Contemporary Attitudes: Cognitive Film Theory and The Subject of Hero and Villain in American Cinema

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The concept of hero and villain is a character structure that is widely used within literature and cinema, but it seems that, since the mid-nineties, a surge in development or deviation has occurred regarding the classical structure of constructing hero and villain as unambiguous in big budget Hollywood film production. Why and how are Hollywood films changing in its method of character construction and does it signify a certain cultural fascination? In this thesis, I will posit that the relevance of this character construction is of great importance to the audiences' reception and thereby the rising popularity of this structure. Cinematic narratives tend to deal increasingly with antiheroes and other character models that break from a traditional Hollywood model. For example, in Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995) there is presented a new edition to the world of character creation within cinematic narratives, regarding its perfectly ambiguous construction and representation of hero and villain – a clear definition of who is who is non-existent through a variety of cinematic and narrative demonstrations that constructs sympathy equally. The idea of a clear-cut distinction between hero and villain become increasingly blurred with the application of shared empathy, mutual sympathy as well as an understanding between the hero and villain characters, and this will be examined thoroughly through a variety of films. When viewing a film that presents certain characters, emotional responses and moral deliberation takes place. Therefore, in an attempt to achieve an understanding of the relationship between the viewer's emotional responses and its relevance with protagonist and antagonist characters, this thesis will apply the body of work of cognitive film theorists such as Murray Smith, Torben Grodal, Keith Oatley, Greg M. Smith, among others. Murray Smith is concerned with the three core terms which he calls "Recognition", "Alignment" and "Allegiance"

and these terms fit together in what Smith calls "the structure of sympathy". These are terms that dive into analyzing an audience's potential for emotional responses regarding sympathy and empathy for certain characters on a macro level and, therefore, it requires a theoretical framework for the micro level. The approach of Murray Smith will be supplemented with the theories of Keith Oatley and Torben Grodal, who deal with emotional responses on a smaller scale – they use theories and key terms to find so-called "cues" and "saturations" in cinema, which are specific actions or a sequence of actions that trigger certain emotional responses. The approach of Murray Smith, coupled with those of Keith Oatley and Torben Grodal, provide an analytical approach that has the ability to look at a movie on a macro as well as a micro level, in terms of applying an analytical framework which is able to operate on a thematic scale but also on minutia oriented small-scale behavior. Thusly, the theoretical framework provides a concise and multifaceted method of analyzing cinema within the sphere of cognitive film theory.

In their book *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin deal with the concept of homosociality as a mechanism that defines relationships between same-sex characters, who often have heterosexual bonds as secondary relationships. Moreover, these concepts are uniquely coupled to "buddy" films such as *The Sting* (1973), *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987), where the featured "buddies" are the protagonists who often are in opposition of a villain together. These concepts will, however, be applied to the films of the analysis, like *X-men* (2000), *Heat* (1995), *Collateral* (2004) and *Unbreakable* (2000), where homosociality and homoeroticism bridges the gap between hero and villain. Through the concepts of "Recognition", "Alignment" and "Allegiance" by Murray Smith, homosociality and homoeroticism will be examined as mechanisms that create a sense of sympathy as well as emotional bonds between protagonist, antagonist and the audience alike.

Since the release of *Heat*, an increasing amount of films with ambiguity surrounding the concepts of "hero" and "villain" have been released, adding ambivalence and moral reflection to emotional cinematic experiences in expensive Hollywood blockbusters as well as Hollywood films with "standard" multi-million-dollar budgets. Whereas it is not likely that *Heat* began this trend, its release signifies the rise in popularity of this type of narrative. The huge amount of superhero movie releases started with *X-Men* (2000), and it is the first modern-day superhero movie as we know them today. With a serious and gritty tone, it attempts to provide a sense of realism, while keeping the heroic attributes of romanticism in a universe of supernatural and unrealistic mechanics. Quadrupling its budget of 75 million dollars (IMDB, *X-Men* 2000) and featuring a litany of well-known actors, not to mention the critically acclaimed director Bryan Singer, it is safe to assume that *X-Men* paved the way for other studios and their exploits in establishing superhero films as the single most profitable method of producing blockbuster films in recent years. Due to its success, it is interesting to look at the ways in which this movie archetype applied character structures and how they relate to emotional audience responses. This thesis will examine a variety of films and cinematic franchises that delve into the world of ambivalence and lack of moral clarity in the emotional presentation of characters. The selection of films will center on narratives that have been released after the mid-nineties but there will also be included specific films that predate it, such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) that with their cult-status have a certain relevance in terms of groundbreaking character creation in cinema. Finally, there will be a discussion which will encompass the entirety of the regarded films while diving into the implications of this narrative trend and its relevance to American culture. The fascination with authenticity and morality has always captured the imagination of human beings, but in recent years it is becoming increasingly prevalent in Hollywood cinema, and therefore, the reasons for this cultural development will be examined and discussed in a context of cultural phenomena that regard information on social media platforms, where many individuals spend a lot of

time. Additionally, the work focusing on literary criticism by Northrop Frye will be used as a frame of reference for constructing a commentary on the nature of films and their function. Firmly rooted in the literary tradition of criticism, Northrop Frye views genres and specific works as embodiments of either aristocratic or revolutionary tendencies, and this will supplement the discussion.

Theory

The field of cognitivism in relation to film theory and studies began in the 1980's as an opposition to psychoanalytical semiotics, dealing with biological manifestations of the subconscious, which was the prevailing approach at the time. (Nannicelli, 1) The approaches of cognitivism in film studies are based on neuropsychological research in emotion and where theories like psychoanalytical semiotics and Grand Theory attempt to separate the humanities from other sciences (Grodal, 1), neurocognitive film theory has the ability to connect the dots between film studies, neuropsychology, psychology, literary criticism and culture studies. By relating to other concrete fields of research, cognitive film theory attempts to root itself firmly in concrete data and state of the art psychology, which allows conclusions to be made on patterns of emotional behavior and responses pertaining to film. In his book, *Film Structure and the Emotion System,* Greg M. Smith explains that:

> film theory has historically paid only spotty attention to emotional effects, although almost everyone agrees that eliciting emotions is a primary concern for most films. In the modern world's emotional landscape, the movie theater occupies a central place: it is one of the predominant spaces where many societies gather to express and experience emotion. (M. Smith, 4, 2003)

The very reason for watching films is the potential for emotional engagement, whether it be amusement, horror or sadness – all genres in film elicit different responses but are all pursued by the moviegoing public as Daniel Hampton argues: "Because films engage mental processes, cognitivist

film theorists have looked to theories of normal human cognition and emotional response to help account for the experience of cinema." (Hampton, 150)

By accepting the general premise that human beings find movies emotionally engaging, and that the audience actively pursues this engagement through characters, cognitive film theorists attempt to delve into the world of emotive audience responses as well as narrative- and character-based relevance for this approach.

Recognition, Alignment and Allegiance

Murray Smith's book *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (1995) engages in depth with structures and creation of sympathy within cinema. This approach focuses on what Murray Smith calls the "structure of sympathy" which deals with the concepts of "Recognition", "Alignment" and "Allegiance" that deals with character construction and how sympathy and emotion work in relation to the portrayal of a certain character or characters. Murray Smith claims that: "Our imaginative engagement with fictional narratives requires, I will argue, a basic notion of human agency or 'personhood', which is a fundamental element of both our ordinary social interactions and of our imaginative activities." (Smith, 17, 1995) A premise of Smith's book suggests that as human beings, we are likely to engage and align ourselves with fictional constructs that mimic or mirror our own perceptions and experiences as biological entities and this comes in the form of characters through "Recognition": "Indeed, I want to argue here that, in so far as we maintain a notion of character at all, as the fictional analogue of the human agent, it is impossible to escape a certain kind of mimetic assumption" (Smith, 34, 1995) Thusly, films draw on the understanding of ourselves as people in order to attain and establish an emotional response to characters in film. Murray Smith maintains that the process of identifying and understanding narratives takes place in the audience's interpretation of character – the idea of character as the single most important element for

comprehension in cinematic narratives becomes Smith's primary reasoning behind his focus on the importance for an approach to film that centers on the emotional relatability of characters. (Smith, 18, 1995) While maintaining that character is the main factor in comprehending narratives, Smith also elaborates the existence and relevance of other "agents of causality" but this also mainly takes place through character. (Smith, 20, 1995)

As previously mentioned, according to Murray Smith, there are three central terms with which empathy and sympathy relates to emotional responses within cinematic works: "Recognition", "Alignment" and "Allegiance". Alignment is a term that is coupled to the method that film presents a character through various scenes, and how it classifies a character via emotions, dialogue, body language and actions. (Smith, 6, 1995) This Alignment relies on the fundamental tool of Recognition and Murray Smith describes it as: "Fundamental to human perception and cognition is an ability to distinguish humans from other objects and agents" (Smith, 111, 1995) Therefore, the process of Recognition is very simple, but it relies on our method of separating and categorizing information, which in turn classifies it and ascribes importance. Recognition is a concept that deals with the ability to discern physical forms and identify "perceptible traits – the body, the face, and the voice." (Smith, 114, 1995) Murray Smith clarifies the existence and importance of two mechanisms which are responsible for Alignment within cinematic narratives: Spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access:

> To a great extent our "identification" with a film's protagonist is created by exactly this systematic restriction of information. I propose two interlocking functions, spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access, cognate with the concepts of narrational range and depth discussed earlier in this chapter, as the most precise means for analyzing alignment (Smith, 83, 1995)

The concept of Spatio-temporal Attachment regards the specific way in which we follow a certain character and receive information pertaining to this character through scenes that are dedicated to following said character, and when dealing with other characters within scenes, we only have access to others through the character with which we are attached. (Smith, 146, 1995) Furthermore, Spatio-temporal attachment also signifies that the audience is included in the focus of a character – if a character has his eyes fixed on an object, the audience will be included in this focus through the lens of the camera. (Smith, 147, 1995) The term of Subjective Access relates to Spatio-temporal Attachment, because is seldomly exists without Spatio-temporal Attachment. Subjective access allows the audience to get into the mind and subjective perceptions of a character and through the specific style of Spatio-temporal Attachment, we may receive Subjective Access – an example of this could be a flashback or the thoughts of a character portrayed as internal dialogue and exhibited to the audience. (Smith, 83, 1995)

The final term, Allegiance, regards the application of alignment in creating a certain bias, either for or against a certain character or characters. (Smith, 6, 1995) This bias, Smith argues, is the application of "moral and ideological evaluation of characters by the spectator." (Smith, 41, 1994) Murray Smith approaches Allegiance as a term that is modified by Alignment through desirability:

> Allegiance denotes that level of engagement at which spectators respond sympathetically or anti-pathetically towards a character or group of characters. It rests upon an evaluation of the character as representing desirable (or at least, preferable) set of traits, when compared with other characters in the fiction (Smith, 62, 1995)

Allegiance is an extension of Alignment which regards morality and/or the ability to understand and sympathize with a character through his/her Alignment. It is a term that allows analysis of a set of characteristics, which is portrayed in a cinematic narrative and how it modifies the spectator's

experience of a certain character. However, according to Murray Smith, morality is not necessarily the only core term of Allegiance, as he argues that through allegiance, the spectator is presented with the opportunity "to revise the assumptions, beliefs and values that we bring to them in a myriad of ways: fictional worlds can propose alternative physical laws, histories, moral codes and social rituals." (Smith, 54, 1995) The idea of allegiance becomes a term, through which the spectator is allowed to revise, reflect and understand a character's perceived world and motivation, whether it harmonizes with our existing assumptions (that the cinematic narrative regards) or not. Murray Smith argues that it is essential to view these terms as affecting each other greatly, while also being terms which cannot be reduced to any single identifiable thing. (Smith, 6, 1995) Alignment and Allegiance work in unison, influencing each other and with the many facets and details of film, they give a set of tools to view and understand emotional reactions to characters within cinematic narratives.

Murray Smith argues that there are two fundamental plot structures which define moral division within cinematic plots – the "Manichean" and "graduated" moral structure. The Manichean structure, as the name suggests, is concerned with the concept of dualism as a defining character division. Thusly, the Manichean structure deals with the two extremes of good and bad. (Smith, 207, 1995) The graduated moral structure lies at the opposite end of the spectrum, which regards characters in a highly ambiguous manner and they are not divided into two opposing moral factions but "occupy a range of positions within the poles." (Smith, 207, 1995) It is important to take notice of the fact that no genre or cinematic culture is confined to a specific type of the two structures, and therefore they must be examined in each instance of appliance to a certain visual narrative. The awareness of moral structures becomes of great importance because of their influence on Allegiance with any given character and clarifies the relationship between characters and what moral concepts within a narrative that unify or separate them.

Emotional cues

Keith Oatley is a cognitive film theorist who has developed a system of cues to decipher the mechanisms of emotional responses in relation to the audience perception of a film experience. In Oatley's article "How Cues on the Screen Prompt Emotions in the Mind", he argues that there are three distinct modes or layers of emotional attention, which in separate layers, develop emotional responses according to the development and reception of certain visual and sound patterns. (Oatley) Oatley explains that the three layers of emotional attention begin when a "cue" or "schema" takes place either visually or audibly:

> A cue is a visual pattern on the screen or a sound pattern in a soundtrack. *Schema* is a term introduced into psychology by Bartlett (1932) to indicate a mental structure of knowledge and understanding of some aspect of how the world works. It's a component of the mental model we each make of our world, a model that we update continuously. (Oatley)

The usage of a psychological model for understanding mental structures of perception and cognition is central to Oatley's work in his application of the "cue" and "schema" terms, which underlines the importance of cognition and frame of reference in any given analysis of film. In the first of the three layers of emotional attention is the "immediate elicitation", where a certain action, performed by a character, prompts an Emotional Cue. (Oatley) According to Oatley, an Emotional Cue is a specific action that attract either negative or positive attention, but it is often a strong action – Oatley argues that such actions, for example a display of affection between a couple or a fist-fight, are patterns that function as "cues that have attention-attracting appeal". (Oatley) These cues are therefore used by directors and cinematographers as tools to attract attention and create a certain focus.

The second layer is an extension of the first and deals with the way sympathy is constructed. By using Frijda's theory of appraisal, Oatley claims that:

> The second mode is based on the idea that cues offered on the screen and soundtrack are patterns of emotional appraisal. Appraisal is the technical term, in modern theories of emotion (e.g., Frijda, 2007), for evaluations of events in relation to a person's goals or concerns. Specific patterns act as cues to trigger specific appraisals and, by means of them, specific schemas of emotion. (Oatley)

The concept of appraisal is concerned with the evaluation of physical events regarding an individual's perception regarding said event. Greg M. Smith explains that the field of cognitive appraisal theory defines emotional response as a reaction to "situational cues" and that emotion is an extension of cognitive assessment of a given situation. Cognitive appraisal theory provides a tool for analysis which allows sympathy to be regarded as a "schema of emotion", and that it is a form of connecting characters in film with the audience. The third mode regards empathy and identification where the audience are further connected with characters and immersion into the characters within a cinematic narrative becomes emphasized. (Oatley) Referring to an experiment regarding empathy in audience film reception by Trabasso and Chung (2004), Oatley concludes that audience members are highly immersed in the feelings and experiences of characters through their reception and subsequent reactions to cinematic narratives.

The approaches of Keith Oatley and Murray Smith mirror each other greatly, however, they provide each other with detailed approaches and methods that allow their individual terms of analyzing emotion to attain greater depth and argumentative significance.

Saturation and the PECMA Flow

In his book *Moving Pictures* and his article, which works as an extension of the occupation in *Moving Pictures*, "The PECMA Flow: A General Model of Visual Aesthetics", Torben Grodal

works with connecting neuropsychology and cinematic viewer responses by creating the PECMA flow model for deciphering visual stimuli. PECMA is an abbreviation of perception, emotion, cognition and motor action and according to Grodal, it provides a framework that enables "investigations of specific film experiences". (Grodal, 3) The advantages of the PECMA model are described thusly by Grodal: "the explanatory advantage of the PECMA framework for film analysis is that it enables us to understand that our film experiences are centrally embodied processes and are not based on the reading or decoding of fixed signs and discrete meanings." (Grodal, 5) Therefore, film enables the perception, cognition and emotional response as reactions to visual and audible experiences that are interpreted by the human brain. (Grodal, 5) Grodal explains that his model enables an analysis that is tied closely to the actual text as well as the recipient of a visual text. Additionally, PECMA provides an understanding of cognitive film theory and the neuropsychological work that precedes it.

According to Grodal, the mechanisms of the human brain are of great importance when attempting to understand and decipher our reception of visual texts and the processes which outline our emotional reactions. The argument of Grodal is that the fictitious nature of film is of little importance due to the human brain principally perceiving before interpreting validity and authenticity, and therein is the implicit success of the film medium as something that creates an emotional response in the viewer:

> PECMA flow starts when light information enters the eyes. Whether this information is derived from the real world or from moving images does not make a fundamental difference for most of the brain systems connected to film viewing, although part of the brain is very much occupied with assessing the reality-status of what we see (Grodal, 3)

The PECMA approach thusly works on this underlying assumption, stemming from neuropsychology as the basis for interpreting the effects of film, although the conscious knowledge of films fictitiousness depends on the film as well as the viewer. (Grodal, 3) Grodal furthermore argues that the validity of his approach is underlined by the fact that the sensory tools used to process real and unreal events are exactly the same and taking place before the process of cognition, which deciphers authenticity. (Grodal, 3) Furthermore, Grodal explains that the visual cortex is heavily focused on the process of Recognition and its relation to emotion as an extension of pattern recognition as well as gathering and responding to information:

> The function of the visual cortex is finding salient forms in the chaos of information that arrives through the eyes and the brain receives a small emotional reward every time it discovers a significant form. Symmetry, for instance, is highly salient because symmetry is typical of living organisms. (Grodal, 4)

Symmetry is regarded as an important addition to the mechanism of recognition pertaining to the likeness that it shares with living creatures. Smith's Recognition along with Grodal's application of symmetry, thusly, become attributes that increases the probability of empathy and creating emotional responses to the visual stimuli of film. Through the works of Claus Bundesen, Vilamur Ramachandran and William Hirstein on visual perception and emotional cues, Grodal explains that: "emotional activation cues visual analysis" (Grodal, 4), which signifies that perception and emoting are mechanisms that work in tandem and aid visual interpretation and the subsequent deduction resulting in a response. Posterior to perceiving and emoting is the process of cognition, which allows the viewer to develop a response to the visual representations by drawing on a litany of universal truths and connecting them with "emotional labels" – Grodal references the universal knowledge that, for example, sugar is sweet and predators are dangerous, which exists in order to clarify the amount of information functioning as a universal frame of reference which aids the process of cognition.

When the process of cognition has taken place, it enables the perceiver to act or emote accordingly. (Grodal, 4) Regarding film, Grodal argues that the visual presentations (which are drawing on the universal frame of reference of any audience member) are attempting to develop associations and connections between the visual stimuli: "When a number of emotionally-charged objects are presented simultaneously and/or in sequence, the mind will build up a strongly charged network of associations and will attempt to find some common denominators for the associations." (Grodal, 5) Grodal furthermore argues that when the "network of associations" build up, they create what Grodal terms "Saturations" – a concept which describes the state of tension that occurs when emotional release does not take place or is ambiguous in its presentation. (Grodal, 5) This indicates that these terms can both be read into a micro as well as a macro context, elaborating the application of the term, which can be coupled with themes as well as certain characters or specific actions.

Methodology

The different theories of cognitive film theory make up a complex analytical approach to the various films through a framework that concerns itself with the abstract psychological notions of emotion. The presence of Grodal's PECMA flow provides an understanding for the psychological research that has provided cognitive film theorists with data that allows them to leap into the field of regarding emotions within the sphere of film reception with complexity. The theories of Torben Grodal rely heavily on the application of tangible psychological studies onto a set of distinct reactions which, according to recent neuropsychological studies are linked to emotion and behavior. Although Grodal's model will not be applied in the analysis, his terms of "Symmetry" and "Saturation" will be a large part of the analysis, complementing the approaches of Oatley and Smith. However, neurocognitive film theorists like Torben Grodal have been criticized for being "reductionistic and irrelevant" in their psychological approach to film, which according to academics, Asbjørn Gronstad

and Christer Mattson, lacks a comprehensive textual analysis (Grodal, 1). There is a danger of applying Grodal's approach, which regards the specificity of visual interpretation, for example watching a physical gesture of a character without viewing it in the context of the culture that it is a product of. However, applying Oatley's term of emotional cues, and coupled with Murray Smith's "structure of sympathy", the analytical approach is provided with a theoretical framework that is able to regard emotional reactions on a scale that includes thematic interpretation as an extension of the approach to analyzing visual and audible stimuli. The critique of Torben Grodal's theories will be met, through the application of other cognitive film theorists as well as Northrop Frye's approach to literary criticism, whose approaches allow the analytical inclusion of thematical and interpretive qualities – just as an Emotional Cue of Saturation can occur as a result of a specific sequence of actions, so can a theme of a film be interpreted to be a Saturation as well as other emotional responses, encouraging either a sympathetic or apathetic response.

The work on "the structure of sympathy" by Murray Smith will be the most widely used theoretical tool for the analysis. Keith Oatley's "schemas of emotion" are very reminiscent of Smith's "structure of sympathy", which forces an evaluation of the different layouts that they entail. Murray Smith's structure provides a wider toolset for analyzing emotion, despite their fundamental similarities. However, Oatley's application of Emotional Cues to this framework, provides a great tool to observe and gather analytical material, where Smith's work allows a deeper analysis of sympathy. Therefore, Oatley's term of an Emotional Cue will be used along with Recognition, as they provide each other with detail and comparative merits that have the ability to stand analytically stronger than apart. Smith's terms of Alignment and Allegiance are far more detailed in their approach to delve into construction of empathy and sympathy and, therefore, they will be used instead of Oatley's three layers, as they provide a better and more specific and detailed framework of analyzing emotional responses of the different films.

The analysis features an array of different Hollywood movies, ranging from cult classics to big budget blockbusters, which have been grouped together to achieve a detailed look into various constructions of hero and villain. The goal of the analysis below is to ascertain the significance of the prevalence of the above-mentioned theoretical approach within the analytical material – specifically delving into the different relationships between hero and villain presented in the range of films through cognitive film theory. The concepts mentioned above will be strictly applied to hero and villain and eventual characters which hold significance and relevance to the main hero and villain relationship. The first two films, the director's cut of *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) have been chosen due to their critically acclaimed status in the film community, and they have certainly influenced Hollywood film production, which is relevant in the context of selecting a somewhat large portion of analytical material. The different sections will contain brief outlines of the constructions of emotional responses, whereas some sections will provide in-depth analyses, focusing heavily on the thematical importance between hero and villain through a case-study structure. The short accounts of some films will, furthermore, provide a frame, serving to connect and relate the entire frame to the general argument of the thematical similarities of the various films.

During the last two decades, superhero movies have dominated film production in terms of major revenue and presence. Blockbuster films are almost exclusively dealing with the subject of superheroes, and you could also argue that the *Star Wars* franchise is a part of this trend. This type of narrative deals with the subject of good and evil, and where it previously has dealt with this unambiguously, it has now begun to regard character as an ambiguous entity. *X-Men* (2000) and *Unbreakable* (2000) were the initial trendsetters for this type of film, which is shown through their ambiguous construction of hero and villain that regard them with a mix of romanticism and realism. The popularity of superhero films is without question due to its saturation of Hollywood cinema and

immense revenue. In an attempt to clarify the origin of the current blockbuster trend, *X-Men* and *Unbreakable* will be included in the analysis for added depth in the wide range of material, providing a backstory in the genesis of the superhero films of the 21st century. There is an inherent danger of cherry-picking films that fit the focus of the main subject of regarding ambiguity in character construction, however, the selection of majorly popular blockbusters serves to aid the prevention of selecting films without relevance. The strength of the investigative study of films lies within the prioritization of popular blockbuster narratives. Furthermore, the fact that five out of the ten highest grossing films of all time are superhero blockbusters, emphasizes the importance of the study of their characters.

Truth and Authenticity

In order to provide the analysis with a cultural frame, the rationale of constructing narratives, as the films of the analysis, will be evaluated, discussed and compared with contemporary American culture. The shift in narrative and character construction that will be demonstrated in the analysis, will be argued as a product of a cultural progression that is rooted in the cultural subconscious that is responsible for the duality between cinematic narratives and contemporary issues. The cultural occupation with the subject of truth and subjectivity will be dealt with as a reason for the interest in ambiguous heroes and villains.

Truth has always been a subject of interest to human beings, which demonstrates the interest in ambiguous character constructions, which is as much a part of the literary tradition as unambiguous character types. There is an inherent fear of disinformation in the American culture which furthers the fascination of the subject in fiction. However, in recent years, through the increased application

of different sources of information and news on the internet like social media, the American culture has become saturated with an obsession of truth that branches to numerous contexts. The recent preoccupation with authenticity, ambiguity and subjectivity may explain the increased presence of these themes in films. Moreover, the usage of said concepts saturates recent blockbuster films and solidifies the popularity of dealing with this cultural fascination. The very fact that the studios behind big blockbusters have begun to deal with ambiguous character types by investing billions of dollars into a variety of franchises, exhibits a clear faith in the popularity and relevance of said themes. The number of factors that influence this enormous subject are insurmountable, but a handful cultural phenomena will be brought up, in an attempt to dive into the cultural landscape that influences film production. Concepts such as "fake news" have risen to an unprecedented cultural relevance, and they are of crucial importance to the theme of this discussion. The term started as a denomination of a Macedonian get-rich-quick scheme, which dealt with making sensational and untrue articles about subjects of interest. (*BBC Trending*) However, it quickly became a term that is widely used to attack unambiguous narratives and denounce them as being unsound and disingenuous. Most notably, Donald Trump has engaged with "fake news" and even gave out "Fake News Awards" to reporters who made small errors. Additionally, the term saturated much political discourse surrounding the election, before and after. (*BBC Trending*) Along with "fake news", the scandalous circumstances regarding Edward Snowden in 2013 and Wikileaks in 2010 solidifies the contemporary fascination with truth, subjectivity and biased narratives. These cultural phenomena can be argued as a rejection of the norm of presenting narratives as unambiguous, clarifying the current zeitgeist and the occupation with truth through the ambiguity of the increasing number of sources regarding a given subject. The heightened application of ambiguity in Hollywood narratives is perhaps a fictitious manner of presenting the tension in the cultural landscape of The United States with the consistent attacks on unambiguous non-fictional narratives between the oppositional forces in American culture

and politics. The idea of truth as fluid is at the very core of this cultural preoccupation, and it is shown throughout the films in the analysis. The concept of truth in terms of good and evil are dealt with in an extreme manner and it seems to surface in the political and subsequently pop-cultural landscape whenever it is relevant in a generation. Supporting this argument is the narrative style of *Apocalypse Now* and its apparent rejection and irony toward the prevailing political opinion during the war effort in Vietnam. Released four years after the end of the Vietnam War, *Apocalypse Now* remarks the cultural obsession with the negative impact on the individuals affected by the war. The specific nature of this example solidifies the relevance to a certain cultural phenomenon, however, in the other films within the analysis, there are ambiguities in their presentation due to their completely fictitious nature. The cultural preoccupation with truth and authenticity is strengthened by the ambiguity of current phenomena, which saturates a large number of contemporary films, and especially recent blockbusters.

Analysis

In this section, the different narratives will be compared and common elements which aid the creation of sympathetic emotional responses for both hero and villain will be explored. The usage of Manichean character archetypes and homosocial behavior will be argued as a basis for supporting the construction of sympathy for hero and villain alike. Graduated moral structure dominates the range of movies analyzed in this project, which explains the highly ambiguous relationship between the characters. This specific characteristic will be subject to scrutiny in terms of the implications of this type of character construction. When Allegiance is constructed with a sympathetic focus on both protagonist and antagonist, a moral ambiguity arises that fixates the audience on emotional

ambivalence regarding the specific outcome of a certain narrative. Moreover, it presents the narrative in a manner that introduces a conflicting bias through two characters, who in terms of the established Allegiance are often quite equal. This conflict of bias will be regarded as a form of Saturation and, thusly, responsible for the tensions of the different films. Furthermore, the specifics of Allegiance construction will be dealt with in the following, as a means of clarifying common characteristics between the opposing characters.

Construction of Alignment and Allegiance for the Villain character

With the exception of *Heat* (1995)*,* the primary Alignment in all of the chosen movies lies with the protagonist, while the antagonist receives adequate Allegiance, making them as appealing as the protagonist. In *Heat*, the usage of Alignment is entirely different, focusing on both antagonist and protagonist equally, thereby making it impossible to find out which is which through the concepts of Allegiance as well as Alignment. The different methods of achieving equal (or close to equal) Allegiance vary greatly, but all films apply certain characteristics to their respective narratives, which causes both hero and villain to become emotionally compelling, and these different connecting factors will be addressed in the sections below. In *Blade Runner*, *Apocalypse Now*, the new *Star Wars* movies, *X-Men*, *Unbreakable*, *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) and *The Rock* (1996) there is an emphasis on Allegiance regarding the villains, which is often created through a heightened focus on their respective backstories. The villains in each of these films are highly emphasized in terms of character development, but not necessarily in Alignment. Although the heroes receive the majority of Spatio-temporal Attachment, the application of Allegiance is completely different. For example, the villain in *Apocalypse Now* is not Spatio-temporally aligned until the third act of the movie, however, he is dealt with largely through the investigation of the protagonist, and through his discoveries, we achieve Subjective Access and a means for sympathizing with the villain. Both *X-Men,* the new editions to the *Star Wars* franchise*, The Rock, Captain*

America: Civil War and *Unbreakable* regard the events that are fundamental to the creation of the villains'/adversaries' identities, which is often centered on childhood experiences and trauma, and this will be dealt with in the following.

Emotional Tangibility and Childhood Trauma

Blade Runner and the Missing Childhood of the "Replicants"

From early on in *Blade Runner*, the viewer is steered toward an emotional relationship with the "Replicants". Throughout the opening sequence, which exhibits a closeup of an eye (that of the antagonist) looking at the city of Los Angeles from above, the audience receives the first Recognition – that this is a person perceiving an enormous collection of structures and people, where the soundtrack emphasizes that this is an emotionally ambivalent experience for said character. This is exhibited by means of using major chords and modulating into minor, which is often used in sad or dark songs. The sequence gives the connotation that the experience is as seeing something for the first time (which is also supported by the introductory wall of text) and that something profound is attached to this through the audible modification. The argument that the eye, perceiving the city, belongs to the antagonist is ambiguous, but it could be argued due to the eye color being similar to Roy's as well as the camera's fixation on the Tyrell pyramids. Moreover, the introductory text that explains the mechanics of the universe also explains that a group of "Replicants" have attempted to break into these pyramids, emphasizing their significance. Although the "Replicants" are not children biologically, they are mentally inexperienced as children which could be interpreted in the context of the opening scene as a childlike sense of wonder and seeking out their father figure, coupled with the frustration of emotional trauma through a loveless and abusive "childhood", which, furthermore is accentuated by the major to minor modulation in the musical score.

X-Men and Magneto

In *X-Men*, Lehnsherr's experiences in a concentration camp as a child works as a shaping force for his motivation. The Spatio-temporal Alignment in the film fixates initially on the character of Eric Lehnsherr (Ian Mckellen) and his childhood trauma of being violently separated from his parents in a concentration camp. By uttering "I've heard these arguments before", the narrative provides an explanation with simplicity, referencing the way he is influenced, and thereby explaining his pattern of emotive and rational reaction to the marginalization and identification of a certain societal group or "race". This scene provides an Emotional Cue of violence against Lehnsherr and his family, which is regarded in his concentration camp experiences. Subsequently, the Emotional Cue becomes attached to this quote giving it an added emotional impact and significance regarding his perception of in-group out-group relationships and the danger therein. This sequence serves as an Alignment, by means of Subjective Access toward Lehnsherr, which creates the tension surrounding his character. Additionally, the character achieves Allegiance through the deliberation of his moral opposition to totalitarianism. Sympathy is also achieved through his childhood experience of abuse, that any helpless person would receive, when facing the atrocities of a concentration camp during World War II. Furthermore, the extermination of a people, like the Jews in the World War II, is an argument that Lehnsherr uses to support his claims: "I've heard these arguments before." Thereby speaking to the political initiative of wanting identification and categorization of mutants. This Trauma of Lehnsherr's character provides the audience with sympathy for his character and the decisions he faces through the Emotional Cue of violent mistreatment. It is peculiar that Lehnsherr as a character is more thoroughly introduced compared to Xavier (Patrick Stewart), especially considering that Lehnsherr is portrayed as the villain. Despite his villainous island lair and the contrast to the utopic atmosphere of Xavier's school, Lehnsherr is the most compelling character in terms of established and elaborated allegiance, thereby allowing the audience an understanding of his motivations and

actions. The pictorial imagery of the villain stands in firm contrast to the actual complexities of his character, which suggests an actual awareness and manipulation of previous antagonist presentations. Whereas Lehnsherr physically resembles a typical Bond villain, he possesses characteristics with which the audience sympathizes, and this creates a greater moral and ideological tension in the evaluation of both factions, spearheaded by Xavier and Lehnsherr respectively. The assessment of Lehnsherr by Xavier furthermore supports the unambiguous manner of representing Lehnsherr as a complex individual: "He [Lehnsherr] became angry and vengeful. He became Magneto". This very vague assessment of the complexity of the character elaborates the villainous visual surroundings of Lehnsherr's residence. Even though the audience is made aware of the complex nature of Lehnsherr, it receives ambiguous indications constantly, although sympathy for his character is constructed carefully and eloquently. However, the sympathy could also be an underlying explanation and elaboration of his character, functioning as an excuse for committing evil acts. Despite Xavier's assessment of Lehnsherr, sympathy and Allegiance are constructed for both characters through their mutual search for hope, survival and peace.

Unbreakable and Mr. Glass

As opposed to the hero in *Unbreakable*, we receive a few short scenes about the upbringing of our antagonist. The application of these serve to solidify our empathy with this character, considering the unspeakable acts that are unveiled in the final scene of the film. These introductory scenes to the character of Elijah Price (Samuel L. Jackson) creates both Alignment and Allegiance in the way of presenting him as a damaged person that acts according to his frame of reference, which is a life of isolation and pain, filled with comic books. The opening scene contains the birth of the villain, and in the subsequent scenes of his childhood, the spectator is made aware of his resent of his frail body and the social implication therein. When Price is discovered as the villain as well as later

in the film, when he receives numerous broken bones during an accident, he utters: "They call me Mr. Glass" (*Unbreakable* 2000). This indicates that the traumatizing experiences of his childhood are continuing to haunt and influence his present thought patterns and actions. In *Unbreakable*, the usage of child-like innocence is a method of aligning the audience with Elijah Price and his experiences with social exclusion through his disease and his subsequent nickname, "Mr. Glass".

Captain America: Civil War and Tony Stark's Parents

Although not a villain but an adversary due to the heroism of his character in other films of the franchise, Tony Stark in *Civil War* receives a small, but significant amount of backstory through his relationship with his parents. This relationship's subsequent relevance for the narrative progression and conflict, serves to solidify the spectator's sympathy for Stark's actions. During a public speaking/flashback, Stark experiences the tension between him and his parents during childhood, which functions as Subjective Access and an Emotional Cue, granting emotional depth and Allegiance with his character. This scene provides Stark's character with a backstory that explains his actions later in the film during violent conflict between himself and the protagonist, Steve Rodgers. The childhood trauma of Stark losing his parents before achieving emotional resolution in their conflict, serves to explain and justify the questionable actions of exacting revenge by means of Allegiance.

Avengers: Infinity War and Thanos's Backstory

The character of Thanos, in the newest edition to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Avengers: Infinity War,* is an interesting character to regard in this section as an example of a character that is saturated by childhood experiences through the actions performed during the film. Through the Subjective Access of a flashback, the audience is introduced to the backstory of Thanos and his motivation of wanting to eliminate half of all living beings. Through the self-destructive behavior of his people, Thanos had witnessed the pitfalls of overpopulation and the subsequent lack of acting

upon the problems of overusing natural resources, which, ultimately, resulted in the death of his species and planet. Thusly, through the persuasion that all planets and species are destined to that very same outcome, it became his mission to rectify that fundamental flaw of life and thereby save all life. The wish for saving life in its entirety is essentially selfless and admirable, and through the Subjective Access of childhood experiences, the spectator achieves an understanding as well as sympathy for Thanos and his behavior through his childhood trauma. Presented through Subjective Access, the Emotional Cue of childhood trauma explains Thanos's moral and ideological persuasion, which serves to create Allegiance for his character.

Star Wars: The Last Jedi and Kylo Ren's Rationale

Star Wars: The Last Jedi portrays childhood trauma of the villain through the betrayal of trust. The spectator is informed of the violent relationship between Kylo Ren and Luke Skywalker, which through the Subjective Access of Alignment acts as an Emotional Cue that creates sympathy for the character arc of Kylo Ren and his rationale. There is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding Kylo Ren's memories, which further sparks doubt for the validity of either bias in presenting the narrative. Kylo Ren is presented as innocent but influenceable, who instead of guidance was subjected to attempted murder. The trauma of being cast out as a child through a betrayal of trust, provides the spectator with an understanding of Kylo Ren's arc as well as the inherent mistrust and anger of his character.

Concluding Statements on the usage of Childhood Trauma

In each movie, these are brief scenes that act as a form of simplistic Alignment which serves to attach emotional tangibility to questionable, adversarial or even villainous behavior, and these are exclusively attached to the villain/adversary type characters. The method of using childhood trauma as a means for creating Allegiance, and thereby as a source of sympathy for these characters, is an attempt to make these villains more compelling and thereby reinforcing the importance of their

individual struggles. Moreover, this application of Alignment as a means for Allegiance is effective in the sense that a film does not need a large portion of screen time to create a sympathetic relationship between the spectator and the regarded character due to the emotional impact of violence against childhood innocence that acts as a powerful Emotional Cue. The specific usage of childhood trauma may be the exploitation of the unique social position and significance of children – they are innocent, inexperienced and vulnerable to influence and traumatize, which aids Allegiance creation.

Disillusion and War Trauma of Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* and General Hummel in *The Rock*

In the following section, another theme will be regarded as a means for Allegiance creation. Like Childhood innocence and trauma, war trauma will be regarded as the means of structuring sympathy for the villains in *Apocalypse Now* and *The Rock.* In these movies there is a litany of strong Emotional Cues that are attached to the theme of war trauma. The concept of war is strongly associated with negative connotations, which provides a certain emotional background and a frame of expectation for the films. As Grodal argues: "Each object and event is associatively connected with an emotional label or tag provided by the emotion system" (Grodal, 4) In the context of war, emotions connected with that particular imagery provides a framework of references to a destructive idea, which is subsequently used to construct Allegiance for both protagonist and antagonist, as they are all presented as victims of the different circumstances. Both Kurtz (Marlon Brando) and Hummel (Ed Harris) have strong emotional reactions to their war experiences, which make both characters rebel against the military system through their feelings of powerlessness. During Willard's (Martin Sheen) voiceover he wonders about the circumstances that made Kurtz go against the army: "Kurtz got off the boat. He split from the whole damn program. What did he see here on his first tour?" Kurtz later explains that his reason for defecting was caused by his experience of witnessing inoculation of children, who subsequently had their arms removed. This sequence acts as an Emotional Cue, which,

through the Subjective Access of Kurtz's emotional state, demonstrates Allegiance by the emotional reaction to violence against children. Becoming traumatized by this event, Kurtz began to focus on the willpower of the opposing forces, admiring their extreme dedication in opposing the U.S. military forces. The dedication in his adversaries became his ultimate reason for rejecting the U.S. military effort and his allegiance to his country of origin.

In *The Rock,* there is a very interesting choice of having the very first Alignment of the film with the villain as the first character introduction. The opening sequence features a military burial and introduces the antagonist character of Hummel and his problems with the military system and its injustices by means of Subjective Access and Spatio-temporal Attachment. Through the opening scene the audience is introduced to a sequence of events prior to the plot of the film, where General Hummel is stating his case in front of his superiors: "Congressman Weaver and esteemed members of the Special Armed Services Committee, I come before you to protest a grave injustice" (*The Rock* 1996). This quote remains unelaborated, but within its simplicity, it sets the tone of the film and the character of General Hummel. Empathy is constructed through the vague audible flashbacks of his career and the sorrow and anger that surrounds his experiences. These experiences of having his colleges die under unfair circumstances leads him to conclude in his internal dialogue: "It has to stop." The opening and introductory scene for General Hummel concludes with him speaking to his deceased wife at her grave, furthermore establishing Hummel as a thoughtful and emotionally conscious person. When speaking to his wife, he utters: "I tried. You know I tried everything and I still don't have their attention. Let's hope this elevates their thinking. But whatever happens… Please don't think less of me." (*The Rock* 1996). This utterance develops Hummel's process of reflections regarding the following act – he is indeed aware of its potentially destructive and thereby counterproductive outcome, but he follows through in the optimistic hope that he might change the status quo for the better of his peers. He knowingly commits treason to better the circumstances that

he has witnessed firsthand, which shows that he believes in his ideals so strongly that he attempts to sacrifice his career as well as his freedom. Through this isolated scene, the spectator receives multiple cognitive indicators for emotional reaction. The Recognition, Spatio-temporal Attachment and Subjective Access of Hummel demonstrates a sad person, who is desperate for change and the wish for saving lives. What ultimately creates Allegiance is Hummel's manner of relating to his troops as well as his deceased wife, showing the audience his capability of sympathizing and fighting for his moral persuasion. The moral deliberation of his character is condensed within the very first scene of *The Rock*, which allows the spectator to understand and sympathize with his actions throughout the film. The compassion of Hummel's character is furthermore solidified in the second scene of the film, where non-lethal ammunition is used during the weapons-heist – he sincerely wants no casualties in his efforts and his method reflects that desire. Moreover, when Hummel loses a college to a deadly poison, there is an extended shot of his reaction with a duration of 6 seconds. The length of that shot is substantially longer when comparing it to the average shot length of that scene, which indicates the high value of human life to the character of General Hummel and that he is anything but indifferent. The character of Hummel is, through the very short opening sequence and subsequent heist scene, solidified as being surrounded by death and sorrow, which serves to establish an understanding for his subsequent actions. The powerlessness that he feels is the emotional background for his villainous actions and provides the audience with an understanding of his actions as well as his victimhood. His highly compassionate approach to a violent act encourages Allegiance and understanding for his behavior during the film. By creating the character of General Hummel in this manner, the film serves to elaborate him as a complex and empathic human being, who moves against a system that has fundamentally failed him and changed his beliefs in the American military and its procedures. A likeness between Hummel and his counterpart, Mason (Sean Connery), arises through the impersonal treatment that they have experienced, which signifies their mutual distrust for a military system that

regards human lives as expendable. This symmetry between the two characters creates Allegiance for both characters, where Allegiance for one spills over to the other. However, their approaches differ greatly. Mason reacts with apathy regarding the system and wants to reconnect and live a normal life with his daughter apart from the military system. Hummel's reaction results in compassionate resistance, which attempts to change and better the system. In fact, Hummel's ideal is selfless and therefore encourages a more solidified Allegiance, although he is the villain. Within the character of Hummel there are clear signs of moral deliberation that are rooted in sympathy for his fellow man, which in turn makes the audience sympathize with his ideals and motivations, however, not necessarily his actions. Both Hummel and Kurtz exhibit clear signs of profound reflection and strong emotional reaction, which serves to create the sympathetic relationship between spectator and the characters, although their actions are questionable and violent in nature.

Allegiance for Vincent in *Collateral*

In his book *The Cinema of Michael Mann: Vice and Vindication*, while referring to *Collateral* and *Heat*, Jonathan Rayner argues that Mann is occupied with "questions of meaning and challenges to social values" (Rayner, 80), which are terms that become central to his films, delving into these concepts through the actions and the dialogue of their characters. (Rayner, 80) These ambiguous questions become central to the films' narratives, and the investigation of ambiguity through dialogue becomes increasingly explicit in *Collateral* through the character of Vincent (Tom Cruise). Rayner explains that, like *Heat*, the characters of *Collateral* develop empathy and recognition of each other through the narrative developments, making the narrative progression comparable despite the many differences between the two films. (Rayner, 80-81) In turn, the sympathy between the characters effectively creates Allegiance for them in their mutual recognition of each other's stances. Rayner states that despite the protagonists' mutual recognition, they represent opposites that create the

dynamic and thematic conflict of *Collateral*: "Superiority and withdrawal versus empathy and engagement; distance and contempt versus emotional investment". (Rayner, 86) The Allegiance for the character of Vincent possesses a strange characteristic of deviation from all other villains regarded in the thesis, and the character, therefore, requires a more thoroughly analytical and argumentative approach. Apart from the beginning, the protagonists, Max (Jamie Foxx) and Vincent are almost equally Spatio-temporally aligned because they occupy the same physical space, having hired and subsequently taken Max hostage for the entire evening. Subjective Access is solely granted through the protagonists' meticulous debate regarding a philosophical approach to life and conceptualizing meaning with each other. Vincent can easily be described as a sociopath who puts little to no value in the individuals that surround him, and this is shown throughout the film by means of his actions and spoken statements. In his book, Steven Rybin argues that Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995) and *Collateral* (2004) mirror the films of Stanley Kubrick, in terms of exploring what Rybin calls "contingency". This contingency regards the idea of truth as a relative term that is unequivocally ambiguous, and that it is formally and thematically reliant on a construction of truth, however subjective it may be. Subjectivity becomes a central component in Rybin's comparison between Mann and Kubrick, in their method of constructing truth in their narratives. (Rybin, 130, 2013) Vincent presents his quarrel with society's manner of viewing the value of human life by questioning how one can unify the scientific fact of humanity's cosmic lack of importance with the notion that people have a unique and powerful meaning (which he also argues is a fake emotional stance in people). His primary tool for arguing his philosophical stance is that of hypocrisy regarding sympathy in his fellow man and therefore I will argue that Vincent is a disappointed person, who in his factual enlightenment has become disillusioned and apathic toward humanity, and that further explains his reasoning toward his choice of work. Throughout the movie Vincent attempts to spark reflection and discussion with Max and it becomes clear that the apathy in Vincent is based on what he views as the

hypocritical notions of humanity, which is the subject of debate during the cab ride discussions between Max and Vincent. An argument supporting the pessimistic but highly non-sociopathic nature of Vincent is his need to discuss and dive philosophically into the subjects that occupy his mind. The very first remark of Vincent, posterior to informing Max about the destination of the cab ride, sparks the entire philosophical debate between the two characters:

> 17 million people. If this were a country, it'd be the fifth biggest economy in the world and nobody knows each other. I read about this guy, gets on the MTA here, dies. Six hours he's riding the subway before anybody notices his corpse doing laps around L.A., people on and off sitting next to him. Nobody notices. (*Collateral*)

The haunted nature of Vincent's being is remarked upon in this quote through his critique of the impersonal ambience of big cities like L.A. Subsequently, Vincent expresses sadness regarding the, in his view, false empathetic ideals of humanity in a macro context. Furthermore, Vincent remarks on Max's feelings toward the Hispanic man who was murdered by comparing the situation with the genocide in Rwanda and the U.S. usage of nuclear bombs in Japan. Max's seeming indifference toward mass slaughter and his caring about a single individual is deemed hypocritical by Vincent's logic:

> Well, tens of thousands killed before sundown. Nobody's killed people that fast since Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Did you bat an eye, Max? Did you join Amnesty International, Oxfam, Save the Whales, Greenpeace, or something? No. I off one fat Angelino and you through a hissy fit. (*Collateral*)

Attempting to apply logic to empathy, Vincent uses Max for reflection by contrasting his reactions with a largescale perspective. What Rybin Terms "contingency" is dealt with in these quotes, debating the ambiguity of the human condition in terms of empathy on a macro and micro scale. Truth acts as an analogy for right and wrong which supports the ambiguity in the Allegiance construction of the

film. The subjective stances and rationales of both characters become understandable and thusly, the audience achieve sympathy for both characters although Vincent resembles the sociopathic in his actions and thoughts. However, the conflicted nature of Vincent's being is apparent in his disappointment with humanity, clarifying his wounded ideals of human beings as consistent in emotional and sympathetic behavior. What is ultimately reflected in the character of Vincent is a fear of being without emotional significance. This is also touched upon in the scene regarding the father of Vincent and their relationship – he was never emotionally significant to his father, which explains the philosophical occupation of significance and subjectivity throughout his dialogue. Allegiance for Vincent is created through the story of his father, adding emotional depth and an explanation of his approach to human beings as inconsistent and flawed. Moreover, ambiguity surrounds the exact truth about Vincent's childhood, suggesting that something has occurred too horrible for him to share without the hint of being disingenuous, that in turn is responsible for his apathy and disappointment. Thusly, Vincent becomes an interesting character who actively reflects and challenges existing norms through debating with Max. Additionally, through Vincent's doubt, the spectator receives Allegiance to his character through his despair and unmentioned traumatizing experiences as a victim of dehumanizing circumstances.

Concluding Statements on The Construction of Allegiance for Villains

Each individual section demonstrates the highly utilized methods of creating Allegiance for villain characters, which often present them in the light of victimhood. By presenting the villains as suffering from a certain trauma or mistreatment makes the spectator evaluate them as damaged, explaining their behavior, and thereby encouraging sympathy for the individual characters. Although their methods often contain violent means, their essential good will and wish for a positive outcome is somewhat overlooked in light of their traumatizing experiences.

The Theme of Sacrifice in *X-Men, Unbreakable* and *Avengers: Infinity War*

The moral evaluation of Allegiance in the different films comes to fruition in a number of different ways, more notably the theme of sacrifice. In *X-Men, Avengers: Infinity War* and *Unbreakable* the moral division between the hero and the villain exists within their willingness to make sacrifices.

X-Men features two opposing factions of "mutants", who fight political battles in order to mitigate fear in ordinary human beings, as well as the prevention of identification, categorization and incarceration of mutants. While essentially fighting for the same cause, these two factions are divided on an essential level – the willingness to use violence and sacrifice as a means to a peaceful end. The character of Lehnsherr has a subjectively noble motivation for his actions. He wishes to turn every human being into mutants and thereby creating peace, bringing Xavier the hope he desires. Lehnsherr mentions sacrifice on many occasions, distinguishing himself from Xavier on this fundamental level. When attempting to sacrifice a person he steadfastly maintains his sound moral principles of sacrificing a few for the good of many: "Your sacrifice will mean our survival." (*X-Men* 2000). In *Unbreakable* the same theme of sacrifice is also the dividing factor between hero and villain, functioning as the gap between them that ultimately separates them and causes the tension and the inherent conflict of the film. Elijah Price (Samuel L. Jackson) murders a large amount of people in his search for the hero and finding the moral good, essentially functioning as a method of creating meaning for himself as well as saving more people than he initially sacrificed. Through their character construction, *X-Men* and *Unbreakable* can be argued as the defining two examples that have created the template for ambiguous villains in subsequent superhero films, and therefore it is extremely relevant to relate them to the newest blockbuster edition to this type of film. *Avengers: Infinity War* features the same type of ambiguous villain character as well as the theme of sacrifice, which is

demonstrated throughout the film by the heroes and the villain alike. The heroes' lack of willingness to sacrifice a single individual is firmly contrasted in the villain's wish to remove half of all living beings from existence, which is a motivation spurred on by the demise of his own planet due to overpopulation. Through his backstory of losing his home, the spectator, through Subjective Access, becomes Aligned with Thanos and an understanding of his actions of sacrificing his daughter is achieved. The firmness of the villain's beliefs is solidified by the sacrifice of his daughter and Allegiance is achieved through the deliberation of his moral and ideological reasoning. Thanos's ability to have sympathy and emotional relationships, not to mention his victimhood of losing everything, underline the spectator's Allegiance and Alignment with the character despite the reprehensible murderous behavior.

In all the mentioned examples, sacrifice acts as the force that separates hero and villain, causing the tensions and conflicts of the different narratives. Coincidentally being superhero movies, the implications of romanticism in the heroic characters are somewhat ironic in the contrast of their opposites, who through their subjective sense of morality attempt to achieve the same goal as the heroes through collateral damage.

Elaboration of hero characters

The lack of elaboration in the hero type characters in the various narratives is perhaps the absence of necessity in Allegiance creation compared with the villainous characters. Through the primary Alignment of the protagonists in each of the above-mentioned films, the audience is given a subjective perception of good and bad behavior, but through the Emotional Cues, which attach themselves to Allegiance, the viewer is given an explanation of the villains and perhaps also doubt, whether the subjective perceptions of the protagonists are correct or not. The ambiguity of truth

becomes a fundamental struggle within each film, which coincidentally is explicitly regarded in *Collateral*. In *Collateral* the subject of authenticity and moral authority is discussed in depth, but no resolution is achieved due to the progression of the plot which interferes with the philosophical debate, adding increased tension which the absence of resolution.

In *The Rock*, the Manichean extremity is not limited to the villains of the movie, which will be dealt with in depth below. The hero of the movie, Stanley Goodspeed is exclusively good and is represented more lightly and superficially with respect to Emotional Cues compared to the villain character, General Hummel. The scene featuring the first Spatio-temporal Attachment of Goodspeed reveals him as a goofy "The Beatles" enthusiast with entirely too much time on his hands. Moreover, Goodspeed is emphasized as heroic and sympathetic in his actions to prevent people from dying to terrorist actions and showing sympathy and caring for his peers – this Allegiance is the extent of his elaboration as a character, navigating the universe of the film. These characters support the narrative surrounding the villain and they function as a contrast to the emotionally complex characters of villains. Additionally, the complexity of some characters is elaborated and underlined by means of the opposition of the above-mentioned characters. The Emotional Cues provided by the metaphysical evil and good characters make them confined to the Manichean character structure and this demonstrates the prevalence of this structure in constructing an opposition to emotionally complex characters. However, the graduated moral structure is also used on the characters of General Hummel and Mason (Sean Connery), which solidifies the fact that these are two narrative extremes with the potential to complement and provide contrasts that are essential to a certain construction of sympathetic Allegiance. In terms of the Alignment of characters that are divided into the two categories, there is an interesting prioritization. The character of General Hummel has traits which are resembling the graduated moral structure, and Stanley Goodspeed has traits which resemble a character that belongs to the Manichean structure. These two characters are the most represented in

terms of Spatio-temporal Alignment within the cinematic universe of *The Rock*. The prioritization of substance through Spatio-temporal Attachment is, however, interesting through the villain's complex development and Goodspeed's goofball hero demeanor.

In *Apocalypse Now,* the Spatio-temporal Attachment centered on Willard starts at the very beginning, which features the song "The End" by "The Doors" with a cross cut of the destruction of the jungle and the protagonist played by Martin Sheen. Imagery of destruction and negativity surrounding the concept of war is pertinent at the very beginning, displaying the state of mind of this soldier. The ceiling fan is crosscut with the chopper propellers, granting Subjective Access to the frame of reference as well as the psychological state of Willard. Alignment with Captain Willard is granted through this scene and the subsequent scene of him acting out and being self-destructive in his hotel room. After witnessing his behavior, we receive additional Subjective Access through Willard's internal dialogue, explaining his mental state and the impact on his social life: "when I was home after the first tour it was worse. […] I barely said a word to my wife until I said yes to a divorce." These quotes signify the damage on the protagonist that war has had on his phycological stability. The access to Willard's thoughts and feelings as a victim of a war creates Allegiance in the evaluation that takes place, when regarding his mental state and the loss he has experienced as a direct result of the extremities of war. Additionally, Willard defines himself as being different from his peers and permanently changed: "Someday this war's gonna end. That'd be just fine with the boys on the boat. They weren't looking for anything more than a way home. Trouble is, I'd been back there, and I knew that it just didn't exist anymore." (*Apocalypse Now* 1979) Willard compares himself to the soldiers that surround him and explains that he is damaged in comparison to them, not belonging in his country of origin any more, which is furthermore underlined by his divorce.

Where the villains have the most powerful imagery and condensed Alignment attached to them, the heroes are much more in focus in terms of Spatio-temporal Alignment and therefore receive the majority of screen time. The narratives are presented through the gaze of their subjective experiences of the plot progression, but the villains are meticulously emphasized through the condensation of their individual representations. The eloquent construction of Allegiance for the hero characters is sometimes equal to, but never greater than the Allegiance for the villains.

Metaphysically evil representations

The sympathetic characteristics of the villains/adversaries are emphasized in the metaphysically evil characters, who, unlike the villains, do not receive adequate Alignment and that prevents them from having any positive Allegiance attached to them. We know almost nothing of the different examples of this type of character, which furthermore, underlines the lack of empathy and sympathy that the audience is able to feel for these characters. Additionally, the metaphysical evil characters of the different narratives serve to create contrast to the central characters of the narratives. The metaphysical evil is often used as a very limited and pure character representation in terms of Alignment – they receive little to no Spatio-temporal Attachment and they are completely void of Subjective Access. They have a limited usage within their respective narratives, being applied as catalysts by mitigating action as well as functioning as comparative agents within the array of films. In *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *The Rock* and *Heat* to name a few, these character archetypes facilitate action and create a platform for plot progression as well as tension. In *Heat,* for example, the character of Waingro (Kevin Gage) is responsible for the final "showdown" between McCauley and Hanna. Therefore, the character Waingro acts as a catalyst for McCauley and Hanna, existing as the causality that brings the two main characters together in the final scene. Waingro also possesses a fundamental opposition to both McCauley and Hanna by murdering people

without showing empathy, creating a strong contrast to both main characters as a metaphysical embodiment of evil. Moreover, as is also presented in the section below regarding *The Rock,* all of these examples of metaphysically evil Manichean archetypes serve as a contrast to the actual villain, who create the effect of exhibiting the behavior of the villain as less evil by comparison with metaphysical villainy. In *Heat* this is demonstrated through Waingro, who with acts of rape and coldblooded murder functions as a contrast to McCauley. This usage of the metaphysically evil is also evident in *The Last Jedi*, where Snoke (Andy Serkis) is responsible for the facilitation of action in bringing together the hero and villain. Additionally, he is also revealed as being the connecting force between them, and thusly, Snoke is responsible for the mutual sympathy between the two characters as well as its revelation to the spectator. In *The Last Jedi*, the Manichean archetype is embodied in the character of Leader Snoke, who attempts to win Rey's allegiance through violence and subjugation. Kylo Ren, by contrast, attempts to win the favor of Rey by eliminating Snoke and recognizing the connection between the two. The contrast of violence is exhibited in Kylo Ren's attempt to side with Rey through emotion, although they oppose each other on a fundamental level.

The agents of the terrorist group "Hydra" is *Civil War's* application of metaphysically evil. The spectator receives no Alignment with these characters which prevents any empathetic relationship with them, only being present during Spatio-temporal Attachment of other characters. The only knowledge of their actions lies within their act of stealing a deadly poison and wanting to sell it to the highest bidder. They function as a clear moral contrast to Stark and Rodgers, and "Hydra" also mitigates the conflict of the film through the actions in the first scenes of the film, where a group of people die as collateral damage, sparking the conflict between the two main characters.

The Rock by Michael Bay is another film that is littered with metaphysically evil characters. It is a peculiar film in its representations of emotionally complex and flat characters, and therefore, it is a highly ideal example for the analysis due to the highly fluid representation of characters with

incredibly varying emotional depth and prioritization in terms of Alignment. In *The Rock* there are character archetypes as well as emotionally complicated and ambiguous characters. The characters of Captain Frye (Gregory Sporleder) and Captain Darrow (Tony Todd) are incredibly villainous to an almost hilarious extreme, becoming metaphysically evil. The Emotional Cues presenting these characters provide a negative allegiance, where the audience is shown that they share sadistic enjoyment in hurting people and are ultimately punished by their wrongdoing. Both characters have a standoff with the hero, Stanley Goodspeed (Nicolas Cage), where they smile and find enjoyment when hurting or about to hurt the hero. Moreover, this metaphysical evil is also commented on with humor by the hero. When capturing the heroes, one of the lower ranking henchmen comments: "Id take pleasure in gutting you, boy." (*The Rock* 1996). Goodspeed notes the highly humorous nature in such an absurd statement, making fun of and referencing the highly Manichean evil extremes of some of the characters within the movie. The characters of Frye and Darrow function as a moral opposition to Hummel, who only defect for the classical villainous act of monetary gain, which ultimately creates a contrast between the characters and makes Hummel increasingly likeable in comparison.

In *Apocalypse Now,* the character of Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore functions as a catalyst for the narrative, who stands in contrast to Kurtz and Willard. The character enables the plot to move forward, while at the same time providing a stark opposition to the emotional depth of other characters. The absence of Alignment and the presence of negative Allegiance for this character makes him come across as unsympathetic. Killgore's motivation for surfing becomes the reasoning behind moving in on enemy territory, and this reinforces the negative, Allegiance for his character. Kilgore's obsession with surfing exposes his disregard of the men in his command as well as the Vietnamese and this is demonstrated in multiple scenes. When Willard steals Kilgore's surfboard, Kilgore dispatches multiple choppers in an attempt to track down his board, displacing military resources and endangering soldiers' lives for a surfboard. Additionally, when meeting a surfer,

Kilgore disregards a dying man's wish for a drink of water and storms toward the surfer, wanting to engage in surfing conversation. The disregard of resources and human lives in favor of the leisure activity of surfing creates an atmosphere of absurdity surrounding the character of Kilgore. The contrast between the lack of understanding Kilgore's character, compared to the immersion and sympathizing with Kurtz and Willard, solidifies the emotionally coldness and absence of purpose for Kilgore. The character of Kilgore in *Apocalypse Now* is a representation of metaphysical evil – This character is so clear-cut and sympathetically vacant in his actions, that he is shown as purely a representation of apathy and selfishness, and therefore evil. Through the scenes of Kilgore's Spatio-Temporal Alignment, the audience receives a clear contrast to Willard and Kurtz. In terms of being affected by war, Kilgore is completely unaffected by the chaos and death, focusing solely on his love for surfing while dismissing morality and empathy for the people he employs and attacks. The musical track of "Ride of the Valkyries" displays his manner of applying militant force, exhibiting Kilgore's godlike and completely unaffected personality in the context of the phycological damage that encompasses the other characters of the cinematic narrative. Moreover, the famous quote of Kilgore, regarding the smell of napalm and victory, emphasizes his nature as brutish and fixated on dominance without self-criticism. Kilgore is a highly ironic character which is shown throughout the absurdity of his behavior. Furthermore, irony is emphasized in the lack of emotion of Kilgore in the light of the powerful contrast of the emotional behavior of Willard and Kurtz.

That these films share the application of Manichean "evil" archetypes as well as the specific functions that the characters have for narrative progression, exhibits a trend that serves to manipulate emotional Allegiance and, thusly, contrast the primary villain/adversary type character (as well as the hero) with powerful imagery through a carefully and eloquently constructed apathetic character. The ambiguity of the different relationships between hero and villain become increasingly aligned by the

comparison that is created by the Manichean, apathetic and metaphysically evil characters, which enhances the trend of ambiguity between hero and villain through the usage of this character type.

The Common Denominator and Symmetry

Within each film, the hero and villain are connected by a common theme that conflate the two characters and create a mutual sympathy for each other as well as the motivations and actions of the counterpart. There is an element within all the above-mentioned movies that connect and solidify the bond between hero and villain. As professionalism is the common ground in Michael Mann's films, *Heat* and *Collateral*, it acts as a force that creates sympathy for the characters in their likenesses, which will be elaborated in the section below regarding *Heat* and *Collateral*. Although there is a fundamental likeness and established sympathy for the opposing characters in the individual movies, the films always escalate the shared understanding throughout the narrative, as well as the inherent opposition which is perhaps even more exacerbated, creating the conflicts and struggles of the individual films. In *The Rock,* the ambition of saving people is the fundamental connecting element between both hero and villain, and it serves to create Allegiance for both in the eyes of the viewer due to the individual struggles of hero and villain being fundamentally the same. However, the method of achieving that very same goal differentiates which ultimately causes the tensions and conflicts. The thematic conflation between hero and villain causes a symmetry, which is mirrored in Grodal's theory surrounding recognition and its conflation with emotional reward in the viewer:

> The function of the visual cortex is finding salient forms in the chaos of information that arrives through the eyes and the brain receives a small emotional reward every time it discovers a significant form. Symmetry, for instance, is highly salient because symmetry is typical of living organisms. (Grodal, 4)

This quote pertains to the function of the brain and its manner of dealing with visual sensory inputs in a microcosm. However, the effect of symmetry could also be an act of recognition in thematic contexts, pertaining to the relationship between hero and villain. Due to the two characters being highly alike in the regarded films, the act of symmetry between them can be interpreted as a conscious choice that creates an "emotional reward" and having these two characters aligned is perhaps one of the most important reasons for the effectiveness of the different narratives. The likenesses become an act of symmetry that makes the audience relate to both characters equally, and although the level and methods of achieving Alignment and Allegiance vary extremely within the different narratives, this symmetry becomes a mechanism that serves to create Allegiance with both hero and villain. Moreover, this causes an effect that when Allegiance is shown for one character, it subsequently serves to create Allegiance for the other due to the conflated and symmetrical nature between protagonist and antagonist. Thusly, the thematic similarity between the two characters functions as the sole agent of mutual Allegiance creation and, thereby, the strong bond between audience and character appears. In *Apocalypse Now* the sympathy for hero and villain is attained through their mutual experiences of psychological damage and loss with respect to subjugation by external social forces. Both *Blade Runner* and *X-Men* share the traits of striving toward survival and attempting to rebel against bondage and forced labor. In *Collateral,* in addition to professionalism, this occurs with the two characters' relationships with parents, which is explicitly remarked by Vincent: "They project onto you their flaws, what they don't like about themselves." (*Collateral* 2004) This instance of shared sympathy regards adolescent experience, conflating protagonist and antagonist with the likeness in their individual experiences and goals. This is also evident throughout the narrative of *The Rock,* where both Hummel and Goodspeed exhibit traits which usually belong to two distinct narrative types, however, they co-exist and complement each other by contrast in the depth of their individual Allegiance. The choice of emphasizing the ethical and emotional motivation of the villain is likely an

attempt to clarify the validity of his actions rather than the hero's actions, due to the expectation of a metaphysically evil villain, given to the audience throughout the better part of Hollywood's cinematic history. By contrast to Hummel's questionable behavior, spurred on by a solid moral foundation, Goodspeed is not in need of the same elaboration through Allegiance due to the universally good nature of his behavior – protecting the society that he inhabits with altruistic and self-sacrificial tendencies. In *Civil War* the same tendencies of altruism and self-sacrifice are shared by the two characters Stark and Rodgers, who with the same inherent motivation and moral deliberation act differently to solve the same problem – saving people who are unable to defend themselves, while performing the morally correct actions.

In the following subsections, different symmetrical relationships will be analyzed in depth in order to fully understand the themes and mechanisms which trigger the symmetrical achievement of Allegiance. Furthermore, the relevance between emotional responses and the ambiguity of symmetrical characters will be highly emphasized. Lastly, the function of homosociality will be analyzed in the context of the different films, as a force that further binds the hero and villain together.

Professionalism in *Heat* and *Collateral*

The theme of professionalism saturates the narrative of *Heat* and *Collateral* and it acts as the theme that creates symmetry and connects the opposing characters in both narratives, and this will be demonstrated in the following analysis. Rybin supports the prevalence of determination and professionalism within *Heat* (1995) which Jonathan Rayner also uses as key terms of the analyses in his book. Rybin claims that the films portrayal of financial wellbeing is not enough for the self-fulfillment of the characters – the central premise of fulfillment lies within the aesthetic of absolute dedication and determination. Moreover, the thematic aesthetic is supported by the cinematography

and visual representation of Los Angeles as a cultural frame and how it depicts the protagonists' state of mind. (Rybin, 132, 2013) Jonathan Rayner states that Mann's approach to crime dramas signify the relationship between professionalism and sociological importance, which clarify the significance and creation of morals by establishing meaning through the existence and actions of characters. (Rayner, 63) Rayner claims that through the actions of the characters in *Heat*, Mann illustrates a debate regarding morality and behavioral norms and this is achieved through the conventional model of the heist movie. (Rayner, 63-64). Furthermore, Rayner explains that the application of a finely tuned work ethic of the criminals in Mann's crime dramas suggest that a moral deliberation has taken place due to their highly professional approach, which suggests that a moral choice is made to go against the norms and laws of the surrounding society. Although the moral deliberation is central to any heist film, Rayner suggests that Michael Mann's approach adds another dimension, which tends to fixate on a clear-cut distinction of explicit professionalism that supersedes the supposedly initial motivating factor for the criminal act, specifically the need for financial reward. (Rayner, 65)

The concept of professionalism is the initial grounds for in-depth communication in *Collateral,* between Max and Vincent as well as Annie, arguing over the efficiency of specific chosen routes, sparking further conversation. Through this Alignment of Max as professional, we achieve an Allegiance through the concept of professionalism, sympathizing with his quest for success in starting his own company. The moral and ideological deliberation of Max, as a hardworking and passionate person with a high level of professional pride, creates Allegiance for his approach to work and personal as well as professional growth. Moreover, Max's professionalism sparks a connection between him and Annie, who recognizes the passion for his work. This encounter between the Max and Annie, accompanied by the pleasant and soothing music of "Groove Armada" accentuates the sphere of romance, providing "emotional appraisal" which through the elected music provides an emotional response to the cognitive evaluation of the verbal exchange. The ability to empathize and

sympathize with Annie through his frame of reference as a cabdriver, he achieves a connection with Annie that goes beyond his professional obligations. Although there is no direct physical contact, both characters provide the audience with Emotional Cues like smiling and laughing, indicating the pleasantry of the events. Additionally, the Emotional Cue within the exchange of intimate details regarding their personalities solidifies their spontaneous bond as well as their emotional and empathetic approach to their fellow man. Allegiance is hereby exhibited for the character of Max in his ability to sympathize with Annie, which is shown through the Emotional Cue of him giving Annie his "vacation" photo that he uses for relaxation and meditation. Emotional appraisal is furthermore provided for Max when he later looks for his photo as a reflex, finding the space empty and responding with a hint of disappointment, indicating that he gave Annie an object of his affection.

As is demonstrated with Max's ability to connect with characters, professionalism acts as a mitigating force for narrative progression. Vincent choses Max for his efficiency, who becomes interested in Max through his dedication and professionality. The initial interest in Max from both Vincent and Annie is presented through his professional approach. With comments like "do you take pride in being good at what you do?" (*Collateral* 2004) and "Man, you are good" (*Collateral* 2004) solidifies the importance of professionalism in *Collateral* as the binding force between the characters of the narrative. Furthermore, the professionalism of Vincent as a hitman and his seemingly apathetic approach to human lives becomes the basis for the abstract debate between Max and Vincent regarding the value of individuals on a micro and macro scale, which is analyzed in the section regarding Vincent above.

Both main characters in *Heat* possess many shared qualities which solidify the relationship and likeness between them, many pertaining to professionalism. Throughout the film a mutual admiration is expressed due to the two possessing many of the same values, making the two characters very symmetrical in their representation. In terms of Recognition, both characters are male, roughly

the same age, natural leaders and, additionally, they have the same professionality with respect to performing their respective jobs. The opening scene features the character of McCauley stealing an ambulance and the character Chris (Val Kilmer) buying explosives as preparation for a heist. Meticulous attention to detail saturates the technique in preparation as well as execution, and deviation is strongly opposed. In the following heist scene, McCauley's crew are very methodical and to the point, remarking police response time and preparing certain measures to slow them down, which is also commented on positively by Hanna in the subsequent scene. Furthermore, McCauley and his crew become infuriated when Waingro deviates from the plan by murdering a guard, emphasizing their professional approach. The very next scene features Hanna, where we are introduced to his character and his family life. His wife asks him to take her out to breakfast but Hanna declines by mentioning a meeting with a colleague. This is the very first hint to his priorities in his life and his attitude toward his profession compared to his personal life. His wife proceeds to offer coffee and he comments: "I'm out of time, baby." (*Heat* 1995). Once again, he refuses the advances of his wife, prioritizing his work. The prioritization of work over personal life is a recurring theme in *Heat*, which is evident for both Hanna and McCauley and it is shown in the very first and the very last scenes, solidifying its prevalence in the film. Although both characters attempt to keep up their personal lives, specifically their heterosexual relationships, they are both forced to make compromises and ultimately neglecting their relationships completely. In the final scenes, McCauley decides to go after Waingro in the end, neglecting his professional principles. Through the act of seeking vengeance, McCauley exhibits traits that are opposite professionalism, letting his emotions dominate his decision making and thereby resulting in his demise despite his application of the ethic regarding leaving everything. McCauley leaves his girlfriend in the end, when spotting Hanna pursuing him, sticking to his professional principle: "'Don't let yourself get attached to anything you are not willing to walk out on in 30 seconds flat if you feel the heat around the corner." (*Heat*

1995) Rayner notes that the total dedication and devotion of both cops and criminals in *Heat* lies within their complete sacrifice of social lives and the discipline of its main characters, which fixates on the goal of success without any compromise being allowed to weigh on their resolve. (Rayner, 76) Thusly, by leaving his girlfriend, McCauley makes the ultimate sacrifice according to his subjective way of viewing a professional approach to his work. Hanna makes the same sacrifice, when leaving his dying stepdaughter and his heartbroken wife in favor of pursuing McCauley. This problem of compromise and professionalism is remarked in the coffee shop scene between McCauley and Hanna: "Now, if you're on me and if you gotta move when I move, how do you expect to keep a marriage?" (*Heat* 1995) This exchange of ideas between the two opposing characters regards the compromise that professional dedication entails on both sides of the moral fence. The symmetrical relationship between the two characters is emphasized in this scene, where they debate their respective situations. Moreover, the opposition is friendly, which is shown through their individual reactions to their stances on not wanting to be less dedicated. Emotional Cues of smiling and chuckling are presented, and when confessing this, they achieve an appreciation of their respective methods of being dedicated toward their individual professional goals.

Jonathan Rayner concludes his analyses of *Heat* (1995) and *Collateral* (2004) by stating that the professionalism of the protagonists constitutes an extreme commitment to a set of determined principles that the characters defend and attempt to uphold at any cost, and this professionalism serves to create the sense of mutual understanding and likeability between the protagonists despite their apparent and violent opposition in their respective films. (Rayner, 89) Furthermore, Rybin argues that both *Heat* (1995) and *Collateral* (2004) are films that present the contrast between brutal realism and romance, creating conflicts between the two that are presented in the films through characters, musical score and cinematography. (Rybin, 184-185, 2007) The symmetry between the characters of *Heat* and *Collateral* is evident through the theme of professionalism and it provides the individual

narratives with a thematic frame that serves to align the characters and create equal footing in terms of Alignment and Allegiance.

Blade Runner and the Mirror Effect Between Rick Deckard and Roy Batty

Blade Runner (1982) was initially disliked by the broader audience but has since achieved impeccable praise for its imagination and hard-hitting emotional strength, which fits the general manner of constructing narratives with ambiguous hero and villain structures in contemporary film production. There are many Emotional Cues and cinematic signifiers which suggests the likenesses between Deckard (Harrison Ford) and his opposite, Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer). Most notable, perhaps, is the symbolism of the unicorn, that is a recurring vision of Deckard when contemplating his situation and the relationship between himself and the "Replicants". Moreover, the unicorn is also an element in the last scene of *Blade Runner*, where Gaff (Edward James Olmos) has placed an origami unicorn on the floor outside Deckard's apartment where Deckard remembers Gaff's statement: "Too bad she won't live, but then again who does." (*Blade Runner* 1982) Thusly, the unicorn functions as an emotional and thematic cue, which signifies the lack of differences between human and "Replicant", narrowing the space between hero and villain, even though the quote is directed toward the relationship of Deckard and Rachel. Moreover, there is some very peculiar and ambiguous imagery in the Voight-Kampff test and the circumstances surrounding the identification of "Replicants". Through the test, the emotional capabilities of "Replicants" are questioned, which makes them distinguishable and thereby lesser than human beings. However, the certainty of the human superiority is questioned throughout the narrative via Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) and his interactions with "Replicant" characters, most notably Rachel (Sean Young) and Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer). The doubt of Deckard's own humanity is also questioned by Rachel who inquires if Deckard has taken the test himself.

In terms of alignment, the Spatio-temporal Attachment is quite classical in its presentation of hero and villain. The scene, following the opening scene, introduces the "Replicants" as inherently evil, due to the isolated knowledge of their actions and nature – the audience is introduced to "Replicants" as violent by witnessing Leon (Brion James) murdering a man. However, as the plot progresses and the Alignment with the "Replicants" is expanded, the audience receives Allegiance with them through the knowledge of their subjugation and their fight for the freedom to live natural lives. Through Deckard, on the other hand, the audience is completely immersed into this character and his subjugation within the first two scenes featuring him, and this creates a clear sense of Allegiance with that character through a very small amount of Spatio-temporal alignment. The usage of Recognition and Alignment within the first scenes featuring Roy and Deckard respectively, portray them as fundamentally different characters. Roy is introduced as very stoic and almost cold in his behavior toward other people, whereas Deckard is shown to be afraid and easily manipulated in the face of death threats. However, as the narrative progresses, this difference is dwarfed by the likenesses between the two and the common theme of subjugation is portrayed through their actions.

In *Blade Runner,* the number of positively and negatively charged cues are mirrored in the main characters, Roy and Deckard. On a thematic macro level and micro level (cues), the two characters are intertwined in their actions and reasoning, which can be reduced to a single motivation – the will to live freely. The negative cues, regarding physical confrontations are ultimately motivated by both parties' will to live and their lack of choice in doing otherwise. Roy is forced by the situation regarding his creation as a subjugated creature and the limitations of his lifespan. Deckard is forced by the police to pursue the Roy and his accomplices with the threat of persecution: "You know the score, pal! You're not cop, you're little people." (*Blade Runner* 1982) This solidifies the reality of this narrative and the forced and subjugated nature of both protagonists, who occupy both sides of the law. In this dystopic film, unlike most other films regarded in the analysis, questions of morality

are beyond the grasp of both Deckard and Roy due to their subjugation, and this fact furthermore emphasizes the sympathetic relationship between audience and the protagonists, because of their victimhood and the inherent absence of the luxury of moral deliberation. As is already mentioned, there is a number of likenesses between Deckard and Roy which is displayed through Emotional Cues and Recognition. The two characters are largely symmetrical in terms of physical appearance – they are both male with roughly the same age, however, one is blond and the other has brown hair, distinguishing them a small amount. A large portion of the Emotional Cues regard the two characters' usage of violence as a means of acquiring their freedom. When both characters are forced to perform violent behavior, it is clear that neither party enjoys doing so. This is evident in the case of Deckard, when murdering "Replicants" as well as it is apparent when Roy murders his maker. However, both Deckard and Roy also display visual Cues in a positive context, regarding heterosexual displays of affection. This affection, which the characters display toward their mates, shows that they are capable of other actions than violence, but especially that the violence is a negative means to a positive end. The endgame of both characters is therefore, through these affectionate Emotional Cues, a method of attaining an existence of their own choosing, pursuing romantic love and friendship, and this is the only portrayal of the characters' occupation throughout the narrative other than the pursuit of freedom through violent means. The common theme of subjugation is the very core of the Allegiance for both Deckard and Roy. Through the bondage and subjugation of both characters, each instance of Allegiance for either character serves to increase the Allegiance with the other. The different situations of Allegiance construction culminate in their final encounter, where Roy has essentially given up on his quest of a natural lifespan. What Roy attempts to achieve is an understanding between himself and Deckard. Knowing of his own imminent demise he wishes to establish one last connection of mutual sympathy. The likeness between them is summed up by Roy in a single sentence: "Painful to live in fear isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave" (*Blade Runner* 1982) This

occurs at the point in the narrative, where Deckard is about to fall to his death but is saved by Roy, and this act induces passivity and attentiveness in Deckard. Listening to Roy's perception of his life experiences, Deckard finally attains a heightened sympathy for the plight and struggles of the "Replicants" which he demonstrates by listening passively. Roy already sympathizes with Deckard, which explains his act of saving Deckard and his motivation for wanting to inspire sympathy in Deckard in the hopes of mutual recognition and sympathy. The shared sympathy for one another displays an Allegiance with both characters, which makes it impossible to sympathize more or less with either character because of the mirror effect between the two. The symmetry in pattern recognition between hero and villain demonstrates the highly ambiguous nature of the narrative in terms of cheering for either hero or villain, and it solidifies the nature of Allegiance within *Blade Runner.*

Willard and Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*

There is a highly symmetrical relationship between the protagonist and the antagonist in *Apocalypse Now*, which is exhibited throughout the narrative by means of numerous likenesses. They are both male military officers and they represent a litany of apathetic attitudes caused by their trauma in the war. The themes of sorrow, meaninglessness and loss dominate both characters and they deal with critique of military systems in individual ways. Both Willard and Kurtz share a mutual sympathy for the deceit and misinformation provided by the military hierarchy and the impersonal relationship which it implies. The symmetry in Recognition exemplifies the same attitudes of the characters and their development in the narrative, and this causes the subsequent Allegiance of both characters. The entire movie is Aligned with the character of Willard, and Kurtz is elaborated through Subjective Access through his representation by Willard. Willard's internal dialogue is categorizing the life and exploits of Kurtz and his character arc of changing from a man of the military system to an opposing

force. While constantly pondering the change in his person, Willard negotiates the rationale and motivation of his superiors for ordering Kurtz's murder. Kurtz expresses his separation from the military system and rejection of the moral codex of said military: "As for the charges against me, I am unconcerned. I am beyond their timid lying morality, and so I am beyond caring." (*Apocalypse Now* 1979) Through Kurtz's rejection of the morality of the American army, Willard feels a connection with Kurtz that he finds highly relatable to his own existence. Having read the entire account of his military record and personal life, he feels a bond to Kurtz that goes beyond the knowledge of his life. The previously mentioned connotation of predetermination regarding the meeting between Kurtz and Willard is mentioned as something profound, going beyond the knowledge that he has attained. Perhaps it is their alignment that Willard speaks to – the two sharing a bond of suffering, meaninglessness and loss, pertaining to their experiences in the military system during war. As there has been previous attempts to murder Kurtz, it is only Willard who succeeds due to Kurtz's recognition of Willard's worthiness. Kurtz allows himself to be killed by Willard, because he recognizes a part of himself in his counterpart.

From very early on, when Willard is about to receive his mission, he underlines the relationship between himself and Kurtz and the likenesses and symmetry between them: "It was no accident that I got to be the caretaker of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz's memory, any more than being back in Saigon was an accident. There is no way to tell his story without telling my own. And if his story is really a confession, then so is mine." (*Apocalypse Now* 1979) As is suggested by his internal dialogue, Willard maintains that coincidence is simply not a part of the equation that made Kurtz and himself cross paths. Willard suggests that the two are so much alike that their fates are intertwined. It is very explicitly remarked that the Allegiance to both Willard and Kurtz is intertwined due to their highly symmetrical relationship with thought, experiences and reflection about the Vietnam War from

a critical standpoint. Through Willard's reception of military intelligence, the audience is granted Subjective Access to Kurtz through the Subjective Access of Willard, and this underlines the conjoined nature of the two characters – the Alignment achieved for Kurtz through Willard's Alignment exemplifies the shared mental outcome of their experiences. Through Willard, we listen to Kurtz's thoughts on tape: "I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor. It's my dream. It's my nightmare." (*Apocalypse Now* 1979) This passage speaks to Kurtz's instability and it becomes clear that Willard as well as Kurtz have become instable by their experiences in the Vietnam War. Through this similarity, the two characters become aligned and achieve a form of sympathy for each other through their individual victimhood. However, the fundamental difference between Kurtz and Willard is their reactions to the military system – Kurtz rejects it completely and violently, whereas Willard follows it apathetically in search for purpose and a solution for his instability. Kurtz's rejection of the military system is clear throughout this quote and the, through his perception, hypocritical nature of the military:

> We must kill them. We must incinerate them. Pig after pig. Cow after cow. Village after village. Army after army. And they call me an assassin. What do you call it when the assassins accuse the assassin? They lie. They lie, and we have to be merciful, for those who lie. Those nabobs. I hate them. I do hate them. (*Apocalypse Now* 1979)

Willard's superiors denounce Kurtz's actions by presenting him as insane, and by presenting him in this fashion there is created an unambiguous narrative surrounding Kurtz, which both Kurtz and Willard ultimately rejects due to the conflated nature of the two characters. The Allegiance for Willard is responsible for an assessment of Kurtz as instable and disillusioned. Moreover, having been psychologically damaged by the war effort, the sympathy for both main characters causes a rejection of the classification of Kurtz as evil and insane. The ambiguity of Kurtz's mental state is developed further through the Subjective Access of Willard:

At first, I thought they handed me the wrong dossier. I couldn't believe they wanted this man dead. Third generation West Point, top of his class. Korea, Airborne. About a thousand decorations. Etcetera, etcetera. I had heard his voice on the tape and it really put the hook in me. But I couldn't connect that voice with this man. (*Apocalypse Now* 1979)

Willard looks through the dossier of Kurtz exemplifying the change or perhaps phycological damage of the war, furthermore aligning the characters of Willard and Kurtz. Although the primary Alignment of the film lies with Willard in terms of both Spatio-temporal Attachment and Subjective Access, Willard spends a large portion of his time traveling to Kurtz, explaining the circumstances of Kurtz's career, granting Subjective Access to Kurtz. Through the reflections of Willard, the audience receives a clear idea of the likenesses between Kurtz and Willard. In this passage, Willard expresses admiration for the achievements of Kurtz, furthermore expressing sympathy for the dramatic change in his personality: "The more I read and began to understand, the more I admired him." (*Apocalypse Now* 1979) Furthermore, when finally confronting Kurtz, Kurtz's subject expresses the reciprocated nature of admiration and sympathy that Kurtz feels for Willard, and this solidifies their mutual recognition of each other as embodying the same experiences. Kurtz captures Willard and wishes for Willard to understand his motivations and his way of viewing the war as meaningless. Kurtz sits in front of Willard, reading the accounts of the war in *The Times*, and subsequently announces Willard's freedom although confined to the location of Kurtz's army. This can be interpreted as Kurtz's attempt to further align the two and have them achieve a heightened empathy, sympathy and a mutual respect and liking. Kurtz utters: "We are the hollow men." (*Apocalypse Now* 1979) This pertains to the meaninglessness of the efforts of soldiers, to uphold and defend a moral standpoint that is forever shifting through the methods of the military. In *Apocalypse Now*, the protagonists share numerous traits, which serve to view them symmetrically and thereby equally in terms of Allegiance. Their

mentality toward war and their fragile damaged personalities solidifies the nature of tension in the narrative and it provides the spectator with moral ambiguity for the individual rationales of the characters.

Homosocial Tendencies

From the thematic conflation between the hero and the villain, a certain bond is created that previously only exists in "buddy" films, such as the "dynamic duo" cop films of the 80's and 90's. (Benshoff, Griffin, 281). Homosociality becomes a unifying agent that encourages further moral and ideological reflection in the audience. Homosocial bonds are featured in nearly all of the films, which solidify that even though they operate on opposite moral grounds or even methods of achieving the same goal, they share a sympathetic relationship which dwarfs any romantic heterosexual relationship (if there is one). Moreover, this heterosexual presence often functions as an agent that solidifies the asexual nature of the homosocial bond. (Benshoff, Griffin, 281) Apart from the *Star Wars* films, homosocial behavior is exhibited in every film due to the thematic conflation between protagonist and antagonist. This is most apparent in *Apocalypse Now*, *X-men*, *Heat* and *Collateral*, and *Blade Runner* where intimate non-sexual actions occur. In *Heat*, *Collateral* and *Blade Runner,* the violent conflict is stopped in favor of an exchange of intimate words between hero and villain as one of the two is about to die. The ceasefire indicates that there is no animosity between them on a personal level and that they sympathize with and understand each other, indicating a profound respect. In all three of these examples there is a life or death struggle, and in all three examples one dies. In *Heat*, Vincent holds hands with McCauley, which is argued by Steven Rybin as a homoerotic act, which underlines the relationship of the protagonists and furthermore signifies the act of them holding hands. (Rybin, 127, 2007) Rybin states that the final scene of *Heat* is aesthetically ambivalent which is shown through Hanna's reaction and subsequent act of holding the hand of his opponent. The

ambivalence of the scene is elaborated by Rybin as he argues that the concept of victory over the counterpart is no victory at all, because of their shared liking and recognition of each other through their professionalism and dedication. (Rybin, 127, 2007) However, there is no explicit eroticism in the act itself, indicating that the act is homosocial and not homoerotic, which is also underlined by the characters' heterosexual relationships. However, the act of holding hands is a demonstration of sympathy and respect, which also shines through in *Blade Runner* and *Collateral*, where the protagonists sit down opposite their adversaries, hearing their final words. Although the two main characters in *Collateral* have completely different stances in terms of an ethical view on humanity and empathy, they both share a mutual respect for their opposite, which is fluid and changing throughout the movie. However, as the movie concludes, and Vincent has been defeated, Max sits opposite Vincent and they share the final moment between them before Vincent's death. Vincent repeats his initial opening line regarding sympathetic relationships and attentiveness in a big city context but reframes it to fit his own demise: "A guy gets on the MTA and dies. Think anybody will notice?" (*Collateral*) Vincent reflects his fear of not being noticed, stemming perhaps from his childhood as well as his intellectual knowledge of inhumane behavior, and furthermore encouraging Max to understand him. This respect is reflected in the professional approach to their respective choices of work. What ultimately separates them and causes the conflict between them is their moral and empathic approach to people – just as *Heat* has its conflict within a moral division between the two protagonists. In *X-Men*, an empathic approach lies within the two characters Lehnsherr and Xavier, in their way of viewing each other despite their disagreement in approaches to the conflict that both characters face. Xavier's manner of speaking to Lehnsherr shows the affection that his character feels for his counterpart: "I'm looking for hope." Also, Lehnsherr's subsequent answer demonstrates his compassion for Xavier: "I will bring you hope, old friend." The homosocial bond portrayed in this scene demonstrates the sympathy that Xavier and Lehnsherr share for each other.

This bond between them, however briefly elaborated in the film, demonstrates the respect of each other's moral position and subsequent manner of acting upon said morals.

Having solidified heterosexuality, the homosocial bonds in the variety of movies function as tool to demonstrate a mutual understanding and an exchange of sympathy between the heroes and villains, adding ambiguity to the inherent tension within the moral opposition of the individual films by having them like each other. In the variety of films regarded in the analysis, homosocial behavior is an extension of the "structure of sympathy" and it is a mechanism that aides the appeal for the both opposing characters of the films. Additionally, the homosocial behavior underlines the absence of hatred as an emotion which usually acts as a dividing force as well as the absence of sympathy and understanding. This clarifies that the films do not rely on cultivating hate but sympathy instead, and thusly, the homosocial bond acts as a type of prevention of hateful opposition for the spectator due to the adaptation of emotions through Allegiance. Furthermore, Benshoff and Griffin state that homosocial behavior is exclusively confined to buddy films, however, this section demonstrates the prevalence of homosociality as a somewhat unifying agent between hero and villain in terms of Smith's "structure of sympathy". (Benshoff, Griffin, 281)

This section regarding the symmetries between the heroes and the villains demonstrates the tendency of constructing characters as thematically aligned, creating a sympathetic relationship between the characters. Furthermore, homosocial behavior emphasizes the likenesses between the opposing characters and serves to create a sympathetic relationship between them, solidifying the thematic and moral tension in the individual narratives. The thematic focuses of the different sections served to highlight the importance of the themes as a binding force for the characters, aiding

Allegiance construction and sympathizing with their adversaries, despite the differences that create the tensions and moral conflicts of the individual films.

Emotional and Thematic Saturation – The Absence of Emotional Release

Ultimately, the films are playing with conventions of good and evil through Allegiance, and as Murray Smith argues: "Allegiance pertains to the moral and ideological evaluations of characters by the spectator." (Smith, 41, 1994) This evaluation causes tension due to the audience sympathizing with both antagonist and protagonist, and moreover, both hero and villain sympathize with each other, solidifying the absence of ill will and hate. This tension causes the ideological and moral saturation which creates the edge and perhaps success of this type of character relationship. I will pose that Grodal's term of Saturation can be read into the thematic macro structures of these cinematic narratives, and through the term of Allegiance, argue that they fit together in this context of evaluating ambiguity. The individual narratives manner of building tension and gathering what Grodal terms the "network of associations" functions as a way of viewing the emotional ambiguity of the films in their way of concluding without emotional release. (Grodal, 5) The lack of emotional release causes the Saturations through the unresolved or ambiguous Allegiance between the protagonist and antagonist respectively. This tension, or Saturation, causes a heightened emotional impact which leaves the spectator without resolution, sparking reflection about the subjectivity of good and evil. The large number of emotionally charged objects and events in the individual narratives are not concluded upon, leaving the spectator emotionally saturated. Furthermore, since the films are drawing on the usual character construction of Hollywood cinema, there is an inherent expectation of a streamlined and distinct morality, however, the usage of these conventions furthermore confuses the spectator causing the moral evaluation. For instance, *Blade Runner* demonstrates that it is carefully constructed to cause reflection in its manner of exhibiting limited resolution – Deckard completes his task and runs away

with the woman who is the object of his affection, but in grand terms the regime and the societal mechanisms that subjugated the main characters was not toppled, and this causes the tension that inspires further reflection. Furthermore, the tensions also arise from the inherent conflict between hero and villain and this is especially evident in the superhero films. Where the goals of the individual characters are essentially the same, reflection becomes a highly relevant tool for deciphering the morality of different characters. With the theme of sacrifice dividing the heroes and villains, a moral and ideological evaluation becomes necessary for the spectator. However, with the extremely ambiguous nature of the different characters, a tension arises when the spectator becomes unable to completely justify one outcome. This saturation is emphasized with the lack of emotional release that the ambiguity causes, which furthermore increases the need for afterthought and moral deliberation. The individual films are immensely reliant on the oppositional forces, and through their ambivalent Allegiance creation, a Saturation occurs through the thematic and moral build of the narratives. This trait of emotional Saturation is at the base of every film and increases the thematical importance of the individual narratives through ambiguity and the tension that this causes between the individual characters.

The Connection between Romanticism and Realism

In his book *The Anatomy of Criticism,* Northrop Frye argues that there is a continuum ranging from realistic to romantic, which defines the romantic as unambiguous and the realistic as ambiguous, and in terms of characters the range is divided between the heroic and villainous to ambiguous on both accounts. Going into this, opposing left- and rightwing groups in the U.S.A. could be related to Frye's continuum which regards viewing different literary genres in terms of cultural impact. The romantic tradition regards heroism and Frye argues that "The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes"

(Frye, 304) Applying it to the framework of terms within cognitive film theory, this quote regards the application of Manichean type metaphysically good and evil characters, who are presented as unambiguous. Frye argues that, although the social aspects of romance is an example of the aristocracy of a certain period and status quo, the genre contains revolutionary elements which strive toward a set of ideals. (Frye, 186, 306) Furthermore, Frye goes on to elaborate the dividing characteristics between the romantic and realistic representations of a fictitious narrative:

> Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personate or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our best novelists have been conventional to the verge of fussiness. The romancer deals with individuality, with characters in vacuo idealized by revery, and, however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages. (Frye, 304-305)

Some of the films mentioned in the analysis above contain a litany of romantic as well as realistic elements varying in degree, and this could be construed as an attempt to conflate the genres, by adding character archetypes from both narrative styles. The above-mentioned presentations of superheroes are especially reminiscent of the romantic ideals, which deal with a stylized ideal. Additionally, evil Manichean character types dominate the narratives in their manner of causing contrasts to other characters, where Graduated moral structure characters serve to deal with their surrounding elements in a reflective manner, which ultimately accounts for the fundamental tensions in the narratives. This blend of genres in terms of character construction reflects the ongoing attempt to mirror the culture that has produced the films in question, becoming increasingly prevalent and in more and more expensive mass appeal productions. A manner of dealing with truth and the authentic good may come in the form of both Manichean and Graduated character types, and the implied contemplation of using

both archetypes sparks the interest of the viewing public. Frye argues that romance has the ability to contain the aristocratic presentation of the status quo as well as progressive attitudes and that clarifies the dualistic nature and potential with the usage of characters that are influenced by romance and their grand ideals:

> Yet there is a genuinely "proletarian" element in romance too which is never satisfied with its various incarnations, and in fact the incarnations themselves indicate that no matter how great a change may take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on. The perennially child like quality of romance is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space. (Frye, 186)

In this regard, elements of romance could be regarded as the films' manner of presenting a desire for truth and good, although shrouded in the main characters' realistic demeanors. Realism comes into the picture with the opposition of the hero and villain type characters, which sparks the reflection, tension and Saturation of ambiguity in the individual narratives. This application of elements from both narrative styles exhibits the cultural attitude and preoccupation with truth as a term that is undergoing constant change, while being influenced by the subjectivity of the observer in a cultural context. The prevalence of stylistic elements from both realism and romance is supported by Rybin in his analysis of *Heat*, which is described as a presentation that encourages reflection as well as the tension and conflict. This observation of *Heat* as a mixture of realism and romance can be argued into the context of the other films in the analysis, through their shared method of presenting characters ambiguously, implying a search for morality through emotive behavior.

The Wish-fulfillment of American Cinema

The films produced during recent years reflect a certain wish-fulfillment of the viewing public in the search for truth and the morally correct. When the cultural issue of challenging status quo attitudes is immensely prevalent, the subsequent films reflecting the same manner of dealing with truth and moral authority can be argued as wish-fulfillment despite its, more often than not, lack of resolution. In his article "Cultural Mirror of Contemporary America: Discourse of Conservatism in Hollywood Narrative", Shinichi Nakamoto describes the tendency of American nationals' attitude towards movies as a conservative "wish fulfillment", which serves to satisfy an inherent optimism of the American people as well as keeping up with the status quo. (Nakamoto, 19) Nakamoto's article mainly engages with the romantic fascination of the moviegoing public regarding happy endings, however, this new trend of having ambiguous character types as well as ambiguous endings within blockbuster films, indicates that the wish fulfillment has arched into a more thematic approach – that truth and good is not definitive and therefore contingent on a certain moral frame. This acknowledgement of ambiguity within Hollywood blockbuster narratives may demonstrate an application of the multifaceted desires of moviegoers. Northrop Frye defines romance as the genre that "is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream" (Frye, 186), and this supports the argument that the pursuit of ambiguity through reflections of good and truth is at an all-time high. These movies present a new edition to the "wish-fulfillment dream" in their reflection of cultural events through moral evaluation and the ambiguity of protagonist and antagonist relationships. Regarding the "stylized" and "psychological archetypes" of romance that Frye explores – perhaps the current "archetype" in American cinema is that of ambiguity in its search for the authentic and perfect moral good. Romance deals with the idealization of heroism and purity, and this can be argued as the mixture between the aristocratic and the revolutionary in the above-mentioned narratives. (Frye, 306) Although the characters embody certain concrete traits, they represent a discussion of their respective

subjective standpoints which allows for an increased contemplation regarding the "moral and ideological evaluation of characters". (Smith, 41, 1994) The different films are modifications of our existing understanding and perception of the world, through ambiguous discussions of morality. In *Collateral*, the discussion pertains to how one can unify the scientific fact of the earth's lack of importance in a cosmic scale, while at the same time maintaining that people have social and individual value. *The Rock's* discussion regards how one can unify obeying the military laws, while also protecting and valuing individuals. The lack of positive reception of *Blade Runner* and its contemporary cult status reflects the obsession with narratives that delve into ambiguous emotional responses. These few examples emphasize the element of inherent moral reflection and discussion within each individual film and it, furthermore, shows that wish-fulfillment has become a more fluid term in American cinema, implying that it deals with reflection of moral truth rather than concluding a certain outcome through happy endings.

Accepting the general premise that cinema reflects and adds to cultural progression, the question of the films' cultural impact, in terms of being progressive and revolutionary or not, holds some significance. Are the films simply conveying contemporary conventions, or perhaps adding to a cultural discussion, and thereby being progressive in nature. Frye argues that elements of romance are more revolutionary than realism, in part, due to its application of wish-fulfillment. (Frye, 304-305). The implied search for betterment and moral correctness within the individual narratives presents a wish-fulfillment that seeks to facilitate a process of reflection. However, the opposing characters of the individual narratives present different methods and opinions regarding achieving moral correctness, which presents the tangibility of both aristocratic and revolutionary traits within these films. Although the different characters present definite opinions, exhibiting the traits of a certain paradigm, the ambiguity of the various narratives embodies an inherent optimistic reflection,

that proves itself revolutionary through the search for moral betterment within the conflict between hero and villain.

Emotional responses regarding ambiguity in film through the usage of what Murray Smith calls the "structure of sympathy", signifies a new era of narrative construction in Hollywood cinema which is influenced heavily by the culture that it inhabits and reflects. The elements of romance and realism within American cinema provides a wish-fulfillment that realizes an element reflection regarding the subject of morality and truth.

Conclusion

The 21st century has brought with it an interesting application and modulation of hero and villain characters in Hollywood film production, playing with conventions of romance and realism. Although these are not new structures, they indicate an increasing cultural fascination with morality through heroes and villains. The usage of cognitive film theory and analysis served to provide a set of tools, which has allowed for a thorough analysis of emotional behavior and the subsequent emotional reception of the various characters in individual narratives. The films regarded in the analysis demonstrate that villains are becoming increasingly important in cinematic narratives and connecting them with hero type characters creates an edge that sharpens emotional ambiguity as well as reception and, moreover, makes thematic and emotional Saturation an important element in perceiving the progress in creation of cinematic narratives. The importance of viewing the films through the gaze of cognitive film theory is paramount because of the firm connection between narrative, characters and audience reception, and this allows for further speculation regarding the relevance of hero and villain interconnectivity as well as cultural relevance. The theoretical

application of cognitive film theory serves to explain the connection between emotion and moral deliberation, which is situated between the conflict of hero and villain. In conclusion, the increased prevalence of relating hero and villain to each other within cinematic narratives, serves to increase the occurrence of contingency and debatable subjectivity regarding the perceived good and evil.

The increasing fascination with emotionally elaborated villains exhibits a certain fascination with subjectivity and the concept of truth and authenticity in the mirroring effect between hero and villain. The American culture is littered with phenomena that increases the cultural concern with the ambiguity of truth and what is perceived as either good or evil and this explains the increased availability of that type of narrative. The recent surge in the success of blockbuster films regarding this subject solidifies that ambiguity, as a theme, is achieving more and more popularity and that the prevalence of ambiguity in the cultural imagination of American citizens is ever more present. The prevalence of the connection and similarities between hero and villain presents a certain wish-fulfillment through the search for morality within conflicts and ideological opposition. The various characters present their respective paradigms which, through the ambiguity of Allegiance construction for hero and villain, achieves an inherent reflection and a wish-fulfillment, implying a search for betterment through the conflict between the characters. The repetition of familiar structures like superheroes, presents contemporary moral dilemmas in a well-known and beloved frame, which underlines the professionalism of studios in their way of capitalizing on the current zeitgeist. Whether this trend of ambiguous hero and villain conflicts will end, or simply become reframed within new contexts is uncertain, but what is certain is its escalating success.

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Summary

This thesis regards cognitive film theory and its application to the character structures of heroes and villains in various Hollywood film productions. The selected material for the analysis ranges widely from cult-classic to bestseller, implying a recontextualization of widely popular and critically acclaimed structures within a popular mass-appeal context. Cognitive film theory deals with providing a framework for understanding characters in light of the emotional responses of the audience. Applying the work of Murray Smith, among others, to a variety of films, the thesis investigates emotional responses to relationships between heroes and villains that are presented as morally ambiguous. Smith's "structure of sympathy" is an approach that deals with terms, which

require the application of tangible empiric data in order to discern how and if sympathy is prevalent for a certain character. Moreover, the cultural frame of American society, pertaining to news through social media as well as the ambiguity of the events regarding WikiLeaks and whistleblowers, is applied to the context of the films as a method of analyzing the relevance of ambiguity as a theme that regards truth and morality within characters. The prevalence of superhero films in the 21st century is extremely relevant for this topic, as it deals with reflections of morality. In recent years a trend has been developing, which deals with superheroes from an ambiguous standpoint in terms of morality by using classical cult-film structures. Older films, as well as the newest editions to the *Marvel* and *Star Wars* franchises exhibit clear traits of ambiguity within their constructions of hero and villain, and this is dealt with through analysis of the individual characters and their own exhibition of emotive behavior. The inherent discussion of moral and ideological truth and the definitive good is of extreme popularity in current superhero Blockbuster releases and, therefore, the thesis contains a thorough analysis of emotional responses to ambiguous relationships between hero and villain type characters. The dualistic nature, pertaining to the progressive and aristocratic elements of the various narratives and their character structures, exhibits a set of traits from a wide variety of paradigms that, through the opposition and conflict of the different characters, constitutes a profound reflection and a wish-fulfillment of American cinema that searches for betterment through the opposition and conflict of characters.