

**COMMUNICATION FAILURE:
AN ANALYSIS OF MYSTIFICATION AND THE WRONG WAYS
OF COMMUNICATING GENOCIDE**

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Introduction

Communication is the main element of social life as it conveys thoughts and meanings from one group to another with the help of frequent signs. Communication should be perceived as a skill or a tool to control an audience. When you fail it the potential spectator will be already lost. In this process the ways of expression, choice of words and signs play a crucial role. Wrong or already common ways of delivering important ideas may have a negative impact on the overall understanding of the main topic. If the communicator has lack of enthusiasm, does not believe in what he/she says it means he/she does nothing to convince others of the message. In succession, enthusiasm arises when one understands the topic fully and can share gained experience and knowledge with others.

In the Armenian context, communication is very limited and dependent on the previous vision of the majority, which means that most Armenians tend to continue perceiving and sharing old experiences and points of view. Mystification happens the same way. In small communities like Yerevan, the vast majority of even intelligent people are used to justify old-fashioned ways of communication by saying that there is no need to change anything as everything works based on the old system. Their idea is “that it is just the way it was from the beginning of times”; very similar to Eagleton’s *Ideology: An Introduction* (1992), where the author states that humans’ subconscious mind protects itself by choosing the easiest explanations for the reality they face (*which in this case is that if something worked throughout decades, it must work now, therefore there is no need to question or doubt anything*).

Using film theory, books and articles about mystification, this study will analyze better ways of communication, concentrating mainly on Artavazd Peleshian's film *We* («*Մենք*»), which suggests fresh views on already common tools, signs and symbols representing The Armenian Genocide. In addition to it this paper will also present a short review and analysis on the film by Terry George *The Promise*, which tells a love story happening during the final years of the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian Genocide. These two films will serve a good compare-contrast for the examination of film language tools, which can either make communication very successful or make it useless.

This topic has a serious importance, not only for Armenians, but also for other small nations, which faced historical dramas like wars, genocides, strong earthquakes, etc. The reason why these kind of audience will be interested in such academic paper is that their stories must be communicated right and be heard by the rest of the world, so in result nothing similar will happen again (*like ongoing genocide and ignorance from other countries*). Therefore the further information will guide them to have better ways of communicating such dramatic historical facts increasing the probable propaganda to stop such kind of violence. Small nations like Armenians tend to lose patience and accept the reality as it is, while the reality is that everyone avoids listening to dramas, which happened many years ago. But the interesting thing is that most of the people start avoiding these kind of topics mostly because the communication of those fail.

Literature Review

A hidden component of communication is myth. For some people myths are fairy tales, which help to cope with real life. Myths have power and can influence reality (*even not having elements of reality in them*). In *Mythologies* (1972) Roland Barthes states, “myths are there to help us in creation of safe platforms for naturalizing exact kinds of worldviews; our points of views, which are different from others.” (p.36). There is an interesting connection between language and power. But those “fairy tales” cannot exist without external interference; it should be created by someone, as it has no life on its own naturally. Therefore, there should always occur some communicative elements. Thus, whenever created by humans it can be designed, re-designed, changed and finally destroyed. As film itself is also a language and has its unique kind of power, Barthes’ work speaks to the kind of myth, which will be analyzed further. In the introduction part it was mentioned that film language could help to communicate ideas in a more successful way.

In cinematography myths operate the same way as in social life, because they depend mainly on the context where they are created, exist and function. Accordingly, in case we change the context a bit we can also change the effect of myth, which is what I encourage to do in genocide communication with the help of movie language. As it has a fundamental role in creation of

various ideologies, it would be efficient to give extra meaning to them using signs and myths the right way in order to have successful communication.

For people interested in cinematography, it is obvious that in the context of films the most important step is the right usage of signs, symbols and their special meaning. It is the obligatory part of filmmaking. In case we talk about the Armenian Genocide communication we need to escape the previous perception of “that’s just the way it was from the beginning of times”. It is better to change the approach to the drama of nation (*in this case genocide, but can also be a war, a revolution, etc*). That is not only for the families whose members lived through the hell on Earth, but also for those who fought for the worldwide acceptance of truth/facts. That idea becomes acceptable while reading Eagleton’s book where he talks about literature and explores many possible relations among ideas, culture, actions, and power. It would be interesting and useful to analyze his statements concerning the complexity of ideologies, which are shaped by historical circumstances and tend to shape those, too.

Going back to efficient communication we can argue that lack of enthusiasm leads to a dramatic failure in communication, as when we stick to the idea of mystification (*being sure that everything is the way as it meant to be from medieval times*) obviously no positive change will take place. We want the world to accept our history as common knowledge, while we are failing to deliver our message right. Going out of comfort zone and trying to design fresh schemes or tools to tell our story is not an easy thing to do, while

there are professionals like A. Peleshian whose films introduce another vision on symbols associating with the Armenian Genocide. The art of new vision makes the audience forget the context in which they were used to see the common history of 1,5 million Armenians exterminated by Ottomans.

The Armenian Genocide is one of the crucial events in history and it needs better communication and delivery, therefore a more perfect chain of symbols and myths. Film is a great way of doing that. John Berger's book *Mystification and Reproduction of Art*, where he states that understanding of art is fundamental for those who want to understand the past, the history. He states that it also reflects us in the present. This idea will help to convey the truth about the drama of genocide, which has left in the past. It's time for a rebirth, the one that is strong, and the one that shows the power of this nation. Berger also says "An image is a sight which has been recreated and reproduced and the mystification is an attempt to prevent us from really seeing the image." With the help of films like Peleshian's *We*, we can follow Berger's point and avoid following the "learnt assumptions". Nothing and no one should put boundaries on what or whom to believe about certain events anymore.

Escaping stereotypes is the actual thing that should be done when skipping the mystification. In films there are people who do that without breaking the classic rules of the field. Peleshian himself is one of those who always breaks stereotypes and creates his own myths and symbols to believe in and admire. He will be the main focus for a great example of breaking the cliché. My work suggests escaping the old mystification and trying to conceive new points of views and fresh vision in order to be able to talk about genocide

with uncommon symbols. This wonderful director does something first and only then looks for an explanation. Maybe that is the best approach when you do not plan things you want the audience to convey, but start doing things you feel and only share the pure material you have got (because you were honest on the first place). That is how you escape the pre-formulated scheme of mystification, when you follow the

path, which was created for understanding certain meanings. Peleshian in his book named *My Cinema* (1988) says, “What people call my theory is actually nothing but my search for the meaning of what I do, for an explanation of the structure of the whole.” (p.54). Maybe Genocide communication needs to erase the old understanding of the “whole”. This became a recent question due to many reactions from interviews, which were taken during this research. Armenians of diaspora are fed up with the old perception of Armenian Genocide. They want to see a bright present and future for their kids to return back and avoid the constant propaganda of being victims of historical circumstances. Film is a perfect language to change this propaganda.

People create myths, but eventually myths control the ones who created them. This is a part of psychology, the tricks of our subconscious mind. For example, Freud states that mystification leads people to think and believe certain values without realizing they had no intention to in the first place. This is the kind of manipulation that existed and may exist always, but the thing is that in art (film) it may also be communicated in a right way and influence positively. Let us take the case of the Armenian Genocide, which

may be communicated by not only focusing only on the drama, but more on the bright future which we create today with new values and a positive vision.

This literature review aims to discuss several kinds of mystification concepts, understanding of ideologies and film theory including the psychology of images and symbols as a way of communication.

This study will further expand the range of approaches different from the accepted common in order to communicate about the Genocide through filmmaking (without using cliché symbols, phrases and images).

This topic was discussed very often, but an idea that genocide communication needs improvement and a radical change was not stated before. The aim of this paper is bring something new to this type of discussion based on findings of scholars. This research includes recent data and relevant information concerning the topic in order to meet the requirements of covering such important points of communication.

Statement of Central Research Question

The purpose of this study is to explore ways of escaping mystification in communication in order to have better ways of communicating the Armenian Genocide with the help of a new vision in films about that excerpt of Armenian history. The following study will focus on answering the research question, “How to escape mystification in communication and why it plays a crucial role in communicating the Armenian Genocide more efficiently?” This study’s goal is to bring attention to the importance of effective communication (*new vision on old signs*). Therefore, this research will be based on the analysis of film theory, the concept of mystification, efficient communication, the history of Armenian Genocide and recent reactions on the acceptance of genocide.

This paper might become an influential one due to its relevant topic for Armenia. As recently was released Terry George’s *The Promise*, movie about love story happening during the Armenian Genocide. The importance comes from the fact that it will be available everywhere around the globe due to its American context and the famous cast playing in the film. The fact that Azerbaijanis and Turks rated it with the lowest stars illustrated how strong these people were afraid of the influential language of film as a successful communication of the Armenian Genocide. The proof for it is that a thinking, intelligent homo sapiens would not rate something without seeing it. The rates were given before even the movie was released and available for large audiences. Therefore, this significant event should be counted as a fact that film language can communicate these kinds of ideas to big audiences and make a huge impact.

Methodology

The study has several steps of examination. Mainly it includes more detailed research and data collection. In further research it has more clear arguments supported by valid in-text citations. Despite using books and academic articles, this project includes the vision of professionals of the field (film directors, psychologists and sociologists) based on interviews with them.

The analysis of some scenes from Peleshian's film illustrating an exact rebirth and positive attitude toward future of Armenian families will be used and analyzed to state how exactly film language can communicate the Armenian Genocide in a better way than the common business of selling and spreading the idea of the flower called "Never forget" translated in Armenian as «Ամենուկ» does. Surely these kinds of events should never be forgotten, but at the same time should not stuck on the same dramatic note. Instead illustrate how worthy can be the fact of rebirth look.

A compare and contrast of two films outreach will help to reflect on what kinds of tools of film language are useful for successful communication and which ones are not.

Research Finding and Analysis

- **Myths and Film Language**

As mentioned previously in the paper myths are tightly connected to communication, therefore as film language is a type of communication it is also connected with mythology. Ronald Barthes in his *Mythologies(1972)* examines the thin line between language, myths, stereotypes, associations based on myths and power. *Mythologies(1972)* presents an idea that myths exist to help and time to time even design a platform for acclimating certain kinds of perceptions and worldviews. Film, being a communicative language itself has its special kind of power. Before turning our attention to film language, it is interesting to know that there is a parallel between myths and mystification. Barthes in his series of essays mentions social phenomena of giving certain mythical meaning to things such as the wine drinking process. In his examples Barthes examines the perception of Red Wine which is presented as French drink and is viewed as “the drink of the proletariat, partly because it is seen as blood-like (as in Holy Communion)”. The fact is that perception leaves in the shade the harmful effect of wine on health. The myth created around red wine states that it is “a life-giving and refreshing- 'in cold weather, it is associated with all the myths of becoming warm, and at the height of summer, with all the images of shade, with all things cool and sparkling.” (p. 60). Coming back to the myths created around the Armenian Genocide we see that it is perceived as an event, which destroyed the possible

bright future of Armenian nature and the fact that Armenians demand the acceptance of the fact from Turkey and the rest of the world means they are weak and want a revenge. The worst myth about Armenians concerning the genocide is that it is a small nation, incapable to protect itself and victimized throughout decades. This paper suggests escaping the myths our subconscious mind tends to accept and lay upon radical thinking. The crucial factor is that humans are the ones who create myths, which means they are in power of destroying or changing them. The symbols and signs of myths can change the whole myth, so the image of a victim should be replaced with an image of strong family and community. This point will be further discussed in detail concerning Peleshian's usage of images in certain scenes, when he succeeds in replacing old myths with new and powerful ones.

In the context of films the usage of signs is the most influential part of communicating ideas. They are giving unique meanings to each detail. Film theories are not only a literature to read, but also a solid guideline to follow in case we aim to deliver messages, which need better communication. Terry Eagleton (1991) in his *Ideology: An Introduction* refers to stereotypes and perceptions, which limit our actions by justifying them as tested during previous experiences. Which means that one follows certain "rules" without questioning why he/she does that way, just because it was set and done that way long before. In case of genocide, Armenians are used to the common perception of drama and victimizing and now without realizing the whole seriousness of wrong communication, they continue present themselves as victims. This fact will no longer help survivors to gain respect and receive

acceptance from others for the horrors that happened because of the Ottoman Empire.

Mystification, nearly the same as the concept of ideology, is defined by John Berger (1972) who in his work *Mystification and Reproduction of Art* refers to mystification as a “process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident.” Berger states that mystification should be prevented as it blocks the radical thinking about things the way they really are. He argues that the present time cannot be interpreted and improved in case we are not able to see the picture of the past events clearly. After reading this book we can assume that in case we could see the Armenian Genocide as something to learn from and not push on the repeat button, the mystification would be escaped and a successful communication of a history would take place right away.

The person who on the first place was not thinking about ideologies, myths and mystification created a movie, which escaped mystification of the Armenian Genocide and presented under a different light, which broke the stereotype of Armenians being a victim. A favorite Armenian film director Artavazd Peleshian in 1967 released an amazing and revolutionary film called *We*, which can be discussed as a guideline for successful film language usage, because it opens up new language of signs and symbols concerning genocide communication. It does not stick to the perception of dramatic events by showing the events the way they took place or were used to be presented before that. Instead of showing Tsitsernakaberd, dying people, blood and bones, he presented a scene where ships were stepping on Armenian land as freaks. They were making chaotic moves and stepping on rocks and sand the way Turks stepped on dying bodies and beating pregnant women on our own

territory. After Peleshian does not hurry to use common sentiments to make the audience cry or relate to human drama. He uses a very proud signature by showing a building with specific Armenian architectural design. The building with balconies having big traces reminding of war on them was facing the amazing view of Ararat. The mountain Ararat symbolizes power and independence, even though it is not on our land anymore, the scene shows Armenian families standing in their balconies with proud faces, realizing something awful happened, but the image represents their positive attitude towards future, hope and uniting power of small families which do not stick to drama, but try to build their on upon the past learned lessons.

The contrasting aspect is presented in movie by Terry George, which was released lately on April 27th, 2017 named *The Promise*. It made many critics all over the globe pay attention to the historical fact concerning the Armenian Genocide. The film language presents a very successful communication of genocide, but it has different reasons for this case. If in Peleshian's film we see classic escape of mystification, in the contrary *The Promise* does not change the common symbols, ways of communication or delivery system, but it succeeds, because film has American style, even it tells a story of Armenians, it also has an American context, which for the universal audience makes more sense, because the victimized side is always doubtful, but when other side presents their view, people see the perspective more clearly and try to believe to the message. The crucial factor plays also the fact that many famous actors were involved this time and people nowadays tend to follow the trend and watch movies where their favorite cast is featured. *The Promise* radically differs from *We* because it does not really escape from

mystification, but still, it proves that film language is a good way of genocide communication, because showing various images far from the accepted common is easier than saying words that were not said before. The problem with genocide communication itself is that it was communicated so long, that people are tired of listening to the same words over and over. That is especially why film language should be used effectively to deliver messages, which need to reach their recipients. These kind of historical events should never repeat again and communication is the crucial factor, which can make it so.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The first and the worst obstacle, which occurred during the research was the lack of aspiration to give interviews about this topic. So many patriots rejected my request to answer questions concerning the Armenian Genocide. To my question “why?” nearly everyone replied the same way saying, “There is no sense in discussing this drama, I am tired of hearing the same on and on. Armenian romanticizes the drama and continues to present themselves as victims. It does not feel right.” It will be useless to quote the semi-interviewees, because they were not eager to tell anything about their perception, but most of them were really excited to know that there will be an academic paper suggesting escaping the mystification and moving on to conquer new possibilities for this small nation.

The other obstacle of doing such a research was lack of reliable data and books about Peleshian, whose works must be discussed as ones, which can make genocide communication better.

For future research, my suggestion will be to collect numerical data on what Armenians of diaspora think about film language as an effective way of communicating genocide. I do hope that future research will not face the same low response rates as I did for this time. My work will serve as a short introduction and it intends to research is avoid the dead-end open up exciting possibilities for future research projects.

Annotated Bibliography

- **Barthes, R. (1972). Mythologies.**

Barthes states that myth cannot live without “ eternal interference, it should be created by someone as it has no life on its on naturally.” (p. 7) Therefore, there should always occur some communicative elements in all of these. It means that the same way myths were created, they can be changed or vanished at all by the one who have created them. In films myths are very dependent on the overall context where they were created and used to function. As in films - myth in history depends mainly on the context where it is created, exists and functions. Accordingly, in case we change the context a bit we can also change the effect of myth, which is what I encourage to do in

Genocide Communication with the help of movie language. As it has a fundamental role in creation of various ideologies. Myths using signs give extra meaning to them and it is crucial to use those signs and meanings the right way to have successful communication.

- **Eagleton, T. (1991). Ideology: An Introduction. NY: Verso.**

In the context of films it is important to use signs, symbols and give them special meaning. It is the obligatory part of filmmaking. In case we talk about the Armenian Genocide Communication. We need to escape the so-called “that’s just the way it was from the beginning of times” stated and analyzed in Eagleton’s book. We need to change the approach to the drama of nation. That is not only for the families whose members lived through the hell on Earth, but also for those who fought for the worldwide acceptance of truth/facts.

For that purpose, I will use some chapters from Eagleton’s book where he talks about literature and explores many possible relations among ideas, culture, actions, and power. I will analyze his statements concerning the complexity of ideologies, which are shaped by historical circumstances and tend to shape those, too.

- **Berger, J. (1972). Mystification and Reproduction of Art**

Armenian Genocide is one of the crucial events in history and it needs better communication and delivery, therefore perfect chain of symbols and myths. Film is a great way of doing so.

John Berger believes that understanding art is fundamental for those who want to understand the past, the history. He states that it also reflects us in the present. The thing is that the drama of Genocide has left in the past and it's time for a rebirth, the one that is strong, and the one that shows the strength of this nation. With the help of films like Peleshian's "We", the Berger's "learnt assumptions" should not tell us what to believe about certain events, anymore.

- **Peleshian, A. (1967). We**

Peleshian himself is one of those who always breaks stereotypes and creates his own myths and symbols to believe in and admire. He will be my main focus for a great example of killing/breaking the cliché. That is what I want us to do. To escape the old mystification and try to conceive new points of views and fresh vision in order to be able to talk about genocide with uncommon symbols. This wonderful director does something first and only

then looks for an explanation. Maybe that is the best approach when you do not plan things you want the audience to convey, but start doing things you feel and only share the pure material you have got (because you were honest on the first place). That is how you escape the pre-formulated scheme of mystification, when you follow the path, which was created for understanding certain meanings. Artavazd says. “What people call my theory is actually nothing but my search for the meaning of what I do, for an explanation of the structure of the whole.”

- **Thompson, M.G. (1996). Deception, Mystification,**

Trauma: Laing and Freud.

These texts will be used to support the idea by Freud, that mystification leads people to think and believe certain values without realizing they had no intention to on the first place. This is the kind of manipulation that existed and may exist always, but the thing is that in art (form: film) it may also be communicated in a right way and influence positively. For example: The Armenian Genocide may be communicated not only focusing only on the drama, but more on the bright future which we create today with new values and a positive vision.

All the ideas mentioned above will become more clear and concrete, when I will finish summarizing all the information I have read / am reading till this moment.

In short, my whole capstone will explain how the famous term “mystification” spoils Genocide Communication in films and art. For the research, there will be used not only online reliable sources, books and films, but also interviews from editors, physiologists, sociologists and filmmakers.

Appendices