“A Man With(out) a Face”: Stigma and Power in Cecile Pineda’s *Face*

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1. Introduction

Facial appearance plays a significant role in determining one’s relations to the world. As the most immediate, visible, and accessible part of the human body, the human face becomes the basis upon which a sense of social and individual identity is constructed. As Heather Laine Talley states in *Saving Face: Disfigurement and the Politics of Appearance* (2014), the face is “a powerful biosocial resource” informing “others about who we are” (13). Facial features have a physical, psychological and social importance that affect the whole human experience in interpersonal relations. Using Talley’s words again, facial appearance “determine[s] our status in social relations and systems of power. Its lines, colors, features, and adornment are all evidence upon which people are labeled, differentiated, and potentially stigmatized or celebrated” (13).

Just as a face plays a crucial role in constructing one’s identity socially and culturally, any form of facial disfigurement indicates a deviation from the normative expectations of society and poses a great risk to his/her mental health. In society where “so much seems to depend on appearing normal” (Talley 5), the set of widely shared values and norms provides the criteria by which an individual’s facial and bodily features are evaluated. This set of values and norms justifies the act of relegating people with “an undesired differentness from what we have anticipated” to the position of outsiders (Goffman 15). People with facial disfigurements, in fact with any kind of bodily disfigurement, are obliged to endure a set of discriminatory practices and negative attitudes, including fear and prejudice. In other words, the disdain for those who have features outside the norm often results in their stigmatization and exclusion from society.

To put it differently, when the physical or moral condition of the subject falls outside the standards of one’s social group, s/he is promptly stigmatized and excluded from
society. Stigma, therefore, stands for a method of distinguishing people according to their physical and/or moral characteristics. According to Erving Goffman, a stigma does not carry a negative value in itself; rather, it transforms into a mark of disgrace in social contacts and is closely associated with stereotypes formed by society (13). It can be argued, therefore, that the creation of stigma is largely pertinent to one’s social context. The individual is stigmatized and is therefore exposed to discriminatory attitudes due to his/her physical or moral characteristics according to the normative and restrictive expectations of the majority.

In this context, the changing nature of social relations with facial stigma reflects on “the culture of aversion” by Suzannah Biernoff, who originally coined the term to describe the “specifically visual” tension arising as a response to facially disfigured First World War veterans (56). To illustrate the negative perception and disapproval of facial injury, Biernoff notes that the culture of aversion denotes a “collective looking-away” from facial deformity (56). Although her conceptualization applies to the Great War context, a trans-cultural and trans-historical reading can allow for interpreting the facial injury in Cecile Pineda’s *Face* in line with Erving Goffman’s “stigma theory” and Michel Foucault’s formulations on power.

Distinguishing people from other members of society and classifying them as stigmatized on the basis of appearance is a complicated issue which also involves power relations. Power is the reason behind stigmatization. As Link and Phelan have pointed out, “for stigmatization to occur, power must be exercised” (363). The stigmatized are compelled to align themselves with those devalued identities designed by the norms of the society. In his analysis of power, Michel Foucault portrays a distinct form of power that differs from other classical power theories in its function and productivity. In lieu of a direct and undesirable force applied on human life from the top by various institutions, he defines a form of power which is “exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (*The History of Sexuality* 94). Consciously or not, individuals are all surrounded with this diffuse “omnipresence of power” since it is “produced from one moment to next, at every point, or rather in every relation in one point to another” (93). For Foucault, “[p]ower is everywhere” (93). In this sense, power acts through a system of norms that mediates reality and knowledge presented to individuals and reinforces conformity to socially constructed roles. As a result, the larger society or, to use Goffman’s phrasing, “the normal” situate(s) the stigmatized as “unworthy, incomplete and inferior” on the basis of shared normative expectations.

*Face* (1985) by Cecile Pineda is a novel which features Helio Cara who has to go through the experience of living with a severely distorted face after falling off a cliff. Losing his face after the tragic fall, Helio Cara’s unusual appearance causes him not only to have a painful recovery process but also to be ostracized by the community in which he lives. To put it another way, his physical recovery follows an incessant effort to heal his psychological wounds. Throughout his struggle, the majority negatively impacts his ability to heal from the trauma of his devastated life. Abandoned by his friends, girlfriend, and everyone else, he is sentenced to live as a stigmatized individual. In Pineda’s word, “he becomes a pariah, an outcast... his whole social context disappears. It is lost” (“Cecile Pineda at the San Francisco Library”).

Taking all these into account, it seems reasonable to put that facial disfigurement creates a “collective looking-away” that provides the base for stigmatization of facially
disfigured Helio Cara as it situates his face as the object of power exercise. In other words, the discriminatory treatment, including exclusion, avoidance, and intolerance towards a facially impaired individual is closely intertwined with the expectations of wider society. The adverse reactions of people constitute a major impediment to achieving a complete healing process for the individual as the living routine of the individual is restructured within the dynamics of culture of aversion and power.

8 Cara’s injured face becomes the object of medical, normalizing, and averted gaze, respectively. Although examining the stigmatization of a facially impaired individual is a conventional approach in treating the texts of similar themes, the reconstruction of the face by the disfigured himself exemplifies a rare response against the setbacks of facial injury. To revert his state of non-recognition and regain his vanished community membership, Cara finds an alternative solution to his desperation by constructing a face. Constructing a face will supposedly offer him emancipation from the normalizing demands of society and psychic recovery.

9 Despite Cara’s enormous endurance and perseverance in rebuilding a face for himself to resist the exclusionary practices of society, his initiative echoes the social dynamics that lead a facially injured individual into rebuilding a face for himself to regain his social existence. Starting from his rejection of the mask, an institutional and social imposition, Cara admirably persists in using his agency, largely overlooked by society, as a subject. His decision to reconstruct a new face proves his determination to survive and reclaim his former life. However, in the final analysis, the reader cannot be sure if Cara preserves his sanity. Cara’s access to his new face occurs through a traumatic alienation to his body as a result of his physical and emotional displacement. Although a new face confers recognition on him, it symbolizes the pervasiveness of power mechanisms that incite individuals to achieve conformity as the object of normative expectations.

2. Stigmatization of Helio Cara in Face

10 Published in 1985, Face is the debut novel of the Mexican American novelist and playwright Cecile Pineda whose works are often regarded as examples of socially conscious fiction. Face engenders a rich variety of interpretations and raises many issues concerning human experience through the human face (“Cecile Pineda at the San Francisco Library”). Regardless of her ethnic origin, Pineda resists the idea of identifying her text with the experiences of a particular group, including her own, asserting that the novel is “hors catégorie” (Pineda and Rocard, “Hors Catégorie” 592). In this respect, besides manifesting her immense sympathy for “the dispossessed and the disenfranchised,” Pineda’s work represents those groups in any community who have to live by standards against which they fall short (592). As Anne Connor also notes, Face narrates the story of “the suffering of those marginalized by society” (156).

11 The novel features the struggles of Helio Cara, a man in his early forties with a deformed face, who yearns to be (re)admitted to society. Living in a favela in Rio de Janerio as a journeyman barber Cara, upon hearing from his dying mother, sets out for the post office on a rainy spring day. On his way, he falls off a cliff and his face is severely injured. His new, distorted face causes him not only to suffer from having to live with a monstrous face but also he loses everything he has including his job, girlfriend, friends, acquaintances and ultimately his home. As S. Pattison writes,
“[p]eople whose faces do not ‘fit’ because of disfigurement, or because they do not have the same kind of facial expressions as others or who cannot facially interact in the same way as cultural ‘normals’ can easily find themselves living on the edge of social relations, even becoming non-persons” (8).

The government does not cover his expenses for the surgery. Without any financial help or insurance policy, Cara suffers from the disadvantage of having a disfigured face for a long time. For little prospect of gaining social acceptance, Helio Cara is obliged to wear a horrible mask made of rubber. When he finally gets opportunity to have plastic surgery, he discovers that his house had burned down. Moving into his dead mother’s house in the hinterlands, he decides to construct a (new) face by/for himself. He leads a hand-to-mouth existence for days to be able to purchase the medication necessary for self-surgery. He carries out seventeen different operations to repair his damaged face, and eventually succeeds in constructing a new face and identity for himself as a full-fledged human being.

Having its origins in the Greek practice of marking “a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person... to be avoided,” stigma is defined by Goffman as “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (9). Likewise, due to his severely deformed appearance after the accident, Helio Cara becomes a “discredited” man for he possesses a stigma which is visible, one that is immediately spotted by those who look at him (Goffman 14). The “visibility” of the stigma attribute is thus of primary importance in determining the way both normal and stigmatized individuals engage with one another. The nature of his social relations has to be redefined over his stigmatized identity. He is excluded from society and rejected by those around him.

Upon his release from the hospital, Cara realizes that the psychological and social impact of his injured face far outweigh the pain of his physical impairment. Goffman argues that the “normals” reserving themselves the right to interfere with the life-chances of stigmatized individuals, categorize and enforce stereotypes about them (15). On his arrival in Whale Back, Cara receives hatred and contempt from the townspeople which turns into a deliberate marginalization in time. He finds his shed ransacked and his bedding stolen. His plea for food and water is rejected by his neighbors who, with each passing day, drive him to despair with their callousness. Because of the unexpected change in his appearance, Cara’s presence disturbs people who either pay no attention to him or treat him in a dehumanizing manner:

It perplexes him more and more in the days following. But the most curious thing is meeting them, in the dusty alleys, between the corrugated tin, the tar paper. They begin not to recognize him.... ‘It’s me, Helio.’ He tries to say it: ‘It’s me. Helio.’ But no matter how he says it, they answer less and less. Their grunts of fading recognition give way to silence. He becomes as one invisible. Finally it seems to him they no longer even see him. (Pineda, Face 34)

Cara’s damaged appearance causes discomfort, anxiety and pain for those around him. Due to the lack of available rehabilitation and resources, he cannot get the public funding for facial reconstruction. Instead, Cara has been assigned a mask of rubber, a historical method implemented on the veterans of the First World War who returned from the war with wounded faces. To be able to “walk in public without shocking or provoking gawking,” the soldiers were issued sculpted masks (Meier). The mask Cara has to wear is “shapeless, rust-brown, like a balloon, punctured and inert” (35).
As a mechanism of “self-censorship,” the development of prosthetic masks in the simplest sense symbolizes the public reluctance to confront the horrors of war (Biernoff 56). At this point, the mask enforcement on facially disfigured war veterans is very much related to “the culture of aversion,” as Suzannah Biernoff terms it (59). Two significant components trigger “the collective looking-away” from the disfigured: The nonrepresentation of a disfigured face in the discourse of martyrdom, and yet the signifying power of facial disfigurement as the fragility of human nature due to the lingering fear of syphilitic disfigurement (59). In Cara’s case, it is seen that society’s response to the “monstrous” face occurs through the substitution of a plastic mask for the absent face and his social ostracism. In this sense, particular dynamics of “culture of aversion” remain valid.

Among the purposes of the masks, designated with “a humanitarian impulse” was to “ameliorate both the horrors of the war and the personal stigma of the mutilated face” (Biernoff 113). Moreover, adorning soldiers with masks seems to serve wartime propaganda in the press (96). Cara’s facial appearance troubles and scares people, and hence he is forced to wear a mask by those who position themselves as speaking from the perspective of wider society. In this sense, Cara’s mask functions to “preserve the privacy of their [his] deformities, and to spare the feelings of those near them, or who are forced to have dealings with them” (Goffman 29). Nevertheless, for Helio Cara, the mask is “worse than useless” and “probably makes things worse” (Pineda, Face 36). As Goffman points to the probable “desire to reject using it,” Cara refuses to wear the mask as it restrains his breath (115). Putting a white cotton handkerchief instead, Cara tries to rebuild his life and his social relationships behind a piece of cloth (Pineda, Face 8).

To put it differently, for the wearer, the mask intended to bring relief to his stigmatized face aggravates not only the severity of his emotional state but also reinforces his humiliation. The camouflage of facial injury with an artificial mask also corresponds to a misrecognition that disconnects him from his former self. As Connor notes, the mask may stand for “a false identity, or the identity imposed by an outside force... by the dominant society” (161). Moreover, Astrid M. Fellner argues that the mask “institutionalizes his face, obliterating any individuality by making him look anonymous. It defies personal recognition, denying the protagonist personal history” (66). Cara’s determinacy in rejecting the mask and his continual search for surgery instead of attending the rehabilitation programs exemplify his potency to diverge from what is presented as his only option.

Analyzing the public scorn of facially wounded soldiers, Marjorie Gehrhardt focuses on “their frequent comparison with inhuman, monster-like creatures” (109). Besides, drawing on Sander Gilman, Biernoff notes that facial injury is equated with “a loss of identity and humanity” unlike amputees (19). These kinds of parallelisms also bring to mind the relationship between “aesthetics and morality” as a reflection of classical thought in Western philosophy and the idea of “disease and deformity” as the visible manifestation of “sin and evil” (65). All these assumptions, however, contribute to “the original stigmatization of the ugly,” or the undesired (Synnott, “Part II” 56).

The degree of Cara’s facial disfigurement disrupts the very nature of his interpersonal relations; it affects the way others deal with his stigmatized status. As Goffman puts it, due to “being attached to a conception of what he[she] once was,” they fail to behave the stigmatized in a respectful and ethical manner (49). After the initial shock of their
first encounter at the barber shop where Cara’s boss and his apprentice “put up their hands in mock terror,” his boss, following a short silence, wants Cara to take his leave immediately (Pineda, *Face* 39). Caught unprepared by his boss’s decision, Cara insists on taking his job back for the sake of reversing the expectations about his stigmatized identity. However, when Cara “[d]eliberately” exposes his deformed face for a moment, his boss and his friends are confounded: “He lifts the handkerchief off his face. He watches the boss’ eyes narrow, sees them falter, hears the low whistle escape him. / ‘God!’ The boss turns away. / ‘it’s not’” (41).

David E. Johnson posits that the ellipsis at the end of the sentence can be completed in multiple ways. However, the most likely ending to his exclamation is “not human” (81). Despite the fact that the appearance has almost nothing to do with his quality of work in barbershop, the clients refuse to be shaved by him. The short probationary period in the barber shop ends in failure as he is shamed by his boss for not looking “confident” (40). Goffman explains the motives behind such discriminatory action towards the stigmatized as follows: “We normals develop conceptions, whether objectively grounded or not, as to the sphere of life-activity for which an individual’s particular stigma primarily disqualifies him[her]” (66-67).

His girlfriend Lula’s reaction to Cara’s disfigurement is also conditioned by prejudices against the facially stigmatized people. Though she initially looks as if she sympathizes with Cara’s distress and pain, Lula, who works as a waitress in a café, merely seeks to attain better prospects for the future by marrying Helio Cara. Recognizing that Cara can no longer realize her dreams since he loses his job, she cannot endure his presence saying, “everything is spoiled now” (Pineda, *Face* 62). She treats Helio like a “monster” to be avoided and refuse to sleep with him (62).

Lula’s emotional disengagement and distancing drive Cara to exert physical force. In a momentary loss of self-control, he beats and rapes her. Afterwards, Cara undergoes a reasoning process that echoes Synnott’s argument that “the face reflects the character of the individual” (“Part I” 608). Cara questions whether his intention to hurt Lula mirrors his personality. In a way, his public ugliness generates self-doubt about his personality:

He lies there a long time thinking himself awake. He remembers her face, the look of surprise when he hit her, her childlike disbelief. Why her? he wonders, why her, when it was the boss he should have hit? Had he saved it for her because women are weak, their softer flesh? Because she wouldn’t hit back? Had he hit her like that because he wanted someone to share in his ugliness? Because the monster he had become wanted company?.... Did a man’s face point to what he would become? Is he such a man now? (65)

The loss of his face and the insult and avoidance incidental to it causes Cara to internalize his stigmatization to a certain extent. To put it in another way, Cara’s stigmatization has a more traumatic effect on his self-conception than his disfigured face. Cara’s questioning himself about his moral character and self-concept could be interpreted as one of the effects of the psychological damage that leads him to doubt if “the face [really] reflects the character of the individual” (Synnott, “Part II” 608). On the other hand, his act of rape can be recognized as an outburst of his repressed, silent rage that emerges from the shame of rejection and the feeling of inadequacy. Although this inference is not to justify his disrespect towards Lula, the lack of compassion and connection that he deserves as a human being causes emotional vacillations about his self-concept. Consequently, the bizarre or sometimes repellent behaviors of the
stigmatized people are caused by social ostracism and bigotry rather than a distortion of their character.

25 In this sense, “the physical and psychological isolation” of Cara is another form of “collective looking-away” that reaffirms the social alienation of the stigmatized (Biernoff 57). When human life does not provide him with a place to live in Cara ends up being a “creature of the night” (Pineda, Face 73) and his living space is narrowed down to the underground in the outskirts of the city. As a result, he gradually begins to feel disconnected from the majority and finds an affinity with other living organisms in the dark:

In the city at sleep, in the deserted alleys, or in the Whale Back, he had come to know them, the creatures that roamed the night, parasites that fed, like himself, on the leavings of the day, of those not afraid to show their faces in the back alleys, or even streets. He had never imagined this underground when he had been one of them, the small mice and occasional rats he had come to discover, hunting like himself, some alone, or in packs, always on the move, some (like him) covering their traces, others leaving mounds of disorder to mark their passing. (74)

26 Under the cover of darkness, he wanders through the streets counting on the inoffensiveness of nighttime creatures. His motivation for survival causes him to be a part of the world of nocturnal animals and to alleviate his feelings of humiliation and loneliness. Underground, which is usually perceived as a hostile territory, provides a shelter for the stigmatized Cara with its promise of the comfort of darkness. Pineda’s description of Cara as the only participant of his kind in this realm also shows that he belongs to a category of being other than race, ethnicity, gender or class.

27 Examining the connection between stigma and self-worth in her “Social Stigma and Self-Esteem,” Jennifer Crocker argues that “the consequences of stigma are dependent on the immediate social context and the meaning of that context for the stigmatized person” (90). The feedback from our daily social interactions is a significant factor in the construction of a positive sense of self. From the viewpoint of wider society, no matter how s/he feels about oneself, the stigmatized individual is described as “someone set apart.” At this point, Cara’s facial injury turns inevitably into a serious threat to his “experience of the self” and causes a “lowered self-esteem” (Crocker 90).

28 However, as Synnott also acknowledges, “[p]rejudice and discrimination against the ugly are virtually a cultural norm” (“Part II” 56). Cara’s stigmatization results from a collective elision by society that focuses on eradicating differences which pose a threat to its homogeneity. Society does not show any consideration for his feelings or his potential as a human being. He is assessed by unexamined, culture-bound assumptions, regardless of what he feels: “It is not his face, this handkerchief. He knows it.... But the clerks at the windows, the armies of men standing in the endless lines of rehabilitation center, none of them know it. For them, he has always been like this” (37). Talley explains how disfigurement, notwithstanding its narrow definitions, leads to unjust behavior:

Disfigurement has no static intelligibility, no objective point of reference, no stable shared meaning. It is not a health status or condition clearly defined by... [n]or is there a shared collective understanding of what kinds of appearances might be deemed disfigured and what might simply be called unusual. Like ‘normal,’ which shifts historically and culturally, ‘disfigured’ is also rife with multiple meanings. Yet despite the term’s ambiguity and elasticity, it has very definite, deeply felt social reality. (15)
In Cara’s case, the plastic surgery, or “facial work” in Talley’s words, becomes “a vital intervention” (38). Apart from his exclusion, the continual attack on his life such as the burning of his house and the gunshot in the hinterlands makes his intervention lifesaving. After spending a great deal of effort to have free facial surgery, Cara achieves his goal. Teofilho Godoy, a doctor of plastic and reconstructive surgery, agrees to operate on him since he regards Cara as a “motivated, an excellent subject” to be studied (79).

Cara’s joy does not last long because his shack is burned to the ground on the same night. On the whole, this incident signifies the stigmatized individual’s decreasing chance of survival and his/her profound dependence upon the judgment of community members. Cara’s house is burned down for he is seen as “compromised, and somehow less than fully human” (Dovidio, Mayor and Crocker 3). He has been “smoked out” just like “vermin” (Pineda, Face 91). His friends and neighbors shut their doors on him and destroy his chance to have surgery.

Having no place to go, Cara moves to his deceased mother’s home in Rio das Pedras in the rural hinterland of Rio de Janeiro; a place he left at the age of eighteen. Returning to his hometown as a stigmatized person, Cara sets out to look for a job again to live but first returns empty-handed. Cara’s stigmatized face alarms people in the hinterlands and scares them away. The psychological, emotional and at times physical abuse owing to his stigmatized face leads him into a perpetual state of anxiety and the internalization of his stigmatized identity entails suspicion about his physical safety. All these play a significant role in his taking the biggest decision of his life: “He would make himself a face” (110). Finding a night-time irrigation job at the mansion of an established family for fifty cruzeiros per day he starts buying the surgical instruments to perform self-surgery.

As a stigmatized person, Helio Cara is automatically placed outside “a shared, socially maintained and determined conception of normal individual” (Thomson 31). His social identity which is “discredited” due to his disfigured face diminishes the quality of his interpersonal perception as it reduces his life-chances. He becomes a menace to be avoided and is forced out of his home by a fire. The continual attack on his reputation and well-being by the “normal” impels him to engage in self-fashioning and construct a face which is “made by him, by the wearer of it” (Pineda, Face 153).

3. Reconstructing Face as a Remedy for the “Averted” Gaze

Appearance hierarchizes individuals. However, the problem is primarily about the expectation of a compulsory conformity to “what is presented as natural, necessary, and normal... like the norm itself” (Taylor 46). Human beings are categorized within a system of norms and normality that includes the ways in which discourses and knowledge are produced and shape reality. Accordingly, normalization is the process which ultimately controls the behaviors and activities of the subject in line with the given norms. Moreover, through the strategy of normalization, power produces the truth about the subject, which essentially has a decisive function in detecting and labeling the normal and abnormal. Therefore, it would not be wrong to suggest that
normalization is actually a form of control mechanism of the power that promotes sameness and presents difference as a problem to be regulated/solved.

During the intense process of his search for surgery, Cara’s conversations with the employees and waiting in lines at doctors’ offices prompt him to ponder the notions of ugliness and normality. Being normal is something created through social interactions, just like stigma itself. However, from the viewpoint of the “normal,” and according to the norms of appearance, Cara is labeled “a monster,” an abnormal person with a disfigured face (62). There is a real change in the way people look, perceive and treat Cara after the accident. Within time, an “unremarkable” face thus turns into a precious commodity to be obtained by Cara to regain his humanity (Pineda, *Face* 71).

He becomes the subject of contempt and derision during the first process of medical treatment. As the most catastrophic injury of the surgery service, Cara’s face waits for two months to be seen: ‘‘Never has this service seen such an injury. Mr. Cara...’’ and the swallowed giggles of the medical students, standing at white starched attention, suppressing the whispering of their linen, ‘...such an injury’’ (24). The distress caused by his appearance among the staff is accompanied by the teasing of the medical students, as they speak in a tactless manner about Cara who is yet to understand the severity of his condition:

The patient (*ah, the patient, yes*), the patient is a thirty-six-year-old man of mixed birth (*ah, mixed, yes*), a barber by trade (*ah, by trade, yes*), who happened to descend the harbor stairs one too often (*ah, yes, the relieving joke)! Once too often. Never, never has the trauma service seen such an injury. A surgical nightmare. The face not simply (*ah, yes, ‘simply’*) unrecognizable…. A distressing sight, Gentlemen. But unfortunately it’s too early to see it today (*the immense sigh of relief*). (20)

During his stay in the hospital, he observes the mechanical routine of the medical students who explore, in Cara’s own words, “the exhibits” by “exclaiming or muttering in hushed voices” (19). His description of surgeons brings to mind Foucault’s notion of “medical gaze.” Tracing the history of modern medicine and the variations in medical practice between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Foucault coins the term “medical gaze” to explain the power of transforming the subject into an “object of knowledge,” by the physician. “Medical gaze,” therefore, is a method used by the physicians through which the subject is granted “the status of object” (*The Birth of the Clinic* XIV). As Hsuan L. Hsu and Martha Lincoln put forth, “[f]acilitated by medical technologies that frame and focus the physician’s optical grasp of the patient, the medical gaze abstracts the suffering person from her sociological context and reframes her as a “case” or a “condition”” (23). The changing nature of the options and the manners in the doctor-patient relationship leads the way to viewing the body as an object to be examined and results in objectification of the patient.

From a Foucauldian perspective, Cara’s identification of the patients as “the exhibits” denotes the objectification of human body: “And here we see... / And to the right we find... / In the next bed we have...” (Pineda, *Face* 19). Directed by “the commanding tone of the chief surgeon,” the students come to examine the injured part/s of each patient in turn: “And here we have the knee... the arm... the abdomen... the scrotum” (19).

Arranging his living routine and limiting his living space, power—or disciplinary power as a modality of power—restructures his daily routine. Without knowing, and having been labeled as stigmatized, Helio Cara is constituted “as effect and object of power, as
effect and object of knowledge” and expected to behave in accordance with this socially
given identity (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 192). In other words, he is ascribed a
stigmatized identity which inflicts a relative “truth on him” or his identity as
acknowledged by others (Foucault, “The Subject and Power” 781). As Foucault suggests,
power designates “an ensemble of actions which induce others and follow from one
another” (786). For example, his neighbors in Whale Back refuse to share their food
with him: “So it has been from that first knock, the first evening following his return to
Whale Back, without water, with nothing to eat. ‘Wait here.’ And sometimes, much
later, ‘She says we can’t,’ or ‘Sorry. Nothing, today’” (Pineda, *Face* 34). When he appears
at the door of his former workplace, the barber shop, his boss, his friends, and the
customers respond to his presence in the same way. Deliberately ignoring him, they all
pretend “as if they had seen nothing” (42).

39 Rejecting the mask and substituting it for a handkerchief to conceal his disfigured face,
Cara demands recognition from social aversion. However, it soon turns out that the
handkerchief causes him to be a man with an increasing feeling of shame. The link
between power and stigmatized face places Cara at the center of the normalizing gaze.
The white handkerchief sets visibility to him so that he is differentiated and judged
according to normative standards (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 184). At first sight, the
idea of surveillance seems to work in a reverse direction for Cara because meeting the
undesired, the supposedly normalizing gaze turns into the “averted gaze” upon
contact:

He boards the streetcar to the general hospital. With the handkerchief held in place
by the fedora, his hand on the brim, he vaults onto the outside runner as the car
begins to move.

…

The car rights itself. The straphangers to the right and left of him appear to look
elsewhere. They are too busy with their thoughts to notice him. He looks straight
ahead, turning neither right or left. He catches a furtive movement deep in the left
field of his vision. Turning, he trades a quick glance with the passenger at his
elbow. On contact, the gaze is broken. The passenger now appears to focus on
something at the far side of his view. The look passes quickly. Now looking, now
turning away. The gesture repeats itself. It has become the coin his personal
marketplace. (Pineda, *Face* 66)

40 Cara’s use of handkerchief functions as a means of self-protection (Fellner 66). Cara
chooses to wear it in order to keep himself aloof from the social sanction of his facial
injury and to preserve his self-worth. Besides, as a discredited person who is liable to
manage tension, Cara employs a white, cotton, and importantly, not a “linen”
handkerchief, which is the textile used for medical uniforms (Pineda, *Face* 7). The softer
texture of the cotton handkerchief compared to linen provides a space for Cara to
reconcile his stigmatized face and gives him a chance to deal with his feeling of
alienation in Whale Back where “the silence, the averted gaze have become a condition
of living” (36). As Fellner argues, “[t]he handkerchief provides a hiding space,
supposedly offering a protective shield from a society that has abjected him as the
other” (66).

41 A closer look, however, reveals that the normalizing gaze prompts Cara to be involved
in “a state of conscious and permanent visibility” which “assures the automatic
functioning of power” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201). His facial look outside the
standards compels him to stay away from everyday activities and restricts the circle of
his social networks. In that sense, surveillance, as an effect of disciplinary power,
objectifies Cara in his subjection to the normalizing gaze and eventually leads him to engage in a self-regulation process (188). In time, Cara learns to organize his daily routine in such a way as to distance himself from those who avoid looking at him and accelerates the process of having surgery.

42 From another perspective, it might be argued that the act of camouflaging his unrecognizable face with the handkerchief also reflects his subconscious tendency to act in accordance with the power that generates certain codes of conduct. In other words, being “caught up in a power situation,” Cara abstains from appearing bare-faced outside and acts as one of its “the bearers” (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 201). Moreover, he at least for a while, engages himself in proper actions, assimilating social mechanisms of power. Similarly, he spends most of his time in his shack and goes out at night to feed like a monster: “More and more, he takes refuge in the night, in darkness... before the sun is up” (34).

43 All these processes prepare him for the most compelling yet miraculous process that will mark the radical transformation of his life and his being. In the beginning, Cara comes to know the basic outline of the human face, exploring the intricate diagrams on the walls with great care and attention as if to discover the particular method of building a face: “They show the skin being peeled away to reveal an underground of nerve pathways and blood vessels. He stands examining these closely, absorbed in their design” (71). In the subsequent scenes, specifically in the one where he meets with T. Godoy, he looks at the panels to discover the essential features of facial reconstruction: “He begins slowly to read the words alongside the arrows, forming the syllables with his lips silently, under his breath. His decipherment is careful and plodding. Some words he repeats again and again until he supposes he has them right. Slowly he moves along the wall” (77).

44 Importantly, these scenes are blended with his memories of Cardoso, his first master who remains in Cara’s memory as a barber surgeon. Cara “remembers holding the basin for Cardoso once while he removed a cyst” and he deduces that “This [surgery] is much like he remembers, only more complicated” (77). His face becomes a means to regain control over his life. Similarly, his name Cara, apart from being a marker of his physical distinction, derives from the sun god in Greek mythology, Helios, known for “giving lights both to gods and men” (Smith 219).

45 Could someone ordinary like himself remake his face? Was it even possible? And what sort of face? Not the one he was born with, surely, or one like some hero or movie star. At best, one with just the minimum: a recognizable nose, a mouth with identifiable teeth, eyes whose expression would at the least be reassuring, a kind of utility face. And skin, skin free of the thousand little black particles still embedded in it, where the rocks had stamped him with the place-name of his calamity—skin that would glow normally, or if not glow, at least be free of distinguishing marks, a slate wiped clean. (Pineda, Face 133)

46 Cara’s exile to his mother’s home in the hinterlands gives him the opportunity to dig into his unconscious and brings him closer to the reality of his subjectivity. His return to his mother’s home is a return to a state of being before he became a subject of society. Returning empty-handed from his search for facial surgery, Cara decides to reconstruct his face by himself. He steals the book “Basics of Dermatologic Surgery” from the library and begins to study the anatomy of the face. He adds what he learns from the book to the knowledge he acquired from Cardoso and from the panels on the
waiting lines at the clinics (126). Soon after his extraordinary decision, he finds an irrigation job at a mansion and spends the scarce money he earns on buying the necessary equipment, such as procaine and suture thread. The average face he is going to make will enable him to fulfill his physical needs, such as appeasing his hunger.

47 Through a continuous and praiseworthy effort “[a]lmost every night... under the oil lamp” Cara operates on himself with the care and attention of a doctor (127). In his opinion, the pain he is subjected to by society far outweighs the pain of surgery. “Hunger, rage, despair” (130) do not prevent him from making a face which is “his, his alone” (153). Crucially, Cara manages to elude the identifications with which the symbolic bombards him through its discriminatory practices. The psychological and physical threats force him to make a resolution to find his way out of the dilemma inflicted on him by society. As Pineda expresses, “there are moments when punishment seems to yield some kind of beneficent transformation” (Biggers, “Pineda Unbound”).

48 In the final analysis, this transformation stems from a desire to turn the averted gaze into a normalizing gaze. Cara senses the invisible heaviness of power in his life. Leaving the disfigured individual in complete isolation, the emotional and mental pain of aversion overwhelms him to such an extent that he begins to search for a new face, a surgery that will give him back his former life. In the last scene where Cara takes a seat on the tram at the end of an exhausting day with his reconstructed face, he comes across his girlfriend Lula just like he had been dreaming of during the tedious reconstruction process. Though he is not sure whether the woman he sees is Lula, Cara cannot get her attention at first glance. Pineda does not reveal whether the woman Cara sees is really Lula or “a stranger” (Pineda, Face 153). Neither does she reveal the reaction of the woman.

4. Conclusion

49 Despite of all difficulties caused by those who put themselves in the relevant authority, Helio Cara finds his way out of all the suffering he is inflicted, by constructing a face for himself. He rejects having “the false recognition” the mask offers and attending to the rehabilitation programs as is advised by the government staff. In his case, facial impairment turns into a stigmatized health condition that he believes only to be reversed by having a new face. His striving for a “normal” appearance illustrates the destructive impact of stigma on Cara’s mental health. In the last scene where Cara takes a seat on the tram with his reconstructed face and comes across Lula, Pineda does not reveal whether he heals from his emotional wounds after the tedious process of reconstruction. However, it is clearly seen that his stigmatization affects Cara’s emotional well-being to an extent that he could no longer distinguish dream from reality since he is unsure whether the woman he sees is really Lula.

50 The principle cause of society’s inhumane treatment of Cara originates from a conventional understanding of normality without an objective basis. In other words, Cara is among those who are “condemned,” for he violates the socially enforced, unwritten rules through his injured face (Pineda, Face 22). It is in fact the totalizing aspect of power that decides on behalf of Cara whose deformed face is presented to be a huge obstacle in terms of the quality of his life. As a stigmatized subject, Helio Cara is a victim of a mentality conditioned by a set of expectations that are transformed into “ideals” and “standards” to which people are obliged to conform. With his disfigured
face, Helio Cara is viewed “disqualified” to continue his former life and is expected to act in accordance with his stigmatized identity with the effect of power exercised on the basis of his everyday relations. In this respect, his face becomes a field of power exercise in which the society somehow claims right to intervene.

His effort to have a proper face and strong determination in fabricating it can be regarded as an example of the human desire to retain basic human relations. He manages to dissociate himself from the discredited identity projected to him with his new face. On the other hand, his effort to return to normalcy essentially corresponds to implementing normative expectations and contributes to maintaining stigma-related prejudices. This approach ultimately leads to the objectification of the physically deformed individual who becomes the object of scorn and is ranked as a second-class citizen by society at large. His act does not erase the fragility of human relations regarding the value attributed to appearance. As Foucault suggests, normality itself is a totalizing exercise that punishes individuals to eradicate individual differences. From a Foucauldian perspective, Helio Cara becomes a “bearer” of power who “is caught up in his subjection.”

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NOTES

1. It might as well be argued that stigmatization of Cara is associated with his ethnicity related to Pineda’s Mexican background. However, since Pineda considers her work as “hors catégorie” and the faceless narrator’s experience is meant to represent the universal struggle of the marginalized, the suffering of these characters is not viewed from their ethnicities in this study.

2. An expression in French which means “beyond categorization.”

3. Internalization of stigma can also be studied through literature on shame and affect theory by Silvan Tomkins, Stephanie Arel and Sara Ahmed.
4. Helio’s last name, derives from the Portuguese word “face.”

ABSTRACTS

This study analyzes the social perception and changing nature of human relations with facial disfigurement on the example of the main character in Cecile Pineda’s *Face* (1985). Losing his face in a tragic accident, Helio Cara in *Face* is stigmatized and experiences social aversion from the majority who deem themselves to be “normal.” With his disfigured face, he is considered “disqualified” to continue his former life and is expected to act in accordance with his stigmatized identity and to yield to the effects of power that determine his everyday relations. In other words, Cara’s facial deformity determines his stigmatized social position as his living routine is restructured within the dynamics of the culture of aversion and power. A closer look, however, reveals that as a stigmatized subject, Helio Cara is actually a victim of a mentality conditioned by a set of expectations that are transformed into “ideals” and “standards” to which people should conform. In this respect, it is the stigmatized role imposed on him by the power relations rather than his disfigured face which negatively affects Cara’s physical and psychological health and causes him to be targeted by society.

Cecile Pineda, *Face*, aversion, power, stigma

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