

Research Practices L5

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Research Practices L5: Sound And Moving Image

“Escaping Reality” by Jean Patterson

Introduction

In this dissertation proposal I will be exploring how and why a screenwriter teleports the audience into their story, why so many people want to escape the real world and what effects this can have on people.

Escapism

“Escapism, I will argue, is human-and inescapable. There is nothing wrong with escape as such. What makes it suspect is the goal, which can be quite unreal. And what is wrong with the un-real, with wild fantasy? Nothing, I would say, so long as it remains a passing mood, a temporary escape, a brief mental experiment with possibility.” 1.1

I believe that escapism is a vital part of human nature, it allows people to escape from their everyday lives and be transported into incredibly diverse worlds and situations that they may never have got to experience in the real world. Whether people use films, books or simply their imagination to do this. It doesn't matter if it all adds up to the same thing, that out of world or body experience. I believe, we as humans have this ingrained into us from birth, you see children playing with sticks, rocks, water and a wide range of different everyday objects that make up our environment and dismiss it but the children can be imagining something completely different to what you see. A stick can be a sword, a wand or a priceless artifact in the hands of that child, who's created a new reality to the one they know, all with nothing but their imagination.

And I don't think we lose this as we grow older, we simply use different methods of creating or experiencing the different worlds. Creating our own worlds through drawing, painting, writing or using films and books to immerse ourselves in a universe created by other people, I myself have grown up reading countless books alone in my room which might seem sad to some people but the difference was that I wasn't in that room, I wasn't even apart of this reality. I was battling in the forests of Narnia, defending my home on the battlefield of Orynth, playing with my direwolf in the courtyard of Winterfell and anywhere else I wanted to go. It was a way to escape from my reality into a reality filled with magic, warriors, monsters, heroes and fairytales.

Just this week I walked out of a cinema in my hometown with hundreds of people I didn't know and yet we were all in that same universe that had been created for our entertainment. Most of us were crying, laughing or simply standing their shocked because it was the end of something that we'd used to escape from our everyday lives for over ten years, it gave us a world where we could believe that extraordinary heroes exist.

Escapism is also a great way for overactive minds to find moments of peace, I know a lot of people with ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) that use games as a way to keep their minds from drifting or racing a mile a minute. And they can also use the games to distract themselves in

moments of boredom, stopping the person from making impulsive decisions, which is one of the most common symptoms of ADHD.

Using escapism is a way of trying to make negative feelings/thoughts disappear or lessen, without working through the problems you are facing which have lead you to escapism. It's basically a quick fix, a way of letting your brain "Step into another room" for want of a better phrase, allowing the person to forget their problems and the world around them.

"My desire to become a filmmaker began when I was eight years old and I saw the 1933 King Kong on TV. It's still my favorite film, and I love it because it's a wonderful piece of fantastic cinema that does everything a fantasy film should do: transports me out of the real world, shows me things, amazing and exciting things that I know I'm never going to experience in real life, and locations that I'm never going to go to. I've always had a desire to make a film like that." 1.2

But with the good, there also comes the bad. Yes, there is nothing wrong with escaping reality for a few hours but when people do it for so long and repeatedly, they begin to mistake fantasy with reality or they become so engrossed with the fantasy that they forget that their actions can affect the people around them.

"When we have an aspect of our lives which we want to escape from, with enough repetition we come to view ourselves as a totally separate entity from the one that had negative traits or circumstances. This partial destruction of self and dissociation are common.

When we escape we may be trying to avoid spending time with ourselves. Escapism can be the opposite of mindfulness. Escapism allows us to numb ourselves to a reality we may not want to accept. This way we can avoid feelings of emotional pain." 1.3

I believe escapism is good in a lot of ways but also too much of it can cause a lot of problems, such as break downs of relationships, trouble at work or even cut you off from the world around you so much so that you distance yourself from friends or family that could help you to experience the highlights of your own reality.

Often people that excessively use escapism to escape their own reality are hiding from issues or problems in their own lives. People who do this are often frustrated with their jobs or tired of seeing the bleak news in today's world of death, abuse and corruption. But in trying to escape these issues they are only putting them off until they eventually have to come back down to Earth and face them, often creating more problems or make the ones they are already struggling with worse.

Also some people create a world in their minds so believable that they abandon reality altogether, such as serial killer "Ted Bundy", who managed to separate himself so entirely from his reality that he was able to lead two separate lives, one who portrayed a charismatic, charming young man to the people around him and another part of himself that preyed on an estimated thirty innocent

young women, raping and killing them, before going back home to his girlfriend as if nothing had happened.

Hero's Journey

"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." 2.1

The hero's journey, is the story or myth that involves a hero who goes on an adventure and then comes home changed or transformed. We see these stories in everyday life from films, books, poetry and even our reality, we see soldiers coming home from war everyday changed. Some having experienced horrors so damaging that they can't physically or mentally function in normal society. They have been changed so drastically by their experiences and trials that they no longer resemble the person that first set off on their journey.

Even these damaged war heroes stories are used in film and books. Because the audience can easily sympathise and connect to their story. Their journey and countless stories have been created to showcase these struggles as it is such a compelling journey of love, lose, honor, betrayal, freedom and war. And in doing this it gives normal people an idea of what soldiers have to go through each day and lets them imagine themselves as a hero. I'm sure we've all done it, watched a film or read a book that immerses us so far into that world that we start to imagine ourselves as a part of the story too, I do it all the time while reading. I imagine and dream that I can wield a sword against an army despite impossible odds, instill hope to a nation of people to rise up against a tyrant, shoot an arrow hundreds of yards to save a friend, fly on the back of a dragon or even be a dragon. All these different things I will never do but even getting the chance to imagine it, is easily enough.

Someone who puts these events into a more structured layout for screenwriting is Joseph Campbell who focuses on the many similarities between cultural myths and religious stories. His studies resulted in what's called the monomyth. The monomyth is a universal story structure. It's a story template that takes a character through a sequence of stages throughout the story, beginning, middle and end.

He starts his story structure with "The Ordinary World", the starting point of the main character, where they are immersed in the ordinary world with no idea as to anything else around them. For example, Elena from "The Vampire Diaries" being an ordinary human surrounded by supernatural beings and being completely unaware of any of it, simply living her life, going to school and being human.

Then comes the "Call to Adventure", the inevitable call to the main character to transition from the ordinary world to the extraordinary world. This change is always fraught with fear, danger and the possibility of death, but also the possibility of great happiness at the end of the journey. The main

character must make a decision to either stay within the ordinary world's illusion of security or take that leap into adventure.

Throughout the adventure, the main character will face many trials, friends or foes who each in their own way will either try to stop the journey or try to move it along. The friends and foes can come in all shapes and sizes, most often than not the foes will be the people least expected to be against the hero or the person who the hero will be the most devastated to be betrayed by.

In most hero's journeys they will have at an early stage the counsel and advice from a wise presence. A father/mother figure who knows where the adventure will lead, the trials the hero will face and gives advice on how the hero may overcome these obstacles. For example, Brom from "Eragon" takes Eragon under his wing in order to teach him how to be and survive being a dragon rider like he was.

The next part of the journey is the entering into the villain's lair, putting the hero at significant physical or psychological risk. This part of the story is where the hero gets close to their goal but is just out of reach.

This is the moment the hero experiences a great moment of despair, when all hope appears lost. They must find that last piece of strength within them to overcome the great evil and save their friends, family or even the world.

At this moment in the story, the hero has defeated the enemy and receives the prize that started this entire journey, this causes the hero to undergo a transformation, that transformation can be either spiritual or physical. Making them see just how far they've come from the first days of their journey.

On the final leg of the journey the hero will still have to face unresolved issues on their journey back to the ordinary world.

The final piece of the story is the champion's return, the hero must pass one more test in order to fully accept their growth throughout the journey. The hero can become at one with both the ordinary and the extraordinary world. They are no longer so immersed in the ordinary world that everything else around them is missed, they have evolved and adapted to be able to survive in this new world of in between ordinary and extraordinary. 2.2

Storyworld

"The story world isn't a copy of life as it is. It's life as human beings imagine it could be. It is human life condensed and heightened so that the audience can gain a better understanding of how life itself works." 3.1

The term "storyworld" is used to describe the "universe" within which a film, tv shows, game or comic is set.

Wonderland, Narnia, Middle Earth, Neverland, Hogwarts, Asgard, Orynth and Westeros, are just a few notable storyworlds that have been created with such attention to detail, storybuilding and character building that these universes come alive in our minds. And because of this people still love and discuss them years after they were created, they made remakes of them to try and keep the storyworld alive in the minds of their audience and it does. The audience will rewatch or reread them over and over again and never get tired of it.

All of these fictional places, worlds or universes have become real in the minds and hearts of their millions of viewers or readers. These storyworlds were created to entertain people and that's what they've done but in doing it so well, they created a generation of people who dream. People who dream of these places and wish with everything they have for them to be real, because who doesn't want to live in a world with kickass heroes, dinosaurs and the vastness of space to explore. It's all a pretty escape from our everyday lives, to imagine and to dream.

For screenwriters the storyworld of their story is the first thing they develop even before characters, plot or even dialogue. They have to determine how their world came into existence, what it looks like, what the weather is like, who lives on this world, what do they look like, what they believe in and thousands of other factors that link together to bring their world together. And they do all of this so people can immerse themselves into these worlds and escape into a different universe of wonder and magic.

I myself wish I could create a storyworld that brings people together from all walks of life, to enjoy and dream of a better world and who knows maybe one day I will. Or maybe I won't, maybe I'll have to settle for using other people's creations to take me to another universe and place but to be honest, I don't think that would be settling at all. And I'll always have this dream, even if I manage to achieve it and create a world like the ones I've grown to love, I'll always strive to make it better and create characters audiences can relate to and love for years.

Next year for my dissertation I will be exploring how a screenwriter develops their stories universe and characters to attract the audience and keep their attention. And why a screenwriter teleports the audience into their story in more detail, and conducting a survey to find out why people want to escape reality, the good and bad effects they've experienced and what effects they think this has on their state of mind and quality of life, including the people around them.

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