

Independent Inquiry Proposal

My keywords: World-building, Ambience and Communication

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I will be constructing this Independent Inquiry proposal by exploring three key words which form a background to the enthusiasm and love that I have for my set design practice. The three key words that I have chosen are: world building, communication and ambience and the way that props hold an importance within film design. I am going to be using The Hunger Games franchise as my main focus, as well as looking into the themes and symbols that make up the story and how these can affect the audience.

World-building is the keyword that I will explore first. World is defined as “a persons life and activities” or “the people or things that belong to a certain class, historical period or a sphere of activity” or “the earth with all its countries and people.” (Oxford University Press, 2002, p.1215). Building is defined as “the construction of houses and other structures”(OUP, 2002, p.129), therefore, bringing the concepts together creates ‘the construction of a characters place of belonging and the structures, individuals and activities that give them a purpose.’ Within set design world-building is creating a space and time in which an actor is able to fully utilise and help create the idea that wherever they are is real. Using Stephen L. Gillett’s book “world-building” gives the best possible starting point for this as he explains in thorough detail how the earth and other parts of the solar system were created – so using this knowledge allows writers to build up their fiction from an initial platform of truth. Props are a minuscule aspect of the overall design but play an important part in symbolism within the trilogy. Creating symbolism within a story helps to build the world further than the pages as it causes people to be reminded of the franchise in the years after the final film was released. Thus showing that although the world is only built up within the pages, symbols give it a link to the outside world creating a bigger platform unintentionally. An example of symbolism in The Hunger Games is President Snow’s obsession with white roses. Before the hunger games was released white roses may have expressed the idea of innocence and purity, however, the crude taunting ways that Snow uses the roses on the protagonist, Katniss, (see figure 1), give them a sinister presence and unlocks new ways for people to view the object. Further research on symbolism has led to ‘Movies and the mind’ by William Indick where he states that “dreams use psychological symbols to purvey a plethora of meaningful information in relatively short visual



Figure 1:
<https://www.bustle.com/articles/50639-7-mockingjay-part-1-moments-that-make-no-sense-if-you-havent-read-the-book> accessed on: 15/04/2020

sequences.” (2004, p.8), which indicates that films are essentially physical examples of dreams but in turn the symbolism presented in dreams can be influenced by what has been seen in a conscious state. Hinting to the idea that, world building may begin on the pages in a book but signals within it are transmitted into other states which establish links and expanses from the initial idea. Suzanne Collins, the writer of the Hunger Games trilogy, did not just build her own world, she built a foundation which has formed paths into other worlds so it can never really stand alone. Moreover, movies are almost always influenced by events, people and objects in history so the idea that dreams are short films is emphasised as they are typically constructed of memories and known knowledge. Recurring dreams display how symbolism is affective with remembrance and repetition. This is highlighted by Carl Jung’s psychoanalysis on how dreams symbolise abstract ideas that can be

too trivial or overwhelming to comprehend consciously, which requires more thought into why one could dream, say, an injury or a horrific event – thus moving it to the forefront of the mind to have the metaphor dissected. On the contrary, however, Sigmund Freud believed that dreams were essentially an overflow of the repressed emotions, desires and memories of the unconscious mind, suggesting that dreams just play on what we cannot want or have. Therefore, Freud indicates that repressed thoughts trigger what we can remember from our dreams and not the symbolism that Jung theorises.

Collins mentions that she made up the idea of the hunger games based on the battle of Iraq and reality TV due to channel surfing between programmes, (Collins, 2008, p.363), so, theoretically, her world is just a reconstruction of another. Researching this further has landed me upon a Japanese film named 'Battle Royal' (2000) which has almost the exact same plot as The Hunger Games, therefore, Collins' work is just a development of older movies and events, which means that she technically did not build her own world, she just adapted and developed ideas into her own. Props are important pieces of world building because they become relics that are wanted by the fanatics. For example, the mockingjay pin used in the movies (figure 2) was the symbol of the rebellion in the story; became an identity for Katniss; and was also the most recognised way for the films to be identified. The use of a key prop within a film helps them to generate more income and publicity as people want to be included in the world and owning a prop creates that entry way into it. The quote "Success of the merchandise is linked directly to the success of a film" (Mathijs, 2006, p.28) tells us that merchandising becomes its own source of publicity alongside the film and connects the public to the movies even more than they may already have been.



Figure 2:

<https://www.pinterest.at/pin/407786941238106800/>

Accessed on: 15/04/2020

Expressing how the audience has attachments to objects, so providing them with physical parts of their favourite movies creates a stronger bond to the story – the audience feels included and the film becomes more successful, a positive for everyone. Furthermore, Volume 16 of the Journal of Economic Psychology states that "products are impulsively bought to reflect self identity." (Dittmar, 1995) Linking to the idea that the world that Collins' has created through her stories has reached out into the readers and created a psychological feeling of understanding and has given them something to relate to. Making them have an emotional connection to the story and wanting to become a part of it. Therefore, obtaining key props used within the story bridges the gap between reality and fiction. Overall, researching into world-building has unlocked the concept of how symbolism can

create emotion, whether it be through physical objects, such as props, or within the unconscious mind.

This brings me onto my second key word. Ambience is defined as, “the character a place has from its immediate surroundings.” (Oxford University Press, 2002, p.30) which denotes to the overall atmosphere and feeling of an area. Within set design this would relate to the mood presented through the design, decoration and dressing to an audience. Ambience is created by a number of things on a set, ranging from: colour, lighting, props, and furnishings to added sounds, special effects and the actors themselves. The ambience within a production is very important because viewers would not be able to engage with a story if the tone is not correctly coordinated with everything. Continuing with the idea of an audiences emotional connection to a story, research has transitioned onto the work of Fritz Heider. His book *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* states that, “man as we know, is affected by events in his environment.” (Heider, 1958, p.16), which highlights the idea that those who watch movies are internally influenced by the mood shown through design. An example of this is how Collins’ used what she had observed to come up with the idea for *The Hunger Games* and her resulting emotions emitted into the themes and concepts that she wrote about. Audiences have the same response and create, collect and do things due to how something has made them feel. Buying merchandise shows how the ambience of certain imagery, textures, objects and colours within film has mentally affected people so much that they want to own a physical thing that connects with that. For example, the art of learning archery



Figure 3:

<https://www.csmonitor.com/Books/chapter-and-verse/2013/1105/Hunger-Games-Catching-Fire-ad-campaign-gets-stamp-of-approval-from-Suzanne-Collins>

Accessed on: 25/04/20

resurfaced after the release of *The Hunger Games* movie in 2012 (Dickinson press, 2019), as it was a pastime teenagers could have to relate with Katniss, as it is her signature activity (figure 3) and an arrow features on the mockingjay pin – the most sought-after prop in the franchise.

Furthermore, looking back at Jung’s idea of unconscious symbolism, links the idea that teenagers could be subconsciously drawn to the bow as it indicates a metaphorical feeling of strength and how Katniss uses it to provide for her family shows independence and maturity. Reading through “A man and his Symbols” (Jung, 1964), has unlocked a revelation about a specific prop in the trilogy and its meaning. The pearl that Peeta gives to Katniss in *Catching fire* (figure 4), represents the bond between the two characters and portrays the feelings that Peeta has towards her. The quote “the stone was the integral part of the revelation. It was the mediator between himself and God” (Jung, 1964, p. 233), portrays the idea of how natural elements such as stones have a deeper symbolic meaning. They have links to religion and rituals, which show that they are a reliable source of comfort and can help hold together routines. They also have the ability to bring people closer together, for example, how the pearl is used in *The Hunger Games*. Perhaps indicating how the texture and density is a reminder of stability as stones can be found everywhere. When Peeta is



Figure 4:

https://thehungergames.fandom.com/wiki/Peeta%27s_pearl

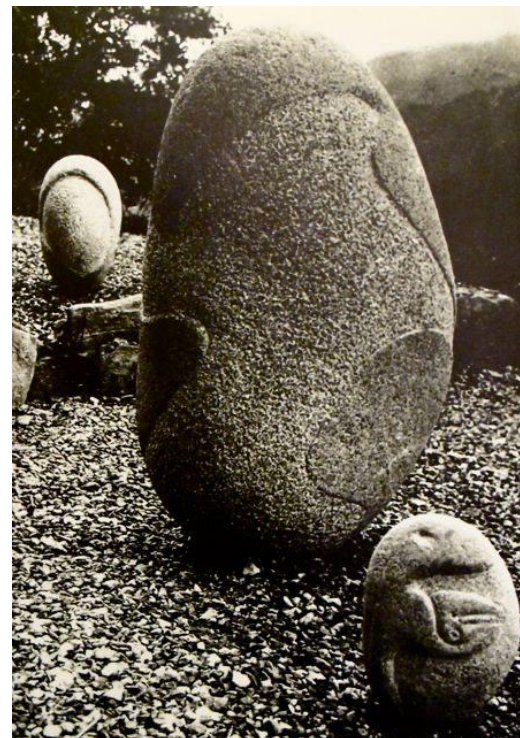
Accessed on: 28/04/20

taken away from her Katniss uses the pearl as a reminder of the good things about him and constantly runs it between her fingers as a familiarity and solace. This links to Max Ernst, a German artist, who used stone within his work. The statement, “whenever I reach an impasse in my paintings... sculpture always offers me a way out.” (Ernst, 1934-1967), shows how he used stone as an escape and to refresh his mind, figure 5 is one of his sculptures. The modifications to the stone

Figure 5:

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/108790147220761033/>

Accessed on 06/05/20



are very minimal, which emphasises further how rocks can create positive ambience in any form. The presence of a rock-like entity provides the audience with a feeling of satisfaction and understanding as it is an object that all can relate or have access to and, once again, it creates a simpler entry way into the story – as a contrast to the original shape of the mockingjay pin or a bow and arrow which some may not be able to afford. Furthermore, the thought Katniss shares once she receives the pearl, “As coal pressured into pearls by our weighty existence. Beauty that arose out of pain” (Collins, 2009, p. 86), foreshadows the ending of the story because despite the losses they went through, they were still able to have a positive future. This passes on a message of hope to the audience – which is made up of a majority of young adults – that even what appears to be the worst

point in time can and will eventually change for the better. Ambience can be felt through the symbolism in an object just as well as it can through physical objects and colours that make up a set.

My final key word is communication. It is defined as “Something that communicates information from one person to another” (Oxford University Press, 2002, p.201) this is usually in the form of messages or letters, but can include images, music and video. Within set design communication would be how the set and props tells a story to an audience, whether they can understand the purpose and importance of a design and what messages are trying to be portrayed. When watching a movie, the symbolism is not typically apparent to the audience as scenes progress too quickly for them to comprehend the overall meaning. Therefore, the communication has to come from what can be seen. Being able to express enough information to the audience with the use of a prop is the best way for a hint of the underlying meaning to be portrayed. For example, in *The Hunger Games*, Collins created a servant called an ‘avox’, in Latin this means “without a voice” (enotes.com, 2020), whereby prisoners have their tongues removed and are forced to work for the capitals people. However, without reading the books, this knowledge does not become apparent until the last film, even though they do feature in shots before this – figure 6 shows how they are seen in *Catching fire*.

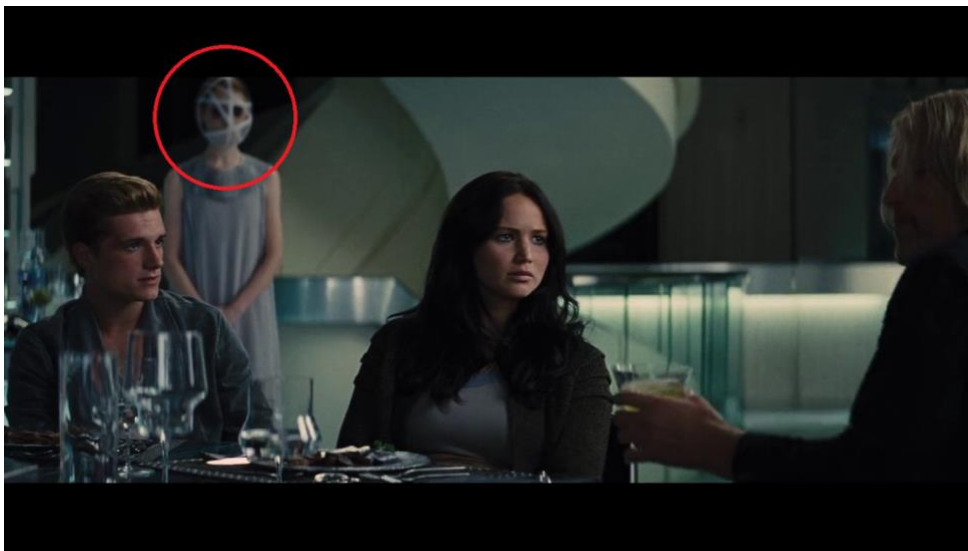


Figure 6:
<https://movies.stackexchange.com/questions/18109/background-character-in-the-hunger-games-catching-fire>

Accessed on:
10/05/20

The way that it appears the designer has tried to communicate this is by entirely consuming the face in a head-piece that resembles a cage. It shows how the servant is trapped and cannot speak as their mouth is blocked by the elaborate prop. Furthermore, the design at first glance looks like a piece of furniture, such as a lamp, so the audience may not even notice that someone is there, another indication towards the idea that the servant should blend into the background and not interact with others unless told to. The idea of being hidden relates to how artists and designers are over-looked and considered unessential to the world. However, the statement “those who have a thorough knowledge, have sooner obtained their object and carried authority with them.” (Vitruvius, 1960), implies the intelligence that has to be held by those who provide visual arts. Nonverbal communication is extremely difficult to perfect and a lot of thought has to go into making something competent enough for others to understand, with the added difficulty of making it look believable. Although, this could be contradicted by people’s ability to distinguish nonverbal gestures by symbols and patterns due to how babies and people with disabilities interact.

Bringing the point back to the idea of having knowledge in order to be able to communicate highlights the idea that designers have to be aware of the psychological components that go into whatever they make. For example, the BBC show “The Great Interior Design Challenge” (2020) hosts an episode into the secrets of decorating the perfect home. They outline the benefits to using colours such as yellow in the bedroom as it provides a calming ambience, which forefronts the idea of how having psychological knowledge equips designers with a wider range of skills to communicate

successfully. To conclude, the remark about symbolism not being necessary with communication in design has been completely contradicted as everything that goes into the story, from the colours to the props, has to have a symbolic or psychological reason behind it.

Concluding my Independent Inquiry proposal, I have explored world-building, ambience and communication and how they link to the the themes and symbols within the Hunger Games franchise. The importance of props has also been explained and how the role they have is affected by my keywords. From my proposal, I have learnt how props are a symbol that can show more about a story and how they link the audience to a movie through merchandising. Furthermore, the props that draw in the audience can unlock unconscious symbols within people and help to distinguish why they may find an attachment to certain objects. Dreams play a vital part in unveiling those emotions so, my thoughts on movies being like a physical representation of dreams is supported by this. The attachment to objects and stories have led me to question the power of symbolism and the effects it has on the unconscious mind, thus leading into the question for my Independent Inquiry: "Can having an attachment to an object hold the same ability as dreams to unlock a persons deeper thoughts and feelings through symbolism?"

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