escalation of pain and aggression, initially permitted by the woman, becomes unbearable, leading to a desperate outcry from the female character. In her protest against the violation of her physical integrity, she vehemently calls out a male name, preceded by the possessive pronoun “my,” indicating not only



that they are acquaintances but also that he is her partner. The sequence concludes with Johnny fleeing, realizing that the woman's distress would not subside and that the consequences of his actions were now irreversible.

Regarding Sophie, Johnny cannot endure her unconditional surrender to him. To dissuade her from this obsessive feeling, he verbally abuses her and sodomizes her. Leigh creates a protagonist who has abandoned civil values to such an extent that he has lost the very concept of morality. For this reason, he is confined, doomed to eternal return.

More importantly, nihilism aimed at human elevation would never allow the belittlement of one's fellow beings, as it embodies an absolute morality (meta-moral or hyper-moral), capable of constantly balancing others' excesses with selfish gratification. It prefers to mitigate the former rather than celebrate the latter, due to the altruistic nature inherent in the state of transcendental nihilism.

It is inevitable to recognize that the protagonist's intellectual superiority elevates him above those who interact with him, engendering overwhelming feelings in others that provoke impetuous reactions, paradoxically devoid of any rationality. Nonetheless, Johnny's strategy to facilitate minimal communication with his interlocutors —his *coup de force*— consists of a harsh critique, laced with fine irony toward the cherished values of his interlocutor. For instance, a discus thrower (an Olympic athlete whose goal is to throw a discus as far as possible) is sarcastically referred to as a “pizza delivery guy,” or the night watchman of an unoccupied building guarding an empty space, with the security job being labeled as the most tedious on earth.

8 ABSOLUTE MORALITY: META-MORAL AND HYPER-MORAL

The distinction between these terms does not hinder the understanding of more complex issues involved in this dissertation's discourse. However, it is appropriate to alleviate any doubts regarding the indiscriminate use of these expressions.

With these considerations in mind, meta-moral involves overpass all moralities, stripping them of their constitutive element of grace, in a state of impartial goodness, the good resolved to see no one, thereby forming a cohesive and circumspect whole. A possible fictional example of this character would be a nomadic mendicant reaching the state of an ascetic.



Conversely, hyper-moral addresses aspects superior to those already conformed within the individual; it is the enigmatic expansion of consciousness, bringing the being closer to the subtle and, consequently, distancing them from the manifest. A possible fictional example of this character would be a prominent religious figure removed from the context of their preaching.

Do you feel that your films are pointing out morals?

Morals are a matter of taste, of course. I would say that my films are moral films, in that they are primarily motivated by a sense of how we should behave toward each other in terms of sharing and giving. (Mike Leigh, *Naked and other screenplays*, pg. xl, (First part – Interview) Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

Both concepts (meta-moral and hyper-moral) encompass the necessary sufficiency to transition from the state of primitive nihilism to transcendental nihilism. Thus, when considering Johnny's journey, it can be inferred that, despite being confined by the ego's chains, he treads a path along a fine line of an aspiring meta-moral.

9 NIHILISM

9.1 PRIMITIVE NIHILISM

Adopting the framework that the conception of nihilism here progresses from the stage of abandoning civil values and belief in social institutions (primitive nihilism) to the assumption and incorporation (an act of assuming followed by unrestricted and superlative identification) of a meta-moral or hyper-moral, thereby understanding the second and final stage (transcendental nihilism), it becomes evident that Johnny belongs to the less developed instance, or merely to that of simple abandonment.

In contrast to the refinement of transcendental nihilism, Johnny stretches the tolerance of others to provoke the poorest and most instinctive reactions in his interlocutors. Poor in the sense of savagery, acts devoid of any notion of civility. This veiled intent of the protagonist is characterized by a lack of regard for the feelings of others, condemning him to the failure of eternal return.



9.2 TRANSCENDENTAL NIHILISM

To enter the realm of transcendental nihilism, it is deemed necessary (*conditio sine qua non*) for the individual to have abandoned civil values and belief in social institutions. Nonetheless, such a condition in itself does not confer sufficiency, nor does it fulfill the requirements of the concept. It is from this plateau, this state of both material and liturgical detachment, that an altruistic world choice must be combined. Only endowed with brotherhood can one have a glimpse of what Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, or superman, is, which bears no resemblance to the abject project of the Aryan race.

In this *quasi* vision, granted at the moment when brotherhood and secular abnegation intertwine, the agony of existentialism begins to give way, allowing the will to subjective power to dismantle the mechanism of eternal return.

Johnny does not find this window of hope, despite some glimpses, such as when he says, "We are not important, we are just a lousy idea," or when he comments on human evolution, stating, "Man will evolve into a species that transcends matter, pure thought, universal consciousness, God!" Unfortunately, he persists in displaying vile and selfish behavior, wallowing in his intellectual frivolities as a pretext to boast before any unsuspecting bystander.

10 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on the research conducted, it is evident that as Johnny professes a detachment from circumstances, parallel to a philosophical deepening, this character becomes the closest archetype in cinema to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Due to the complexity of the concept, the challenge to comprehend the character.

Was there any kind of antecedent for Johnny, in literature or films? These things are never particularly conscious. I suppose he's related in some way to Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment. (...) But none of these references had occurred to me, quite honestly. (Mike Leigh, Naked and other screenplays, pg. xxxv, (First part – Interview) Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

Furthermore, it is concluded that another challenge faced by the text pertains to the task of rendering the character believable, specifically, providing Johnny with feasible and plausible



contours without allowing him to slip into the seductive realm of the fantastical or the incomprehensible absurd.

In an ideal framework, the possibilities of inventing a truly nihilistic character with the aim of ascending to the stage of transcendental nihilism, brushing against the condition of the *Übermensch* as defined by the will to power, are numerous. The challenge lies in establishing the connections (or “fistulas”, as Johnny likes to call them) between a modern context and a classical state of mind.

In this context, the feeling that the protagonist of *Naked* (1993) is reluctant to interact with his peers on a strictly earthly plane dominates the narrative. It is situated in the mental realm, without concessions to trivialities, and could easily be transposed into the language of theater, requiring no scenography, only counterpointed voices.

It's important that he (Johnny) keeps changing colours. This is a man of intelligence whose potential is being wasted. He is a man of ideas and passions and frustrations, and positives and negatives, therefore he has to be a character who constantly confuses and surprises us. (...) The journey that this guy is on continues, to nowhere – or to somewhere. (Mike Leigh, *Naked and other screenplays*, pg. xxxix, (First part – Interview) Faber and Faber Limited, London (1995).

Johnny bequeaths to the viewer a contrast, being himself an *art pendant*, the synthesis of cruel cordiality with a nonchalant intellectual discourse, the convenient lack of scruples with purposeless intent, and for this reason, he becomes memorable, an enthralling and inextricable philosophical skein.



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