

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) According to Jungian psychology and his theory of the human psyche, there are many archetypes which can be a part of people’s unconscious (Cherry, 2019). As well as inheriting behaviours from parents, Jung also believed we also inherit these archetypes. (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 created some of the best psychological concepts including archetypal phenomena. Jung identified 2 different realms; the Ordinary Realm which he related to a person’s conscious mind, and the Realm of Adventure, which he related to the subconscious (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



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

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. In order to do this, the audience needs to have empathy with the characters. Empathy is when people are able to relate to other

beings on an emotional layer, and it is

explored and applied throughout cinema. “We cheer on the underdog, and we resent the villain.” (Kiely, 2018). Audiences relate to the characters they see on screen, this may be because they are similar to them or that the situations, emotions and feelings portrayed are similar to what the audience member is dealing with (Kiely, 2018). 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* (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,

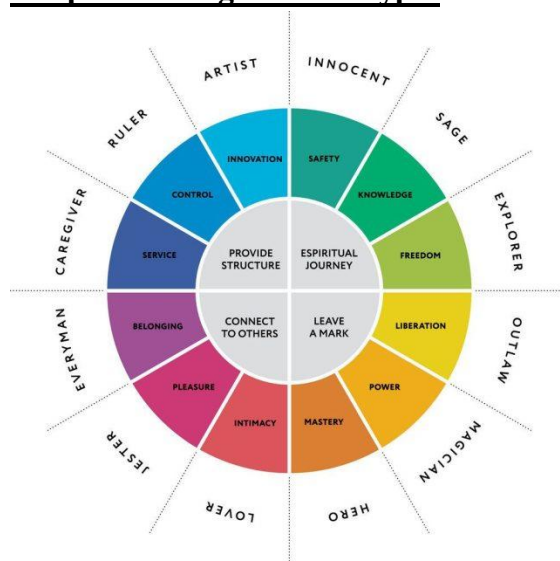
"Avengers: Endgame." (Stolworthy, 2019)

The 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 years 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.



The poster for Avengers: Endgame (2019)

Chapter 2: Jungian Archetypes



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

As mentioned earlier, Carl Jung believed that there are many archetypes which can be a part of a person's unconscious. These include- 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 and relate to. The 4 cardinal

orientations that the archetypes are seeking to realise are ego, order, social and freedom. In

simple terms, this is what they are motivated by (see above diagram). Jung was able to

identify a large number of archetypes but mainly focussed on four. The 'persona' is how the world sees us, as opposed to how we see ourselves. The same can be applied to other people.

This can link to escapism as it implies that what we see is different to what we expect

The self is who we are as a whole, which includes our personality and ego. The shadow is the part of us which doesn't conform to modern culture and society. The anima archetype is the feminine side of men, and the masculine side 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)

According to Jung, the archetypes show the different parts of a person's mind. He explained that these archetypes are combined to create an individual's personality. Jung also thought that the archetypes and personality within a person came from that person's unconscious (Academy of Ideas, 2017). However, Joseph Campbell believed that the archetypes were more biological rather than psychological, and that they were connected to the body organs.

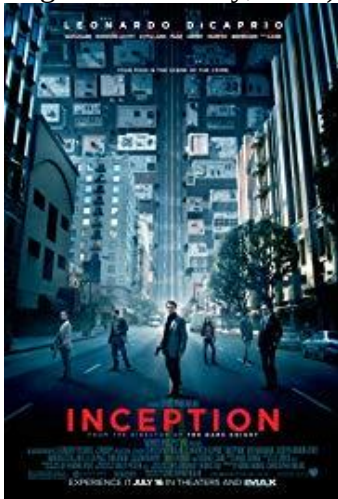
Due to the archetypes built within us, Jung believed that we are attracted to the symbolism within images and stories. Filmmakers have used the connection between Jung's archetypes and the unconscious for decades. At the beginning of a story, the audience is able to identify with the hero, and experience the journey through their eyes. (Vogler, 2007)

According to Academy of Ideas, if each individual has the archetypes within them, the unconscious knowledge could be used to recognise and identify other symbols (Academy of Ideas, 2017). Therefore, it would be easier to recognise common symbols, and harder to recognise unfamiliar symbols (Brown & Hannigan, 2006). When relating this to storytelling and filmmaking, the audience can identify with the hero, but not be initially aware of the villain.

Chapter 3: Conscious/Subconscious

Our subconscious is made up of two parts; the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious (Purrrington, 2018). The collective unconscious is made up of information we have gained hereditary. Unlike the personal conscious, which is made up of information acquired and which was once in our conscious minds, the collective unconscious is based on 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).



Some films use this conscious exploration to explore the nature of dreams. A modern example is Christopher Nolan's *Inception*. (*Inception*, 2010)

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.

Our subconscious is in control of our dreams. Although dreams may include familiar settings based upon the experiences of the individual, they are unfamiliar due to the often-unusual content. Films are often based on the experiences of the filmmaker, however similar to dreams, films also have unfamiliar or unusual content, and a reality of their own. When individuals dream, they are mostly unaware of this, accepting it as their reality. However, similar to the film 'Inception' (*Inception*, 2010), sometimes individuals are able to manipulate reality to suit them within the dream. This is often referred to as lucidity.

In addition to the aforementioned Inception, many films rely on how lucid dreams work. This can help films with complicated plots become simpler.

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” (Renov, 2004)

According to (Hardie, 2011), Don Frederiksen describes symbolic cinema as an obvious use of Jung’s archetypes, using images or objects to represent certain meanings. Film can help us see or interpret or dreams by letting filmmakers manipulate or interpret scenarios to suit the film or project. By manipulating reality in dreams, cinema can mimic real life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are some links between my key words, and what they mean for modern cinema. In terms of modern cinema, escapism means being able to live in and bring alternative realities to life e.g. medieval kingdoms and superhero universes. We are not able to live through these times or realities, however, through watching a film, we are able to experience it. Archetypes can relate to modern cinema by allowing us to relate to characters and contexts in new ways Archetypes allow us to relate to unfamiliar characters or contexts as they may have traits which we might recognise. The subconscious and conscious is how filmmakers see both escapism and archetypes to manipulate the audience. They do this by ‘tricking’ our minds into believing that the fantasies within these films are real. If I were to use any question created from my research, it would likely be ‘How has escapism impacted on and affected modern cinema?’. As a filmmaker, being able to understand how big blockbusters use escapism to create their fantastical worlds really interests me, and I feel that this would be beneficial to me as my passion project which I am currently writing is based on a world which I am creating. 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. Instead of this, I am interested in looking at how comic book stories can be adapted into modern and social contexts. I would be doing this by researching the stories in their original formats and comparing those to how they work as film adaptations in a modern and social era. For example, earlier in this essay, I looked at *Avengers: Infinity War* (*Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018). This film is about how Thanos takes the infinity stones from the Avengers and uses them to stop what he sees as universal overpopulation. Whereas the comic book version of this, *Infinity Gauntlet* (Starlin, 1991), was about how Thanos used the infinity stones to please Death. This is the same story, just repurposed to suit modern society.

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