

Dissertation Proposal

3 Key words

Escapism can be defined as being the tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019) In Jungian psychology the archetypes represent universal patterns and images that are part of the collective unconscious. Jung believed that we inherit these archetypes much the way we inherit instinctive patterns of behaviour. (Cherry, 2019) Conscious can be defined as being aware of and responding of one's surroundings. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019) Subconscious can be defined as being the part of the mind which isn't fully aware, but which influences one's actions and feelings. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019)

Key theorists

Carl Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist who create some of the best psychological concepts including archetypal phenomena. Jung identified the 'Ordinary Realm' with the conscious mind, and the 'Realm of Adventure' with the subconscious mind. (Vernon, 2011) Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was an American mythologist, writer and lecturer, best known for his work in comparative mythology and comparative religion. (Segal, 2019) Christopher Vogler (1949-) is an American screenwriter and author best known for his screenwriting guide *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. (Vogler, 2007)

Introduction

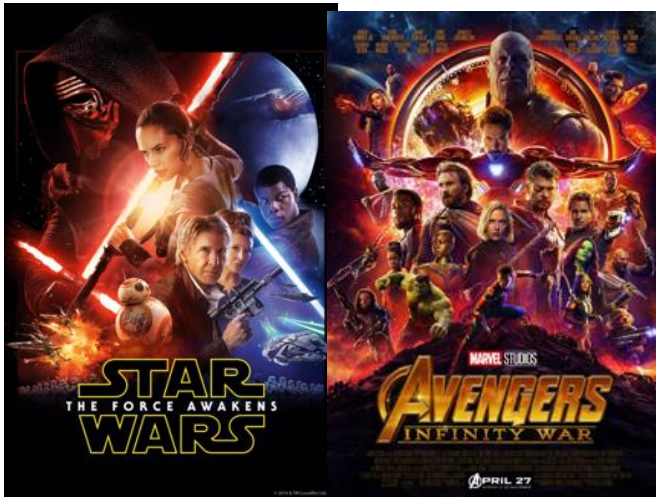
In this essay, I will be looking at the 'special world' of the hero/writer's journey and seeing if there is a link between that and the concept of escapism. I will also refer to Jungian archetypes. As a professional filmmaker, I want to give audiences the ability to transcend their daily lives and escape into a world which I have created. Some of my favourite films are

ones which take place in their own universe or reality which I want to escape to especially when I don't want to be living in the real world.

Chapter 1: Escapism

Escapism can be defined as being the tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). As previously mentioned, I am wanting to look into this because I want to help people escape their daily lives and live in one which I have created or helped create.

Empathy is a key characteristic of humanity, and it is explored boundlessly through film. We cheer on the underdog, and we resent the villain. We feel this way because we see ourselves in them (Kiely, 2018). We see ourselves on the screen and gain comfort knowing that we are not alone in our emotions, our struggles and our triumphs; even if they are only fictional characters that we share these experiences with. An early modern example of escapism I have found is that after the 9/11 terrorist attack, two of the more popular films were *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (IMDB, 2001) and *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*



Star Wars: The Force Awakens and Avengers: Infinity War are two of the highest grossing films of all time.

(IMDB, 2001), both 2001. They grossed \$974.8 million and \$869.3 million respectively. More recently, franchise films like these have owned the global box office, with titans such as the Star Wars saga and the Marvel Cinematic

Universe having films which gross well over 1 billion dollars. These films

provide escapism as you don't look through a telescope and see space stations battling each other for galactic dominance, nor do you see Norse gods and World War 2 super humans walking around the street. These films also share a similarity as they follow a formula called

the hero's journey; a concept created by Joseph Campbell, and later expanded on by Christopher Vogler. It details the process of which a hero/protagonist completes a quest, and the help and assistance that they get from other characters, or as Carl Jung calls them, archetypes (Vogler, 2007). For example, in *Avengers: Infinity War*, you would expect the Avengers to be the heroes, but instead it is Thanos. His main quest is to complete the mystical Infinity Gauntlet. If anything, the purpose of the Avengers is to be a human representation of the 'special world', who come into conflict of Thanos' plan to stop overpopulation. In the real world, overpopulation isn't really a big concern, but for people that are escaping into this universe, they are aware of the ramifications. If you were to look at this from another perspective, this can be seen from a political standpoint- in Brexit, people think that the most popular choice- leave- is the worse choice: In *Avengers*, people start to think that Thanos winning was a bad idea because of its ramifications.

During the 1960s, America was going through some troubled times as the Vietnam War started, JFK was assassinated, and the civil rights movement was starting to gain attention. While these events were happening, comic book companies such as Marvel started using their craft to provide escapism for those that were too young to know what was going on. This escapism was in the form of characters and teams including Spider-Man, the X-Men and the Avengers. Years later, characters like these and many more have evolved onto the big screen.

A recent example of this is *Avengers: Endgame*, released in April 2019. The synopsis is:

"The grave course of events set in motion by Thanos that wiped out half the universe and fractured the Avengers ranks compels the remaining Avengers to take one final stand in Marvel Studios' grand conclusion to twenty-two films, "*Avengers: Endgame*."

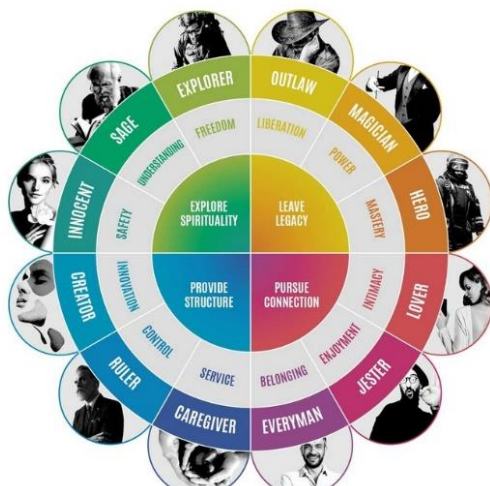
(Stolworthy, 2019)



The poster for Avengers: Endgame (2019)

The reason as to why I am including this as a case study is because of the audience expectations going into it. As mentioned earlier, these films are very popular with cinema goers, having grossed over \$2 billion, making it the second highest grossing film of all time. 11 films have led up to this film, with audiences learning more about key characters and McGuffins as the films progress. They are also able to escape into a universe where anything is possible.

Chapter 2: Jungian Archetypes



This diagram shows all of the Jungian archetypes, including which subcategory they go into.

In Jungian psychology the archetypes represent universal patterns and images that are part of the collective unconscious (Vernon, 2011). Jung believed that we inherit these archetypes much the way we inherit instinctive patterns of behaviour. There are 12 main archetypes- innocent (Forrest Gump/Mary Poppins), sage (Spock/Dumbledore), explorer (Ellen

Ripley/Indiana Jones), outlaw (Terminator/Maverick), magician (Doc Brown/Darth Vader), hero (Luke Skywalker/Neo), lover (Rose DeWitt Bukater/Phil Connors), jester (Jack Sparrow/The Dude), everyman (Harry Potter/Frodo Baggins), caregiver (Oskar Schindler/Atticus Finch), ruler (Aragorn/Howard Hughes) and artist (Ray Charles/Andy Kaufman) (Silverman, 2016). These archetypes are symbolic images we unconsciously understand. The 4 cardinal orientations that the archetypes are seeking to realise are ego, order, social and freedom. Jung was able to identify a large number of archetypes but mainly focussed on four. The ‘persona’ is the outward mask we present to the world. It conceals our real self and Jung describes it as the ‘conformity’ archetype. This can link to escapism as it implies that what we see is different to what we expect.

The self designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man. The shadow is a representation of the personal unconscious as a whole and usually embodies the compensating values to those held by the conscious personality. The anima archetype appears in men and is his primordial image of women. “When an archetype is constellated, our whole body is engaged and its emotional arousal focuses and motivates us with a force that is very difficult to resist.” (Houle, 2011)

Jung suggested that these archetypes reflect different aspects of the human mind – that our personalities divide themselves into these characters to play out the drama of our lives. He suggested that both were coming from a deeper source, in the collective unconscious of the human race (Academy of Ideas, 2017). Joseph Campbell spoke of the archetypes as biological: as expressions of the organs of the body, built into the wiring of every human being. Each person hearing a tale or watching a play or movie is invited, in the early stages of the story, to identify with the hero, to merge with them and see the world of the story through their eyes. (Vogler, 2007)

Jung defined archetypes as the main source of the symbolic richness of certain images or stories. Archetypes are ‘an unrepresentable, unconscious, pre-existent form of certain images and stories. Filmmakers have been aware of Jung’s archetypes and its connection to the unconscious for decades.

If indeed, archetypes are universal, it would follow that the collective unconscious would be an effective memory tool in situations where individuals are asked to recognise and memorise the relationship between symbols and words that describe the concepts represented by these symbols (Academy of Ideas, 2017). Furthermore, if these archetypal symbols were present in the collective unconscious, memorisation and recall of their current meanings ought to come quite easily (Brown & Hannigan, 2006). Also, in cases where symbols were paired with words that didn’t match the concept of the symbol, it would be expected that the ability to

remember such a mismatched pairing would be hampered.

Chapter 3: Conscious/Subconscious

The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it doesn't, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently isn't a personal acquisition (Purrrington, 2018). While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity. Whereas the personal unconscious consists for the most part of complexes, the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of archetypes.

Conscious can be defined as being aware of and responding to one's surroundings (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). Subconscious can be defined as being the part of your mind that contains thoughts and feelings that you do not think about, or do not realise you have (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019).



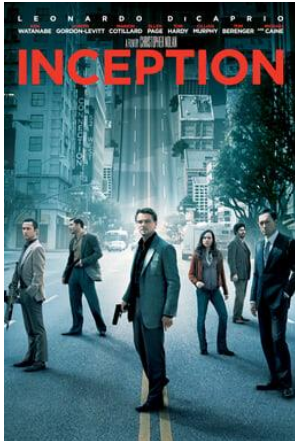
In this image from Star Wars: Return of the Jedi (1983), we see Darth Vader (the magician) fighting Luke Skywalker (the hero)

In terms of film, there are many ways in which the conscious/subconscious can be interpreted. In my context, I am looking at how the audience interprets what they see on screen in terms of escapism. This can be linked back to *The Writer's Journey* which uses Star Wars as a reference

when Christopher Vogler was writing the book- in which he, and to some extent the audience, refer to key Star Wars characters as members of Jung's archetypes.

Like films, dreams are composed of their own unique environment, complex and comprised of pieces of human identity. Dreams draw on the experience and history of the dreamer,

creating a world that is familiar visually by drawing on similar surroundings, but foreign due



Some films use this conscious exploration to explore the nature of dreams. A modern example is Christopher Nolan's Inception.

to the void of rational logic. Films utilize the experience of the filmmaker in a similar fashion and are also subject to their own filmic logic and exist in their own reality, much like the nature of dreams. The world of the dream creates a façade of reality, allowing us to be unaware of our presence in it, because we merely accept our familiar surroundings. Occasionally we are able to move above this barrier of unawareness in the unconscious into a 'lucid state'

allowing us to explore and manipulate the laws of the dream realm-

see image on the left. Being conscious of our unconscious realm

opens possibilities to reshape our dream landscape. Lucidity is difficult to achieve and manage, but when done correctly can provide an opportunity to explore the inner workings of the mind. Our awareness of our dream environment and ability to mould it in different ways allows us to explore our dreams and manipulate them as well. A number of dream films capitalise on the narrative values possessed by lucid dreams. Allowing a character to consciously explore the dream realm allows for a more structured digestible plot.

Cinema can be described as being "a window into another space, onto another subjectivity; it is also a mirror in which one sees the self-projected, in minute and unflinching detail". Don Frederikson describes 'symbolic cinema' from a Jungian perspective as an image bearing infinitely resonant meaning. Film effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem the world from its dormant state its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmented. The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are some links between my key words, and what they mean for modern cinema. If I were to use any question created from my research, it would likely be 'How has escapism impacted on and affected modern cinema?' Before I started to write this essay, I had some prior knowledge on the hero's journey, both from Campbell's and Vogler's versions, so none of the new research I did into them gave me more in-depth knowledge about them and their studies. This question chooses to focus itself more on film theory as opposed to filmmaking. The concepts of the hero's journey and escapism will both continue to intrigue me as a writer/director, but I don't want to continue looking at this from a theoretical standpoint.

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