

THE DEPICTION OF POWER RELATIONS IN *WISH* (2023) THROUGH FOUCAULDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Nur Gustiya Utama¹, Putri Ayienda Dinanti²

Universitas Dian Nusantara^{1,2}

e-mail: 311211052@mahasiswa.undira.ac.id¹, putri.ayienda.dinanti@dosen.undira.ac.id²

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi konsep relasi kuasa menurut Michel Foucault yang dipahami sebagai mekanisme yang tertanam dalam hubungan sosial, serta bagaimana konsep tersebut direpresentasikan dalam film *Wish* (2023). Film ini menampilkan sistem pengaturan perilaku dan pengawasan yang dijalankan oleh tokoh utama, King Magnifico. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi terhadap dialog dan adegan terpilih yang merepresentasikan dinamika kuasa dalam narasi. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa terdapat dua bentuk utama praktik kuasa: kuasa-pengetahuan dan kuasa disipliner. Kuasa-pengetahuan terlihat melalui kontrol atas informasi dan narasi yang membentuk persepsi warga terhadap harapan dan kenyataan. Sementara itu, kuasa disipliner tercermin dalam pengawasan, hukuman, dan pembentukan subjek yang patuh. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa bentuk kuasa dalam *Wish* tidak hanya bersifat represif, tetapi juga bekerja secara halus melalui proses normalisasi, internalisasi nilai, dan produksi wacana, sebagaimana dijelaskan oleh Foucault. Dengan demikian, film ini dapat dibaca sebagai representasi kontrol sosial modern yang bersifat menyeluruh, di mana dominasi berlangsung melalui struktur simbolik dan mekanisme pengawasan yang sistematis.

Kata Kunci: *Relasi Kuasa, Michel Foucault, Kekuasaan-Pengetahuan, Film*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore Michel Foucault's concept of power relations, understood as mechanisms embedded within social interactions, and how this concept is represented in the film *Wish* (2023). The film portrays a system of behavioral regulation and surveillance exercised by the main character, King Magnifico. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through observations of selected dialogues and scenes that reflect the dynamics of power in the narrative. The analysis reveals two primary forms of power practices: power-knowledge and disciplinary power. Power-knowledge is manifested through control over information and narratives that shape the citizens' perceptions of hope and reality. Meanwhile, disciplinary power is reflected in surveillance, punishment, and the formation of obedient subjects. The findings show that power in *Wish* is not merely repressive, but also operates subtly through processes of normalization, internalization of values, and discourse production, as described by Foucault. Thus, the film can be interpreted as a representation of modern social control, where domination occurs through symbolic structures and systematic surveillance mechanisms.

Keywords: *Power Relation, Michel Foucault, Power-Knowledge, Film*

INTRODUCTION

Film as a form of popular culture, has long served not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a powerful instrument for representing and shaping social structures and ideologies (Shehab, 2023). Disney's animated films, for example, often convey ideological narratives related to power, identity, and authority (Booker, 2020). In *The Lion King*, power is portrayed as hereditary and legitimized through royal lineage and divine right, while in *Zootopia*, the

metaphor of predator-prey relations is used to explore themes of systemic discrimination and inequality. These narratives demonstrate how films can reflect, reinforce, or critique dominant ideologies, making them valuable texts for examining power dynamics in society.

One of Disney's more recent animated films, *Wish* (2023), presents a captivating portrayal of power and control embodied by the character King Magnifico. As the ruler of the Kingdom of Rosas, Magnifico collects and stores the wishes of his people, granting only those he considers suitable while indefinitely suppressing others. This selective granting of wishes is not enforced through explicit repression but through a more subtle mechanism—controlling the discourse surrounding hope, dreams, and aspiration. By monopolizing the authority to decide which wishes are granted, Magnifico exerts ideological control, positioning himself as the moral and political arbiter of his community's existence.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Michel Foucault's concept of power. Foucault (1980) argues that power is not only repressive but also productive, it shapes subjects, discourses, and social practices. Power does not merely operate through force or coercion, but through the construction of knowledge, norms, and truths that individuals internalize and reproduce in everyday life (Abdurrozaq, 2024). Modern forms of power rely on surveillance, normalization, and disciplinary mechanisms that influence behavior without the need for visible force (Gaventa, 2003). This makes power more insidious, as it becomes embedded in everyday practices and accepted as common sense.

Building on this foundation, recent studies further demonstrate the actual application of the Foucauldian concept of power in a modern context. Capodivacca and Giacomini (2024) highlight how disciplinary power is now transforming into digital surveillance: the personalization of user experiences through microtargeting data collection creates subtle controls that regulate behavior in almost invisible ways, further reinforcing the relevance of Foucault's notion of productive power in the contemporary information society. Furthermore, Villadsen (2024) explores the evolving concept of subjectivation in his essay "The Subject and Power" – Four Decades Later, reinforcing the view that individuals are not only constructed by power structures but also reproduce themselves as docile subjects through the internalization of social values and norms. This research intends to examine the depiction of power relations in *Wish* (2023) through the perspective of Michel Foucault's theory of power. It focuses on how power is constructed and maintained by King Magnifico within the dialogues and scenes in the film. Through this analysis, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary media shape and reflect dominant ideologies related to power and authority.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach as its primary research design. A descriptive qualitative approach is a method that seeks to systematically, factually, and accurately describe the characteristics of a particular phenomenon or social symptom based on non-numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Rather than relying on statistical or quantifiable metrics, this approach emphasizes in-depth interpretation and contextual understanding of the subject under study. The primary data source for this research is the animated film *Wish* (2023), with a particular focus on how the narrative represents dominant power relations and the mechanisms through which that power is maintained and legitimized. The data consist of selected scenes, dialogues, and character actions that reflect power dynamics in line with Foucauldian theory.

The analytical process consists of four main stages. First, the researcher conducts data collection by watching the film multiple times and identifying relevant segments that portray elements of power. Second, the data are categorized into key thematic areas aligned with Michel

Foucault's theoretical framework—specifically the concepts of power, knowledge production, and disciplinary mechanisms. Third, each theme is critically analyzed to uncover how these elements manifest in the film and reflect broader socio-political structures. Finally, conclusions are drawn regarding the ways in which *Wish* illustrates the operation of systematic power, surveillance, and normalization, consistent with Foucault's theory of modern power.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Power or Knowledge as the Foundation of Power Relations

The concept of power-knowledge emphasizes that power and knowledge shape and strengthen each other (Foucault, 1980). In *Wish*, King Magnifico uses knowledge as a tool of power while simultaneously monopolizing truth through official narratives. Within this framework, Foucault presents the concept of episteme, which denotes the arrangement of knowledge dominant in a specific period and influences individuals' thinking (Foucault, 1980). In the film, the *episteme* created by Magnifico claims that only the ruler can achieve hope, not the individual. This establishes the foundation for a discursive control that renders individuals passive and reliant on authority. Recent scholarship supports this understanding: Nwadinihu (2025) argues that discursive practices construct regimes of truth such that certain statements are validated as knowledge while others are disqualified, demonstrating how institutional power shapes what counts as truth within a specific episteme. This mirrors Magnifico's control over official narratives that exclude alternative perspectives as invalid or false.

Knowledge as a Strategy of Power

In *Wish* (2023), King Magnifico uses knowledge as a means to reinforce his authority and keep control over the people. He does not merely act as a political ruler but also as the sole arbiter of truth. A clear example of how he weaponizes knowledge can be seen when King Magnifico tells Asha "I decide what everyone deserves." This statement reflects how he manipulates information to determine people's fates, reinforcing his dominance over their hopes and lives.



Figure 1. *Magnifico's statement to Asha (minute 00:20:48)*

This remark reveals how King Magnifico places himself as the ultimate judge of whose hopes matter. He draws the line between what is considered valuable and what is not, essentially creating and controlling the accepted "truth" within Rosas society (Foucault, 1980). Furthermore, King Magnifico declares that Saba's wish is a dangerous one, as reflected in his conversation with Asha between minute 00:19:01 and 00:19:54.

King Magnifico : "It's a beautiful wish. Beautiful. Mm, but unfortunately it's too dangerous"
Asha : "Dangerous?"

King Magnifico : “Your Saba long to create something to inspire the next generation. Great wish but too vague. Create what? A rebellious mob, perhaps? To inspire them to... To do what? Uh, destroy Rosas, maybe?”

By framing the wish as a threat, King Magnifico sets up a clear divide between what he considers “good” wishes and those he deems “dangerous.” This not only fuels fear among the people but also shapes the belief that certain desires are harmful to the kingdom’s order. Such a tactic reflects Foucault’s idea of the *regime of truth*—a system where those in power construct knowledge that justifies their control and suppresses individuals or groups labeled as deviant (Foucault, 1980). This narrative of control is strengthened later in the film when Magnifico asserts ownership over the people’s aspirations. At minute 01:16:01, he declares, “Their wishes are mine,” during the moment when Star tries to free the stolen wishes. Rather than allowing them to be returned, Magnifico absorbs their power for himself, further consolidating his authority.

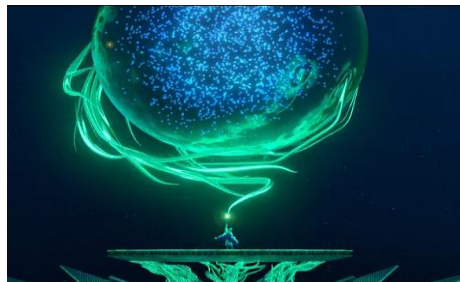


Figure 2. *Magnifico declares that the wish belongs to him (minute 01:16:01)*

By seizing the wishes, King Magnifico does more than take away people’s dreams and he also takes control over their meaning. When he declares that the wishes belong to him, it is not merely a physical act of confiscation but also a symbolic one. He removes individuals’ ability to define and pursue their own hopes, placing himself as the sole authority in interpreting and managing them. This shift of agency from the people to the ruler, illustrates how he constructs and imposes a system of knowledge in which only his perspective is valid (Foucault, 1980). In doing so, Magnifico is not only exercising political power, but also shaping the very framework of truth that sustains his domination. Recent Foucauldian discourse analysis research reinforces this insight: Khan and MacEachen (2021) emphasize that dominant discourses produce regimes of truth that determine which statements are validated as knowledge and which are silenced, underscoring how Magnifico’s symbolic confiscation molds subjects’ reality and limits their capacity for dissent.

The Practice of Manipulation through Power and Knowledge

According to Foucault, modern power operates in subtle ways by shaping how individuals think and act through the creation of discourses and truths that seem natural and unquestionable (Foucault, 1980). Rather than using direct coercion, power works by influencing collective perception, making certain ways of thinking appear as common sense. Through the control of media, traditions, narratives, and institutions, those in authority can construct a version of reality that aligns with their interests.

This process gives rise to what Foucault terms a *regime of truth*—a system in which particular ideas are accepted as truth because they are produced and reinforced by power.

Instead of forcing obedience, this kind of power encourages individuals to internalize and uphold existing structures willingly. In the film *Wish* (2023), this can be seen in how King Magnifico uses grand stories and visuals to present his rule as protective and benevolent, while in reality, it serves to maintain his control over the people.

Manipulation Through ‘Magic’ as a Political Performance

The manipulation of public perception through magic as a form of political performance is a key strategy used by the ruler in *Wish* to reinforce his power. According to Foucault (1977), power is not exercised solely through physical force but also through symbolic practices that create and reinforce the legitimacy of authority.



Figure 3. *Magnifico show his magic (minute 00:21:12)*

At minute 00:21:12, King Magnifico is shown displaying his magical powers during a formal ceremony, using the occasion to impress the people and strengthen his image as their protector. His control over magic and its presentation in public rituals creates an illusion of order and safety that appears achievable only through his rule. These performances serve not merely as entertainment, but as a strategic display that reinforces his status as the only one worthy of such power. By astonishing the public with grand, choreographed magic, he fosters admiration and dependency, leading the people to see him as essential to their prosperity and security. As a result, the ruler secures the people's obedience not through direct coercion, but through their belief that without his presence and magical abilities, prosperity or safety would be unattainable. Recent research in political discourse and social media underscores how symbolic performances work as persuasive strategies to construct and sustain authority: Suwarni et al. (2023) identify that carefully staged language and imagery in political campaigns deliberately evoke emotional responses and reinforce ideological frameworks, which parallel how Magnifico's magical spectacle operates as symbolic persuasion to shape collective belief systems.

Manipulation Through ‘Wishes’ as Social Control

Beyond his use of magic, King Magnifico's control over the wish-granting process becomes a powerful tool for shaping public perception. Personal wishes, which represent individual dreams and desires, are transformed into mechanisms of governance under his authority. As Foucault (1980) argues, modern power functions not merely through repression, but through the management of life itself—particularly by influencing human desires and the formation of subjectivity. By determining which wishes deserve to be granted, Magnifico subtly governs the hopes of his citizens and establishes himself as the sole authority capable of shaping their future.



Figure 4. The people surrender their wishes (minute 00:21:45)

The citizens willingly surrender their wishes to King Magnifico, and he declares, *“You’re going to be happy here, I promise you. And now make a wish and hold it in your heart.”* (minute 00:21:38). This statement reinforces the idea that he is a benevolent ruler. However, the hidden storage room filled with thousands of ungranted wishes reveals a starkly different reality: a mass of suppressed potential, controlled under the guise of protection.



Figure 5. The wishes that will never be granted (minute 00:21:45)

Kusuma (2023) explains that this selective approval mechanism functions to normalize certain behaviors while marginalizing others, ensuring that only state-sanctioned desires are legitimized. Magnifico further manipulates perception by constructing a binary opposition between “safe” and “dangerous” wishes, as illustrated in his conversation with Asha at minute 00:19:46.

Asha	: “My Saba would never do anything to hurt anyone”
King Magnifico	: “You think that?”
Asha	: “I know that”
King Magnifico	: “Well, you’re young. You don’t know anything, really. Where’s it my responsibility to only grant the wishes I am sure are good for Rosas”

By portraying ungranted wishes as potential threats to social harmony, King Magnifico legitimizes his exclusive control over hope and discourages any form of resistance. This reflects Foucault’s concept of power as something that operates through the construction of truth—Magnifico defines which wishes are acceptable and which are dangerous, thereby shaping the collective imagination of his people (Foucault, 1980). He maintains a seemingly perfect society where people’s desires are subject to his authority. Through this manipulation of the wish system, the film reveals how desire, control, and governance are closely linked, echoing

Foucault's view that power does not merely restrict but also shapes and directs aspirations to serve political purposes.

Disciplinary Power as a Mechanism of Surveillance

The concept of disciplinary power, as proposed by Foucault (1977), illustrates that modern power no longer relies on physical violence or overt coercion, but operates through mechanisms of surveillance, normalization, and the regulation of behavior embedded within institutions and everyday practices. This type of power produces obedient individuals not through fear, but through the internalization of rules and social expectations shaped by the power structure itself. In *Wish* (2023), King Magnifico exercises this kind of power by establishing a social order that oversees and guides the lives of Rosas's citizens—an order that is accepted and followed not out of compulsion, but because it appears natural and unquestioned.

Surveillance System

In Michel Foucault's theory, surveillance is a central component of disciplinary power, a form of power that does not rely on physical coercion but operates through the systematic control of individual behavior. In the context of the film *Wish* (2023), the surveillance system is established through regulations and policies that instill a constant sense of being watched. One prominent example is the restriction on the use of magic, which is exclusively reserved for King Magnifico. This is depicted in the scene where King Magnifico delivers a speech at minute 00:45:35, expressing suspicion about the presence of magic that does not originate from him.



Figure 6. King Magnifico giving a speech (minute 00:45:35)

King Magnifico : "I know you are all wondering about that little light last night. A light that I didn't command or condone! It was magic, quite clumsy and amateurish. It was also completely forbidden. There is a traitor amongst us who defied the law...."

King Magnifico's policy renders magic a privilege reserved solely for himself, turning it into a symbol of exclusive authority. Any use of magic beyond his control is treated as a threat, thereby eliminating potential sources of resistance. His power extends beyond observable behavior, reaching into the realm of individual potential and imagination. By restricting magical ability, he prevents the rise of alternative powers that could challenge his rule. As Foucault (1977) explains, disciplinary power functions by establishing norms that individuals internalize. When the people come to believe that only the King has the right to use magic, they no longer question the restriction—instead, they accept it as natural, often perceiving themselves as unworthy or incapable of such power.

This internalized obedience exemplifies what Foucault describes through the concept of the *panopticon*—a model of surveillance where people behave as if they are constantly being watched, even when no one is observing them (Rajkhowa, 2024). In *Wish* (2023), this effect is clearly seen as the people of Rosas begin to regulate not only their own actions but also those of others. The fear of punishment or suspicion leads them to avoid behavior that might be seen as defiant, creating a culture of self-discipline and mutual surveillance. Through this mechanism, King Magnifico maintains control not by constant enforcement, but by fostering a psychological environment where conformity is produced from within.

Normalization and the Standardization of Citizen Behavior

Normalization is the process through which certain behaviors are established as standards or norms, while others are positioned as deviations that must be corrected or eliminated. A scene at minute 00:43:27 shows Sabo reacting fearfully upon seeing Star, a character believed to possess magical power. This is due to the fact that magic is forbidden to anyone except the King.

Sabo : “Am I the only one who realizes this is gonna end very badly?”

Asha : “No, if everyone keeps quiet about star”

Sabo : “Magic is forbidden by anyone other than magnifico, who is also the only one authorized to grant wishes”

This scene demonstrates how the rules imposed by King Magnifico have become deeply embedded in the everyday behavior of the citizens. They understand that magic is forbidden to everyone except the King, and they follow this rule not because they are forced to, but because they have accepted it as part of their social reality. This reflects Foucault’s (1980) idea that power functions by producing and circulating values that society eventually embraces as truth. As a result, obedience stems not only from fear, but from a shared belief in norms that have been shaped by those in power and internalized by the people as natural and unquestionable.

The outcome is a society in which individual dreams are subdued in order to maintain the stability defined by the ruler. Anyone who challenges the system such as Asha is immediately labeled a threat to the existing order. This highlights how disciplinary power not only influences how people act but also defines how they are perceived (Idris, 2024). Those who conform are seen as “good,” while those who resist are cast as “bad” or dangerous. In this way, the standards set by King Magnifico become the moral compass for the entire society, allowing him to determine who belongs and who does not, who is considered valuable and who is not based on their alignment with the norms he has established.

Internalization of Surveillance and Voluntary Obedience

The most powerful aspect of disciplinary power is its ability to make individuals regulate themselves without needing constant external supervision. In *Wish* (2023), the people of Rosas have become accustomed to living under King Magnifico’s rule, where he holds authority over their dreams. Over time, they stop questioning his control and accepting it as normal. According to Foucault (1980), modern power creates individuals who “govern themselves” because they feel compelled to align with the norms imposed upon them. This internalized conformity is evident in the scene at minute 00:23:30, where Asha speaks with her mother, Sakina, and her grandfather, Saba. Their words reflect a deep-seated trust in Magnifico, showing how his authority has been normalized across generations and woven into the private beliefs of the citizens.

Saba : “My wish is dangerous?”
Asha : “No. That’s the thing. I don’t think it is at all
Sakina : “You saw it?”
Asha : “I did. And you should know what it is”
Saba : “No. No. Don’t say anything”
Asha : “But it’s so beautiful”
Saba : “Well, clearly Magnifico feels otherwise, so...”

Saba chooses not to know the dream he gave to King Magnifico because he believes the King’s judgment is best. There is no coercion in Saba’s actions; rather, it is done voluntarily and in full awareness that he entrusts what he has to the ruler. This reflects an invisible yet powerful form of domination, one that has become part of the collective mindset. The people do not realize they are living within an oppressive structure, because power has disguised itself as value, tradition, and norm. As Veva (2019) said, this form of power is far more potent than coercive power because it generates obedience without resistance.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the power relation in *Wish* (2023) using Michel Foucault’s theory of power. The findings show that King Magnifico exercises power not through physical force, but through ideological control by regulating knowledge and enforcing surveillance. Power is presented as subtle yet deeply embedded in daily life, legitimized through discourse and normalized by the people. *Wish* (2023) illustrates how modern power operates. The film reflects real-world power relations and emphasizes the importance of critical awareness and agency in confronting ideological control.

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