

“I Am Iron Man”: An Affective Engagement Study of MCU’s Tony Stark

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## Introduction

Diegetic characters engage us. They help to mimic specific traits of the human experience. The experiences of a movie character can mimic those of an observer, like a tragic death of a loved one. If a spectator has had similar experiences in their life, then that elicits empathy. Characters bear relatable features and develop an interrelated bond between spectator and diegesis. That is a rudimentary process of how movies connect with the audience. With such knowledge, there needs to emerge a framework that will help comprehend such a fact on a deeper level.

Contemporary moviemaking has more at stake than characters in a diegesis. They function as a gateway into the story world. Within a diegesis ruminates the spectacle. Not necessarily a modern term or concept but one of complexity, historically speaking. However, I will elaborate on that later. The usage of spectacle induces a sense of wonder. It evokes and frames a shot that, once decoded, elicits a specific emotion, like sadness or joyfulness. The scenes of spectacle hook the audience to the edge of their seat. Through visual effects, they get instructed to feel specific emotions during a scene of spectacle. Coupled with the notion of character is what this thesis intends to survey. In further detail, how the characters operate within the diegesis to elicit empathy from the audience. The spectacle is a scene of astonishment. However, a beloved character placed within such montages must encode a distinct meaning. My argument is that scenes of spectacle contain more than visually stunning imagery. They entail valuable character insight too. In that sense, spectacles help to shape and evolve a character. It appears that structures of sympathy mainly indicate narrative characteristics. Therefore, I will create my own concept, which revolves around spectacle and character. I label this concept: affect as it relates to character development on the one hand. In addition, affect also relates to spectacles. Scenes of spectacle have to evoke a specific ambiance or experience. Therefore, it must equally entail distinct insight into a character in action. Affect covers both the empathetic function of the character within a diegesis and how scenes of spectacle get used to showing said character in action, which provides insight into the deeper levels of sympathy for said character. My focus is on the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the character of Tony Stark as a focal point.

The first section elaborates on the concept of the spectacle, mainly from a historical point of view. That serves to review the field of prominent scholars of spectacles. The concept of spectacle is not a modern invention. Its genealogy emerged with the dawn of moviemaking. Showcasing spectacular sequences has always been an integral part of a film. Transitioning from the early days

of filmmaking to modern usage will be applied too. After that, I will survey character engagement. That will provide a tangible framework for the character analysis of my thesis. Since MCU are mostly serial-based, I will draw upon various scholars. One has film theory in focus, and the other has TV series as a prime target. The mix will benefit my own analysis, as MCU heavily relies on seriality.

Meanwhile, the movies are interconnected. That transgresses some notable borders and creates a hybrid version of serialized storytelling. Through the MCU, each film is interconnected and carries significance to the overall story structure. The mix of the seriality of TV and movies collide in the MCU. Said story world can become overwhelming. That is why I want to focus on a single character arc from start to finish.

At the beginning of MCU's phase one, Tony Stark gets introduced. The section after my theory will consist of a precursor for my analysis. It will provide insight into the character of Tony Stark within the MCU. I intend to focus on the trilogy containing Tony Stark as the main protagonist. In addition, I will also mention prominent MCU movies that feature Tony Stark as the main character. That includes *The Avengers Series* and *Captain America Civil War*. All of these will gain valuable insight into Stark as a character. It will introduce him as a character who experiences a vast development throughout the phases. Through my theory section, I will unfold concepts that uncover the arc of Stark. In addition, how affect works to highlight different acts of Stark. Through the scene of spectacle, Stark undertakes specific acts that each show his character in action. When decoded, it entails insight into his character traits. And how they are evolving.

The analysis consists of a character analysis of Tony Stark and how affect works to show his development to the audience. It is my argument that character and affect go hand in hand. By this, I mean that the scenes of spectacle plan to tell a story. Said story shows and links the spectator to Tony Stark as they witness his actions. They become the judges of how the morals of said character are. In addition, the scenes of spectacle visually amaze and stun the audience. However, the spectacle scene also shows the audience Tony Stark's actions. These actions intermingle with how much empathy Stark elicits.

I intend to finish my thesis with a discussion of Stark's importance in the MCU, not only from the character's perspective but also from Robert Downey Jr. With output in a tribute video from *Endgame's* extra material will uncover Tony Stark's role and notable presence. I will explore how Stark and the actor follow the same patterns and traits. These all help apprehend why Tony Stark's death was so powerful. I will argue that Tony Stark has elicited empathy substantially throughout

the phases. In addition, Stark elicits more empathy than any other character in the MCU. That is what drives this thesis: Tony Stark as a whole encompasses a unique arc. The character changes tremendously throughout the journey from phase one to three of the MCU. How he elicits empathy is what I intend to survey. Primarily how he elicits empathy via the scenes of spectacle, which make the narrative and spectacle collide to tell an affective part of Stark's journey. These moments are valuable to study as they gain insight into Stark's internal thoughts and motivations.

## Examining Spectacle

For this section, I will examine the term spectacle, a term with a rich history within film theory. I commence by defining its meaning. After that, I will lead towards a historical review of the term. Initiating with Tom Gunning, I examine noteworthy theorists of spectacle. The historical approach, spanning from the early movie theater to modern blockbuster movies, will aid in gaining requisite insight into the spectacle. A problem that will emerge is its relation to narrative. A rather complex relation, as my section points out.

At last, I survey another aspect related to film theory and audience reception. The latter relates to the reader-response theory known through literary practices. My aim here is to advocate for the importance of character in a diegesis. As I will examine, characters are the ticket into the story world. In that sense, characters share a profound bond with the audience. However, theorists of spectacle would disagree. Their focus is on spectacle, and therefore exhibitionism goes through those elements. The voyage into the story world would emerge through scenes of spectacle, as opposed to character. This is where and why I intend to bring scholars of character engagement into play. Murray Smith and Jason Mittell survey the importance of character and its function within the story world. Unlike the spectacle theorists, they advocate for the affective character engagement within a diegesis. I do intend to study the spectacle usage within the Marvel Cinematic Universe. However, that is only the secondary aspect of my thesis. My primary focus is on character engagement through the scenes of spectacle. I will use Murray Smith and his work of character engagement. This later becomes relevant in analyzing two notable blockbuster movies within the MCU. However, first I will survey spectacle as a theory.

Oxford's Advanced Dictionary defines spectacle as a performance or event that is very impressive and exciting to look at. That definition applies both in terms of modern and early cinema. Modern cinema uses technological advancements like Computer-Generated Imagery. What modern technology, like CGI, brings to the movie screen is more captivating images than ever

before. A brief notation upon CGI is Tom Gunning's observation of it as a tamed attraction. Therefore, Gunning implies that CGI is predictable and service story. I will elaborate on Gunning later. CGI also makes grounds for depicting imagery that is beyond human capability. For now, I want to pivot my attention to the early movie theater and bring a historical review of the cinematic history that concerns spectacles. The term spectacle, as written above, defines a stimulating montage. With or without CGI, the spectacle enchants through visual wonder.

Originally written in 1984, Tom Gunning's article "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde" (2006) emphasizes early cinematic history and its usage of captivating imagery. To survey further, Gunning argues that early films, before 1906, did stress the notion of "making images seen" (381). This tendency is left unnoticed as "early filmmakers like Smith, Méliès, and Porter have been studied primarily from the viewpoint of their contribution to film as a storytelling medium" (Ibid). A concern of Gunning is that studies of early cinema tend to focus only on the narrative structures of film. However, the filmmakers of said era did more than conducting a narrative. In addition to that, they also displayed captivating images on the screen. Gunning calls this movement the cinema of attractions. The cinema of attractions means the "ability to show something" (382). Gunning elaborates on the concept by phrasing it as exhibitionistic cinema. By this, Gunning suggests that cinema wants to connect with the spectator. Therefore, in his own words: "the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself" (384). There is an emphasis on the showcase. That is the cinema of attractions. However, Gunning argues that it is too simple to view narrative engagement as absent. The narrative still endures within the cinematic screen. According to Gunning, narrative and attraction begin to synthesize during the early cinematic years (386). The cinema of attractions is a perspective on a specific cinematic technique, which showcases the spectacle. This perspective has had a defining impact on film theory. Not just in the early days of cinema but in modernity too. Gunning mentions modern filmmaking as the "Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects" (387). These directors employ a style of captivating montages that resemble a carnival ride (Ibid). Effects such as these are what Gunning calls "tamed attractions" (Ibid). Cinema of effects has been under scrutiny and regulated to fit accordingly. These effects appear as regulated objects with a specific purpose. That also shows a discontinuity when it comes to the practice of showcasing an attraction. What I mean is how Gunning makes the juxtaposition of trick and effect. The trick of the filmmakers of said era relied on captivating the spectator through more than just the cinematic

screen. In his conclusion, Gunning states specific methods such as applying glue to the seats and igniting firecrackers behind the audience (Ibid). These methods are bygone at the contemporary movie theater. However, I would argue that the application of 3D glasses is a valuable attempt at a modern cinematic trick. The cinema of attractions focuses on the stimulating experience. Early movies, pointed out by Gunning, did display the spectacle element. That is, as written above, not to say that Gunning deems narrative suffers. He attempts to claim that spectacles are not an invention of the modern era. It has been there since the dawn of filmmaking.

In addition, Geoff King's article "Spectacular Narratives: Twister, Independence Day, and Frontier Mythology in Contemporary Hollywood." (1999) claims that "narrative is far from being eclipsed, even in the most spectacular and effects-oriented of today's blockbuster attractions" (25). Thus King believes that narrative persists. King disclaims that "in some cases, spectacle can be seen to reinforce as much as to interfere with the work of narrative" (26). A spectacle may interfere whenever it "exists purely for their own sake, rather than being integrated into the film as a whole" (Ibid). So, there is such a thing as excessive spectacle usage. King also grasps the historical approach of Hollywood's tendency for spectacle usage. King states:

"One of Hollywood's key strategies in response to the move of populations to the suburbs, and to competition from television and other forms of leisure activity, has been to use spectacular attraction as the basis of its effort to tempt audiences back into the cinema, playing on the particular characteristics of the big-screen experience" (33)

This movement, King claims, started during the '50s. And the notion of Hollywood's tendency for the spectacle only increased over time. Although, a short decline during the '60s, King argues (Ibid). The spectacle can evoke and affect the viewing experience profoundly. That is not to say narration cannot bring these elements. But, spectacle creates a profound interrelated bond between the movie diegesis and the spectator. In King's words "the viewer is sold the illusion of being transported into the world on-screen, of experiencing more directly the [...] moments of direct engagement for characters within the fiction" (34). King also argues for what the strengths of both spectacle and narrative are by stating: "If narrative offers order and coherence, moments of spectacle or excess may offer an alternative, the illusion of a more direct emotional and experiential impact" (35). An emphasis is on spectacle and presence. In addition, the narrative provides a steady pace of the cinematic experience.

Scott Bukatman's excerpt "Spectacle, Attractions and Visual Pleasure" (2006) claims spectacle functions as a threat to the narrative system (75). Bukatman argues that the spectacle functions as a non-narrative and therefore "lies beyond a narratively-grounded conceptual schema, and that "beyond" threatens the totalizing coherence of the narrative system" (Ibid). This statement largely agrees with Simon Lewis and his observations on narrative and spectacle. However, Bukatman takes one-step further and calls the spectacle a threat to the narrative system. Bukatman's article also touches upon notable theorists of spectacle, like Gunning and Laura Mulvey. Mulvey researched through a feminist perspective, which Bukatman also mentions and tries to reconstruct a new perception of Mulvey's work. In the words of Bukatman:

"Despite this overdetermined (albeit deeply creative) reliance on a particular psychoanalytic model, it is possible to read Mulvey's essay in retrospect as an early acknowledgment of the limitations of narrative theory, through its emphasis upon the presence of something else that exists in cinematic form. The filmic text is posited as a site of abundance, of multiple semiotic systems that only reinforce one another to a degree. The texts are fissured in ways that threaten their very coherence. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," then, draws attention to the precariousness of stable meaning in the face of spectacle" (77)

Eliminating the gender ideological framework still bears tangible elements when it comes to spectacle. In addition, this quotation also reestablishes Bukatman's notion of spectacle as a threat to the narrative system. Spectacles, according to Mulvey, affect the spectator through the notion of "to-be-looked-at-ness" (73). In addition, Bukatman accounts for the similarities between the works of Gunning and Mulvey. According to him, these theorists have a lot in common. Mulvey argued for "a something else" (79) in a film. Whereas Gunning would advocate for saying something "was there from the outset" (Ibid). Therefore, the spectacle has always been present within the cinematic universe and has always possessed a threat. As Gunning studied the early cinematic productions of attractions, Mulvey focused on the classical Hollywood era. Bukatman argues the differences in the two approaches to spectacle "If Gunning will argue that attractions will continue to exist within narrative cinema in a "tamed" form, and then Mulvey provides a gloss on how, in the case of the spectacular attraction of female sexuality, that taming has occurred" (79). Eliminating Mulvey's article on spectacles in classical Hollywood film is a fallacy. Written through a feministic perspective, Mulvey shows spectacle usage through gender. Therefore, it is worthy of mentioning

Mulvey's contribution. The key notation from Bukatman relies upon the threat of spectacle. Spectacle works like a dimmer switch within the cinematic world. As needed, a dimmer switch can be turned either up or down. The same goes for the use of spectacles. Certain movies, like a blockbuster, may apply spectacle more excessively. The next article attempts to compartmentalize two categories of spectacle.

Erlend Lavik, and his article "New Narrative Depths?: Spectacle and Narrative in Blockbuster Cinema Revisited." (2009), intends to describe and question the notion of a narrative death. That is through the perspective of both classic and modern Hollywood movies. The debate revolves around the ability of storytelling or lack thereof. In addition, it is in these separate categories each critic resides (142). However, Lavik argues that the narrative structure has been consistent through time. In addition, Lavik mentions a lack of empirical research that shows how a narrative should have altered through time (143). Furthermore, he argues against the narrative death as:

"I'm just not sure that anyone actually believes that narrative is literally lacking in contemporary Hollywood films. To the extent that there have been any doubts on this point, surely the time has come to put them to rest once and for all: it has indeed been firmly established that modern Hollywood films meet all the basic technical/formal criteria of any definition of narrative" (144).

In this quotation, there is a consensus that narrative lives. However, the question that Lavik entertains is lingering towards depth rather than death. In addition, he points out: "it seems to me that proponents of the view that the classical narrative tradition is alive and well have laid out their arguments far more carefully and persuasively than their opponents" (143). There lacks a comprehensible approach to account for a narrative extinction. In contemporary visual culture, narrative prevails. But, what modern film critics focus on still lingers towards lack of narrative in cinema. Meaning, that modern blockbuster tends to focus on the spectacle first and then construct a fitting narrative second. Lavik also argues and agrees with the fact that narrative and spectacle "have been at the heart of Hollywood cinema right from the start, one foot firmly placed in the classical narrative tradition of the well-made play, the other in the menu-driven, one-attraction on-top-of-the-other conventions of popular theater" (150). That statement agrees with Gunning, as attractions are not a modern invention. Lavik states that attraction-based storytelling is not an invention entirely created within the cinematic sphere. This is why Lavik mentions Stephen King

and his thought process while writing books. King favors a situation over a plot. A method that embodies King's authorship throughout. Furthermore, Lavik states:

“I have made the case that the tendency to structure stories around isolated moments is not confined to blockbuster cinema. We come across it even in more prestigious films and in less attractions-based media, like the book. Moreover, it was a staple of Hollywood cinema long before George Lucas and Steven Spielberg appeared on the scene” (154).

A key notation from this article is how it makes a case for decoding the spectacle. In addition, Lavik also attempts to question that spectacles only appear in movie theaters. In particular, that attraction tends to come before narration in writing processes. A notable example of this is Stephen King, as written above. King wrote through situations as written above. These situations work similarly to a spectacle. They capture a specific setting. My point, and what motivates this thesis, is how characters show within situations/spectacles. Returning to Stephen King and his writing process, there is an emphasis on character over plot. In addition, these characters undertake certain actions that shape the plot. Therefore, characters have a profound element in a diegesis. It is only relevant to survey how a character functions through the scenes of spectacle. In that way, we can analyze the character arc as it progresses through these scenes of spectacle. However, I would argue that situation is a concept that hovers above spectacle. Through the diegesis, any situation that reveals something distinct about a character works as a tangible analytical component too.

While decoding the spectacle, Lavik attempts to compartmentalize two dichotomous categories. Each describes a specific element of attraction. Erlend Lavik calls the first small-scale attraction. Second, Lavik calls a large-scale attraction (149). These are an attempt to signify two narratological frameworks. However, some movies, say the modern blockbuster, might be easier to decode through the category of large-scale attractions. In Lavik's own words, the difference is: “Small-scale attractions are relatively easier to think of as seeds to be cultivated in some inspired author-mind, while large-scale attractions are relatively easier to think of as predetermined lowest-common-multiples” (154). The categories classify different story structure easily decoded through their different significations. For instance, a small-scale attraction function through a “springboard for *the* story” (149), whereas the large-scale attractions “springboards for *a* story” (Ibid). Erlend Lavik argues that these are caricatured positions (Ibid) that easily can overlap. However, they connote and decode certain aspects of a movie structure. Where Gunning attempts to survey a

significant period of movie history through spectacle usage, Lavik elaborates upon two different scales of attraction. The two entail noticeable characteristics that are culturally familiar through stereotypes. Large-scale attraction and small-scale attraction are tools to open up discussion of similarity. For instance, a large-scale attraction has a focus on commercialization and mechanistic frameworks, which is not the case for a small-scale attraction (149).

Lavik is not the only scholar who attempts to designate different types of spectacles. That is spectacles that operate within the cinematic universe. The narrative structure still has potency in contemporary filmmaking. The article “What is Spectacle?” by Simon Lewis (2014), outlines two variations of spectacles. In addition, how each operates through the *mise-en-scène*. Lewis also argues, “the narrative works to prepare the spectator for the spectacle” (216). The quote outlines his main argument being that cinematic spectacles dissect into two different categories. These are labeled as event and object spectacle, accordingly. Lewis appears to agree with Lavik about the lack of transparency of spectacle as a concept. A notion that Lewis challenges in his article. The approach Lewis surveys the transmission of narrative. Consecutively, these are narrative and non-narrative within the Matrix diegesis (215). Lewis defines the two terms as:

“Narrational transmission is that element of transmission that is aimed solely at providing the spectator with information about the plot, directing the spectator’s attention to the elements of the film that advance the narrative. Nonnarrational transmission is everything else: the sum total of the rest of the information transmitted, whether intentionally or otherwise, to the spectator” (216-17).

The relation between narrational and nonnarrational is one aspect that Simon Lewis focuses upon when it comes to spectacles and narration. Although Lewis also mentions other concepts when analyzing spectacle. The two elements of spectacle Lewis defines the following “event spectacle represents an exaggeration of elements of the *mise-en-scène*, object spectacle is more of an emphasis of those elements” (220). Both of these entail a spectacle and narrative, Lewis argues. For instance, an event spectacle can provide certain insight that regular dialogue simply would not (Ibid). These two features of spectacle intend to create a bond between a spectator and the movie. Simon Lewis states: “The effect (as is also the case with event spectacle) is of a direct, exhibitionistic communication with the spectator outside the film’s diegesis” (218). The keyword through the spectacle is the interconnected emotions that transpire through the spectator and the

diegesis. It is a corresponding experience that occurs between spectator and diegesis. An experience that happens through exhibitionism, as it establishes an emotional connection between spectator and character. This transpires through the diegesis and can happen during scenes of spectacle. However, exhibitionism can happen in other montages too. For Lewis, narrative and spectacle coexist (215). In other words, they have a dialectical relationship. This notion appears to be present in both the writings of Lavik and Lewis. Each has comprised tools or structures for surveying spectacle and narrative. Each does linger towards the fact that spectacle is excessive in certain areas. However, that does not necessarily mean the narrative becomes irrelevant. The term spectacle is neither with nor entirely without narrative. But, as Lavik points out, a large-scale attraction appears and operates through the spectacles in larger capacities than a small-scale attraction. Concerning event and object spectacle, Lewis argues they both entail narrative cues. The spectacles emerge through the diegesis. Lavik and Lewis attempt to apply and expand the concept of the cinema of attractions. They do this by compartmentalizing certain structures within which the spectacle operates. One should not fall into the assumption that these are mere stereotypes. Both Lewis and Lavik emphasize that the categories overlap and are not entirely separate entities. Each element is susceptible to discussing and comprehending the complex term of spectacle. Another attempt at decoding the concept of the spectacle will be next. The following is part of a larger discussion regarding slow-motion shots. I bring this as another example of how studies of spectacles transpire.

In Eric Jenkins' excerpt "Digital Special Affects: On Exhilaration and the Stun in CGI Blockbuster Films" (2020), he investigates a specific type of spectacle. The effect of slow-motion (410) is what he surveys in this piece. However, Eric Jenkins does elaborate on the term by separating two components of the slow-motion spectacle. One of the components Jenkins labels as:

"Suspension-images slow down a scene right before a crucial moment – such as an explosion or an attack – holding the moment in suspension by slowing time down, as may seem to occur in everyday phenomenological reality, since time often feels like it slows down during intense, suspenseful moments." (412)

Suspension-images, therefore, work as a suspenseful and astonishing moment. Furthermore, Jenkins mentions the aftermath-image as a combination of "spatial mastery and temporal discontinuity" (414). These two components evoke exhilarating and stunning sensations that resemble a roller coaster ride (418). Modern blockbusters intend to leave the audience feeling like

they have just witnessed a two-hour-long emotional rollercoaster ride (Ibid). Eric Jenkins concludes by sharing his perception of the difference between the movement-image and the special affect. The difference is that:

“Movement-images represent the change of time by tracking to the diegetic action, whereas time-images sever or alter the relationship between the camera and diegesis, instead foregrounding the relationship between spectator and camera, a relationship now distinct and even at times divorced from the sensory-motor schema of the filmic world.” (420).

So, time-images, or special affects such as suspension-images, decompress the natural flow of the narrative. With modern technology, this process exponentially appears in contemporary blockbusters. Usage of time-image most likely serves an affective purpose within a given movie. The audience gets to experience two separate spatial movements at once. First, the one on the movie screen, and second its slower spatial affect. In addition, the real-time experience of sitting in the cinema. Either time-imagery-focused or attraction-focused spectacles produce visual pleasure that affects the audience. However, modern blockbusters do make use of plotting and tailoring their movies towards creating more of a rollercoaster ride than a narrative masterpiece. Jenkins outlines his excerpt through the lens of how CGI manipulates the audience's perception of time. Both time-images and suspension-images are conduits in the reinvention of the consumer landscape (422). This notion is a larger discussion, which I deem as irrelevant here. However, the concepts do entail yet another analytical tool for decoding spectacles. For now, I have outlined three scholars and their analytical schematics. Each has found inspiration in Gunning's cinema of attractions concept. Lewis, Jenkins, and Lavik had all intention of surveying contemporary spectacle. Whereas Gunning focused on early movie theater mostly. That is not to say Gunning has eliminated any mention of modern application. As I outlined above, Gunning researched a specific period of movie history. There appears to be a consensus between the scholars that narrative and spectacle are in dialectic relation to one another. However, one might ask what will happen if a movie turns excessive attention towards spectacle rather than narrative. Lavik would argue that it would carry the characteristics of a large-scale attraction movie diegesis. This debate links to contemporary blockbuster movies and their showcase of spectacle. There is no such thing as narrative extinction, as pointed out by Lavik.

At last, I will bring Dirk Tomasovic's excerpt “The Hollywood Cobweb: New Laws of Attraction (The Spectacular Mechanics of Blockbusters)” (2006). This excerpt works through the

scope of depicting spectacle usage as excessive. Furthermore, Tomasovic scrutinizes modern blockbuster movies. In the course of the excerpt presented above, Tomasovic analyses early 20's Spider-Man productions. Dick Tomasovic initiates by stating:

“The metaphor is not new: the cinema, like a cobweb, traps the spectator’s gaze. This quasi-hypnotic preoccupation of the image rules nowadays contemporary Hollywood production, and more specifically what forms today a type of film as precise as large, the blockbuster” (309).

The scene of attractions captivates the audience. However, it also connotes an imbalance between narration and spectacle. A remark that follows Tomasovic’s argumentation throughout. As written previously, Gunning mentions the modern blockbuster and recalls them as equivalent to a carnival ride. Gunning mentions the directors Spielberg and Lucas. According to Gunning, each of these directors applies this approach of highlighting the spectacle. The modern blockbuster has been criticized for making cinematic effects become too much in focus. A notion that Tomasovic agrees to. In fact, Tomasovic elaborates on the tendency for highlighting the spectacle to more directors. Tomasovic names Peter Jackson, James Cameroun, and Sam Raimi as directors who apply the cinema of attractions (Ibid). Sam Raimi is also the director of the Spiderman movies that Tomasovic later wishes to examine. What makes these directors unique is their ability to transcend from “one-man bands” (310) and into signing, “several gigantic hits during the 1990s and 2000s, joining Lucas and Spielberg in the little circle of American Top Ten box-office” (Ibid). In addition, Tomasovic mentions Lucas as having said, “Lucas himself declared that his films are more closely related to amusement park rides than a play or a novel” (312). This notion bears deep significance in modern-day blockbuster movies. Their main ability is to transform themselves into being more attraction-based than narrative-driven. As an example, Tomasovic mentions how in the '80s “the link between Hollywood and amusement parks became more and more vivid” (Ibid). Also, Tomasovic mentions that there appeared to be a unification of cinema and video games (Ibid). That notion engenders the conundrum of cinema as a commodity. And, of course, the cinema wants to make money. Tomasovic argues that

“The teenage audience becomes gradually the main target of an entertainment which wants to dazzle the gaze, with an audiovisual inflation as working principle. The audience wants to get

his money's worth. The art of screenwriting loses its rights to the advantage of the creation of stunning images..." (Ibid).

That brings Tomasovic into examining Sam Raimi's Spiderman movies. I intend on focusing on his arguments for the modern blockbuster movie. As seen, there appears to be a nucleus in making images seen. However, that leads to narration weakening through a given movie's diegesis. In his conclusive remarks, Dick Tomasovic advocates for this movement of the modern blockbuster in the following way: "Until Hollywood frees itself from this crisis, popular cinema, never forgetting its fairground origins, continues to appear as a gigantic cobweb which keeps the captive spectator in its center, eyes wide open" (318). Claiming Hollywood as going through a crisis. Furthermore, makes acclaim for more narration-driven cinema, rather than focusing on the carnival experience. The fusion of video games and cinema emerged. There appears to be an emphasis on the spectacle. I am not claiming that this is true in all blockbuster movies. However, these tend to highlight the spectacle. A trend that occurs especially through franchise movies. These tend to highlight the spectacle within the diegesis.

## Affective Character Engagement

For my thesis, I intend on surveying character affect too. That is, put more forwardly, how the character(s) engages with the audience. This approach connects slightly to the reader-response theory. However, as this directs towards cinema, a more appropriate term would be spectator response. In addition, to how this response affects the audience. As I will bring forward next, Murray Smith has noted how characters are likely a conduit betwixt a movie and the spectator. They function as a gateway into a movie's diegesis. To preclude any confusion, I want to point out the relation between spectacle and character. As of now, my thesis has scoured the field of spectacles applied throughout time in filmmaking. It lacks the component of character, which is crucial for making a spectacle scene work effectively. I would argue that characters make the spectacle thrilling. The bond between the on-screen characters and spectators is profound. An audience member begins to recognize and empathize with certain characters in a movie diegesis. Modern blockbuster movies emphasize the spectacle montage. Meanwhile, character and how they affect the audience is crucial for analyzing the spectacles. A spectacle usually places characters in thrilling predicaments to hook the audience. Therefore, eliciting fear and anticipation in the audience. Granted, they already are invested in the characters of a diegesis.

Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters. Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (1995) argues that "our 'entry into' narrative structures is mediated by character" (18). In other words, a character is the utmost important element to gain access to a movie's diegesis. In addition, Smith claims that spectator and character meet through various structures of sympathy. Specifically, through three levels of sympathy. Each has its own domain. So, the audience connects with the movie's diegesis through characters.

The first level of sympathy that the audience engages with is *recognition*. Smith defines the term as "the spectator's construction of character: the perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body, as an individuated and continuous human agent" (82). Therefore, the first level revolves around observing and acknowledging a human agent within the cinematic universe. Recognition operates through characters who mimic similar real-life patterns (Ibid).

The second level of sympathy is *alignment*. In this level, the "spectators are placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions, and to what they know and feel" (83). Therefore, alignment is the next level to being acquainted with a character. That is, of course, through the eyes of a spectator. Smith also points out that alignment shares similarities with another common concept known as focalization (Ibid). Alignment has two functions, which are "spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access" (Ibid). Smith describes spatio-temporal attachment as "the way in which the narration restricts itself to the actions of a single character, or moves more freely among the spatio-temporal paths of two or more characters" (Ibid). In addition, Smith states that "subjective access pertains to the degree of access we have to the subjectivity of characters, a function which may vary from character to character within a narrative" (Ibid). These affect what Smith calls "structures of alignment" (Ibid). What that relates to is a film's capacity to regulate knowledge. Throughout a movie, said knowledge will reveal itself to the audience. The regulation of knowledge constructs a distinct narrative to pan out accordingly. Alignment and its functions relate to narrative structures and do not mention spectacle. It would be insubstantial to proceed without advocating for the relationship between the two. Therefore, I must apply my own concept that will coexist with alignment. The alignment that revolves around affect concerns spectacles and spectators. It is within this connection that affects gains merit. The study of spectacle is, at the same time, the study of affect. How these spectacles affect the audience is crucial when at the same time surveying the characters of the diegesis. The audience must care for the characters to get engaged

with the plot. Also, they function as entries into a movie diegesis. Therefore, in relation to Smith's structures of sympathy, I will add affect as a concept for analytical purposes.

The third and final level of sympathy is *allegiance*. This level “pertains to the moral evaluation of characters by the spectator” (84). There is a difference between alignment and allegiance. Smith states, “allegiance is distinct from those of recognition and alignment in that it is an emotional as well as a cognitive response” (187). Therefore, allegiance has a cognitive element linked to it, whereas the other levels have not. Allegiance concerns a character’s ‘likability’ so speak. And this evaluation happens through the spectator and their moral and cognitive process, which may alter during a movie. A character may be like at the initiation of a film. Through their moral actions, they can shift towards becoming villainous in the end. Murray Smith states how allegiance functions as: “to become allied with a character, the spectator must evaluate the character as representing a morally desirable (or at least preferable) set of traits, in relation to other characters within the fiction” (188). This concludes Smith’s levels of sympathy structures. Each of these shares a relevance to analyzing a character through a movie diegesis.

Jason Mittell’s book *Complex TV. The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (2015) has an entire chapter dedicated to the characters in films. In this book, there is a focus on characters in television series. Mittell wants to survey how the production of a character occurs and how the viewer responds to serialized characters (118). In addition, Mittell remarks on a distinct notion of creating characters. Mittell states that “television characters derive from collaboration between the actors who portray them and the writers and producers who devise their actions and dialogue” (119). Characters, both televised and cinematized, conjure through a series of encoded structures. Usually, these occur through writer and directors who works as character guides. It is up to the audience to decode a set of character traits. At the same time, the actor portraying a character plays a factor too. Yet, actors work within a given frame set by the production crew. Although, James Mittell mentions that “actors have varying degrees of creative authority and collaborate ownership of their ongoing characters” (Ibid). That may be a result of whoever directs and produces a television series. A notion that I intend not to dive further into. The statement emphasizes the actor’s creative freedom while portraying a given character.

While producing a movie, it is vital to encode a certain degree of sympathy for a character. That will shift and change given the intended outcome a production wishes. Mittell states too “TV audiences need to invest in characters” (124). A notion that Smith would agree upon. Even though Smith focused on cinema, the structures of sympathy apply to serialized television too.

Furthermore, Jason Mittell mentions how spectators reacted to the first season of Game of Thrones. Ned Stark, the main protagonist, is executed for treason. A death that happens in George RR Martin's book series as well. However, the television viewers were still left devastated by the loss of this protagonist, played by Sean Bean. That shows how considerable a protagonist and character can captivate an audience (Ibid). In addition, Jason Mittell states that how "we should not presume that caring deeply about characters is a sign of unhealthy boundaries but embrace it as a central component of storytelling - we temporarily give part of ourselves over to a fiction to produce intense emotional affect" (127). Mittell argues that characters and spectator relations are central to a movie's diegesis. In order to connect with certain characters, the audience gives a piece of themselves. That ushers Mittell into mentioning the work of Murray Smith, who did focus on singular movies. That is also what makes Mittell claim for expanding and translating Smith's terms onto serialized television. Watching serialized television, which stretches over time, requires much more from the audience. Their investment and time are in high demand during serialized television (Ibid). Mittell argues that

"Viewers of serial television engage with an ongoing, dynamic system, not a fixed text like most films. We identify characters not just within a fixed ensemble but also from episode to episode, across gaps of various lengths in both screen time and story time" (132).

My approach is a hybrid interpretation of Smith and Mittell. Each has its own specific slot when surveying characters in visual culture. The quotation above shows how serialized television characters affect the audience. A distinct notion here is that it happens over a prolonged period than a singular movie would. When analyzing the Marvel Cinematic Universe, its seriality is of high priority. Throughout the seriality, the characters will shape and develop. Their arcs will alter over time. It is insufficient to watch a Marvel film and think a wholesome character structure assembles. Nevertheless, how character Tony Stark (played by Robert Downey Jr) changes over the course of the MCU. However, that, in and of itself, is a rather big project to conduct. Therefore, I must condense the number of movies that emphasize his character growth. Mittell states "wholesale shifts in allegiance are rare" (137) and continues advocating for their ability to change. I will uncover this change during this paper. Tony Stark changes throughout the phases of the MCU. Stark's character arc does signify a specific growth. Jason Mittell mentions a plethora of different types of arcs. I will claim that Tony Stark resembles a hybrid version of character growth and education. Mittell claims

that growth revolves around the maturation of a character (Ibid). In addition, character education concerns a type of life lesson being learned by the character (Ibid). How these relate to Stark will be an ongoing process in this paper.

## Introducing Tony Stark

As written above, the Marvel Cinematic Universe develops through three individual phases. There are four phases of MCU. However, my scope is on the first three phases. An important note is that the fourth phase transpires after the Infinity Era. Therefore, I alleviate the fourth phase completely from my thesis. Another mention will be that I focus on a specific character, Tony Stark. Each phase extends and shapes the overall narrative. From phase one to three, the MCU revolves around the antagonist Thanos, who aims to balance out each planet he conquers by eradicating half its population. Thanos goes from being a relatively unknown villain in phase one to being the ultimate antagonist in phase three. Each of these serves as a supplemental asset for the phases to come.

Returning to one of Marvel's main protagonists Tony Stark, whom the audience gets introduced to in *Iron Man* (2008). The phase one movies of interest are *Iron Man*, *Iron Man 2*, and the first installment of *The Avengers*. In the initiation stage of *Iron Man* (2008), the audience recognizes Tony Stark as an eccentric character. Tony Stark is the Chief weapons manufacturer of Stark Industries. From the very first montage, Stark embodies a rather high-minded and arrogant playboy type. Sitting in a presumably expensive suit and discussing his latest conquest Tony Stark stands in great contrast to his surroundings. The scene has Tony Stark seated in a military convoy. He says slightly misogynistic and arrogant comments towards the soldiers within the vehicle. Meanwhile, each of the soldiers idolizes Tony Stark within the convoy. The audience may get confused to which degree they can root for this protagonist. Sipping on his glass of scotch while bragging about how many Maxim cover models he has slept with is another indicator of Stark's mindset and mannerism at the beginning of phase one. Therefore, from the first scene, the stage is set for a movie whose main protagonist embodies arrogance but, at the same time, can charm his way out of anything he says. Although, the montage gains suspense as the leading convoy explodes. An ambush is about to transpire. Ironically, the grenade that detonates is from Stark's own company. An extreme close-up of the grenade makes this notion explicit. A moment later, Tony Stark is on the ground, bleeding. What makes this scene significant in the arc of Tony Stark is how it changes him, as the audience witnesses his struggles being in captivity in the following montages.

Stark's tenure in confinement initiates his development of the Iron Man suit, with assistance from fellow captive Yinsen. The aftermath of the ambush also leaves Stark with serious injuries. Yinsen helps him survive by operating an electromagnet into Stark's chest to evade any shrapnel from piercing his heart. The time in captivity humbles Tony Stark a bit. However, not to any severe degrees. But it becomes clear through his relation to Yinsen. A man that Stark wanted to save but did not. All of this transpires in the first act of the film. It sets off the arc of Tony Stark in a way that shows room for improvement, as his main characteristics have not changed to any precise degree. Tony Stark, the playboy, still embodies arrogance and an egotistic personality.

At the end of *Iron Man*, Tony Stark announces to the public that he is the unidentified superhero, Iron Man. So, the first movie revolves around the origin story of Tony Stark. A protagonist who comes from a prominent family within the military manufacturing industry. The moral compass of Stark is within the first movie driven by personal needs as the primary agenda. Tony Stark aligns with having panache to a large degree. That is the same Stark the audience gets aligned with within the initiation montage of *Iron Man 2* (2010). The aftermath of him revealing himself to be the Iron Man turns him into prominent notoriety. However, fame takes a toll on him, both in legal terms and in his personal life. *Iron Man 2* focuses on Stark's invention, the Iron Man suit. The audience gets aligned with the same Stark as in the first movie. Only this time, his recklessness turns more volatile. Stark's mannerism becomes transparent in a montage featuring a party held by Stark. While in his Iron Man suit, he appears drunk and reckless. Unsuccessful, the newly anointed CEO of Stark's company Pepper Potts tries to end the party. Stark proceeds to shoot wine bottles and watermelon close to the guests. As the shooting occurs, James Rhodes has managed to grab another Iron Man suit, which ultimately leads to a faceoff. As the guests abruptly exit the room, Stark and Rhodes battle inside the mansion of Tony Stark. The altercation causes a substantial amount of collateral damage. In its entirety, the montage envisions Tony Stark as irresponsible. His behavior does not align entirely due to his drunken state. This lack of responsibility and reckless behavior needs some discipline. The spectator witnesses James Rhodes trying to contain Stark. Rhodes stands up to Stark, even if it means an altercation is the only outcome. The montage peaks when both shoot their repulsor blast. That creates an enormous amount of pressure, which eventually explodes. As of now, the spectator recognizes Stark's behavior as self-absorbed. In addition, the fact that Stark has trouble with any authority figure. Something that becomes clear through the altercation with Rhodes. Whether or not Stark is likable as a protagonist from this moment is up for debate. He harbors both good and bad personality traits.

The bad is his irresponsibility and arrogance. Meanwhile, Stark also gains sympathy through his ongoing illness, a heavy metal poisoning caused by the arc reactor in his chest. Throughout *Iron Man 2*, numerous close-up montages depict how Stark measures his blood toxicity. In *Iron Man 2*, the audience gets introduced to Nick Fury, head of the Avengers initiative. Nick Fury and other S.H.I.E.L.D. agents emerge to ground Tony Stark. The donut shop scene is a fine example of how Nick Fury tries to reason with Stark and his current reckless behavior. Furthermore, the S.H.I.E.L.D. helps Stark with reducing the symptoms of his illness. In addition, Stark also gets informed about how he is essential for innovating the future. The organization supervises Stark so that he fulfills said destiny.

The allegiance for Stark changes when his father's film emerges. That makes the backstory of Tony Stark more profound. Before that moment, the audience aligns with the notion of Stark's deep resentment towards his father. Tony tells Fury how he has never heard him utter any words of affection from his father. However, the film provided by S.H.I.E.L.D. functions as a turning point for Stark. Howard Stark, the founder of Stark Industries, speaks to his future son and addresses him personally. Within the montage that Tony Stark observes, his father states: "What is and always will be my greatest creation is you". That entire montage works as a catalyst for Stark. Afterward, the spectator witnesses how Stark tries immensely to improve his behavior. A prime example of that is when Stark surprises visit CEO Pepper Potts. Tony Stark brings her strawberries. Although, she points out to him that she is allergic. It goes to show how little Tony Stark knows Potts. The attempt for redemption may have fallen short for him. However, the audience may appreciate the effort put in by Stark.

Thus, the audience recognizes Tony Stark as the eccentric billionaire. They are aligned with the character mainly through his selfishness and arrogance. Yet, Stark also displays charm and wittiness. A character whose allegiance can shift to either end of the spectrum. The audience may appear puzzled as to how much Tony Stark is presentable enough to be praised. Allegiance is interesting here because Tony Stark is not the usual hero. An archetype of a hero would imply an ability to make the ultimate sacrifice.

*The Avengers* (2012) recognizes Tony Stark as having made some engineering progress. In the first montage, the audience immediately perceives a slightly more balanced Stark. Introducing the Stark Tower and Pepper Potts as CEO, there bridges a gap between *Iron Man 2* and *The Avengers*. We are aligned with a motivated Stark, which may be influenced by the S.H.I.E.L.D. organization, founders of the Avengers initiative. Tony Stark in the Iron Man suit acts as a hero

without much wit and arrogance. Out of the Iron Man suit, Tony Stark still assimilates features of arrogance and charm. The alignment that relates to Stark's confidence shows the audience that he is completely capable of solving the issue at hand. It also aligns Stark with the characteristics known from previous movies: handling things independently. Still, Stark is not capable of collaborating with others.

A segment of *The Avengers* (2012) is Steve Rogers's remark about Stark's inability to make a selfless sacrifice. A quote made by Rogers goes: "the only thing you really fight for is yourself. You're not the guy to make the sacrifice play, to lay down on a wire and let the other guy crawl over you". This quote makes Stark respond with "I think I would just cut the wire". Stark indicates that there is a better solution to the problem. However, it shows his selfish nature quite facetiously. Obviously, this functions as a foreshadowing for things to come. At the film's climax, Roger's observation turned spurious. An atom bomb is about to strike Manhattan, to evaporate the premises free of extraterrestrial activity. However, Tony Stark intercepts the bomb and diverts it straight up into the atmosphere. A protracted montage follows their journey upwards. There is cross-cut editing appearing that equally shoots from inside the helmet of Stark and outside. Eventually, the bomb explodes way out in the wormhole and sends Stark plunging toward earth. Stark's effort turned successful as he recovers at the concrete of New York. An act of heroism happened. However, the allegiance aspect of things may not agree favorably with the act as vast collateral damage already had happened. It is also unclear how many civilian casualties there were. This act of heroism did come out of spontaneity. Still, Tony Stark showed that he could make a selfless act of heroism. Yet the moral conundrum at stake is up for debate. The Avengers faction will, throughout the franchise, get accused of not only being heroes but also vigilantes. However, my point here is that Stark shows character growth from this act, regardless of its implications. In addition, an act that depicts Stark as maturing.

For *Iron Man 3* (2013), the audience aligns with a Post-Traumatic Stress suffering Tony Stark after the events of *The Avengers* (2012). During *Iron Man 3* (2013), the mindset coupled with extreme insomnia makes for a different familiarity of Stark. He makes questionable remarks that lead to terrible outcomes. During an interview on live TV, Stark gives his address to a terrorist. That leads to the destruction of his mansion. Afterward, Tony Stark calls Pepper to apologize and atone for putting her in danger. It is one of the first montages that depicts Stark apologizing. The demolition of his mansion is symbolic. It is an act of tearing down the old version of Stark. The beginning of a mature character who tries to reverse his misdeeds. *Iron Man 3* depicts and

transgresses Tony Stark like no other MCU movie thus far. The audience and their allegiance to the character turn more likable during the diegesis of *Iron Man 3*. In one montage, Stark rescues 13 airborne passengers floating in midair. The scene adds suspense by having Jarvis, Stark's intercommunication system, tell him how the distance to earth decreases rapidly. Once again, an act of selfless sacrifice epitomizes Stark's growth. At the very end, Stark blows up all of his Iron Man suits like fireworks. A final act of dismembering the old version of Tony Stark and rising like the phoenix. In the final monologue of his occurs, Stark says: "My armor, it was never a distraction or a hobby it was a cocoon. And now I'm a changed man. You can take away my house, all my trick and toys. One thing you can't take away... I'm Iron Man" (*Iron Man 3* 2013). This indicates a textual representation of the growth developed from the previous movies and *Iron Man 3*. Another important insight into how the allegiance has shifted to making Tony Stark more likable is his personal relations, mainly Pepper Potts and the kid he meets when he is in hiding. In *Iron Man 3*, Tony Stark shows care and affection towards these characters. That is a telltale sign of his maturation. Especially in his relation to Pepper Potts, as pointed out in *Iron Man 2*. As mentioned above, *Iron Man 3* is also a precursor for MCU's phase two, and each has its own narrative that layers the diegesis with fresh content. Phase 1 of the MCU has had the audience recognize Tony Stark as the arrogant, billionaire, playboy type. These things never entirely disappear from his virtues. However, they diminish and make room for growth to arise. The character of Tony Stark initiates phase two as more likable. Allegiance has therefore shifted. Stark personifies as more careful and affectionate with the ones around him. However, it is still in the early stages of maturation.

For *Avengers the Age of Ultron* (2015), Stark must battle his own artificial creation. In Stark's words, he wanted to bring peace into their time by engendering an artificial intelligent enforcer named Ultron. All of these plans appear to happen after *Iron Man 3*. However, the artificial intelligence known as Ultron gains consciousness and misconstrues its entire purpose. Ultron becomes malignant and decides to evaporate all human life on earth. Undisclosed with the S.H.I.E.L.D. organization Tony Stark created Ultron with good intentions. However, Stark must have known that their ethical perception did not match his. Even though Stark did make Ultron come to life, he also materialized Jarvis. Therefore, Stark still produces something good. Unfortunately, he does exhibit a vast amount of chaos and destruction too. Like New York, Sokovia is a place with multiple casualties at the hands of the Avengers. This time, it is a deed that Stark is

to blame for, as he was the inventor. That is also why he decides to leave the Avengers headquarters at the end. Once again, he is turning inwards for reinvention and contemplation.

An important side note is the connection and tension between Rogers and Stark. Already witnessed by the spectator, the tension between the two culminates in *Captain America Civil War* (2016). I will not get into much of the plot, but in said movie, the spectator watches a substantial amount of background story of Tony Stark. That story and the disagreement about the Sokovia Accords lead Steve Rogers and Tony Stark to switch roles completely. Before, Tony Stark's alignment was not following/listening to the command. After *Civil War*, Stark becomes the leader of the Avenger faction. On the contrary, Steve Rogers aligns with a morally gray / antihero personality. That is the polar opposite of what the audience recognized in Captain Steve Rogers during the previous MCU movies. After that, Tony Stark is in charge and shows a new level of maturity. A growth that culminates and materializes in phase three of MCU. The next section will be regarding an analysis of phase three MCU movies *Infinity War* and *Endgame*. All to show how the character Tony Stark shows maturation through scenes of spectacle. These changes in Stark's character appear as affect within the structures of sympathy. Already established a connection to Stark, the audience connects and relates to the character. That is where spectacle and character engagement happen. Whereas my first section of the analysis revolved around encapsulating and contextualizing the character of Tony Stark, I will now begin to analyze the end of phase three of MCU movies.

### *Infinity War*

Before the analysis, I want to mention a significant plot device within *Infinity War*, the Infinity Stones. Thanos intends to collect all six and become the most powerful being in the universe. For now, I will focus on *Infinity War*, as Thanos proposes to collect all stones and place them into his Infinity Gauntlet. I shall refer back to Simon Lewis's concept now of the object spectacle, which I deem fits perfectly onto the Gauntlet. It is an object filmed repeatedly to depict and show the progress of Thanos. In addition, it signifies the driving force of both *Endgame* and *Infinity War*. Through the mise-en-scene, object spectacle aims at having the object as the focal point. The audience gazes at the object due to its significance within a diegesis. As the saga of the Infinity Stones transpires through the MCU, I deem the Stones and Infinity Gauntlet as objects of high priority. The Stones are key to the plotline. When Tony Stark visits the Sanctum in New York for the first time, the Stones are swirled around the room through magic. They are an invitation to

the audience to focus on them. They carry importance, as they show the agenda of *Infinity War*. In addition, the Gauntlet as it shows progression. It also builds suspense throughout, as Thanos increasingly collects all six Stones. Therefore, *Infinity War* functions through an object spectacle. Next is how character and empathy emerge within the diegesis. As mentioned above, I will be focusing on Tony Stark. However, for *Infinity War*, Stark gets acquainted with particularly one central character of interest. That is Dr. Stephen Strange. Their relation is to understand how empathy creates itself within *Infinity War* essential, as I will unfold next.

Tony Stark appears eleven minutes into *Infinity War* (2018). Stark and Pepper Potts are engaged in conversation. Stark talks about a recent dream that involved them having a kid. A notion that works as a foreshadowing of things to come. However, before that, Stark tussles with two conflicting sides of his character. First is his relationship with Pepper Potts, which is evolving. The audience recognizes the changes previously mentioned in the section above. Stark seems to have matured to the degree that starting a family appeals to him. The second conflict appears when Potts notifies Tony about his arc reactor, which still is in his chest. Stark still has it for protection, in case of "monsters in the closet". A reference to how he still feels the need to protect Earth from any extraterrestrial threats. Stark cannot retire from being Iron Man just yet, as the montage introduces Stephen Strange, who wishes to speak to him urgently. That is also how Stark gets knowledge of the Infinity Stones and Thanos. This montage has Stark aligned more with his urge to save Earth, as he says to Potts that they may have to postpone their dinner plans. The montage build affect through a gradual increase in suspense. One aspect of this goes through the diegetic sounds produced. Once again, a slow buildup to ensure an increase of anticipation within the audience. The accumulation of tension initiates as the hair of Dr. Strange begins to twitch, depicted in a close-up shot. Meanwhile, an infinitesimal sound effect emerges in the distance, accompanied by muffled screaming. All of these sounds occur outside of the Sanctum. As spectators, we want to know what happens outside on the streets of New York. As the scene progresses to the outside, the handheld camera films the chaos that transpires all around the characters. People are panicking, cars driving into streetlights as Tony Stark navigates through the scenery. As the characters move around a street corner, the Q-Ship emerges onto the screen. Inside the massive circular spacecraft, there are two accomplices of Thanos who wish to loot the Time Stone, which Dr. Strange possesses. The disturbing sound effect of the Q-Ship connotes the fear the diegesis wants to evoke. That is the main agenda of the scene: Get the Time Stone. In addition, the protection of it from the Children of Thanos. However, some

unexpected challenges appear for the protagonists, like Bruce Banner's inability to release the Hulk. That increases suspense and uncertainty even further.

Concerning spatio-temporality, the scene splits the point of view to include several characters, from Dr. Strange's battle with Ebony Maw to Stark's fight with Obsidian Cull. Furthermore, the crosscut editing appears with Spider-Man as he observes the Q-Ship out in the distance. That leads to the possibility of multiple outcomes and makes for an anticipative montage of spectacle. As action branches out into several fights, the montage becomes anticipative and creates anticipation. The shifts between the battles make the spectator hooked to the action. Hooked, in terms of observing the fight sequence, and at the same time waiting with anticipation for how outcomes will pan out. For instance, Bruce Banner's internal struggle as Hulk is reluctant to join the action. In addition, Dr. Strange's battle with Ebony Maw can go either way, as we are unclear about Maw's abilities against Strange. The struggle appears balanced equally in terms of powers and abilities. An anticipative montage can create instances of uncertainty. This is mainly related to Hulk's aversion to fighting, as it increases excitement and intrigue.

Stark's comprehension of the Infinity Stones is entirely new. That is the aligned version of Stark observed by the spectators. Dr. Strange appears well informed about the Infinity Stones. This is a notion that Stark cannot take. From previous movies, the audience knows that Stark wants to feel superior. However, in this montage, he becomes the scholar. Wong teaches both Stark and the audience about the Infinity Stones. In addition, instances of Stark doing research also make him a scholar of the Infinity Stones. The subjective access to Stark's character develops throughout the scene. Furthermore, the montage ends with him understanding their worth and takes upon himself to keep the Stones out of the hands of Thanos.

That leads to the concept of allegiance. Tony Stark, as mentioned, has two conflicting desires at stake. At the end of the montage, he is onboard the Q-Ship to rescue Dr. Strange. That leaves Potts down on the ground, disappointed. Stark's decision also lingers around his urge to protect Earth, which Stark has contemplated since *The Avengers* (2012). Therefore, in terms of empathy, the audience can comprehend his choice. Even to the degree of making him more likable. However, allegiance is also a subjective exercise transpiring within an audience member. Allegiance equally revolves around our moral compass and how that links to a character. It is as if the spectator becomes a part of the diegesis for a moment. During said process, the spectator evaluates how they would have acted if the same circumstances happened to them. Therefore, empathy plays a

substantial part in allegiance toward a character. The audience knows through the MCU diegesis how much he wishes to install peace. Seeing Thanos as a disturber of that peace, Stark retaliates.

In many ways, the tension between Strange and Stark relates to their similar backstories. Both are egocentrics. In addition, each of them had to go through hard times to increase their maturity. That helped them to be able to help other than themselves. However, their similarity still ignites sparks between them whenever they are in each other's presence. Strange represents a world of magic, as Stark represents the world of technology. Through this scene, it is vivid that Stark has underestimated the power of the Stones. He even underrates the force of Strange. Stark's ignorance is what the audience gets aligned with within this first montage. Even though Stark appears to throw insults at Strange and does not give him the credit he deserves, it is still in the typical charming Tony Stark way. Stark has to put his faith in a man that knows more about a subject than himself. An example of a dialogue exchange that emphasizes their difference goes as follows. After rescuing Dr. Strange from Ebony Maw, an altercation between them emerges:

"Strange: We gotta turn this ship around.

Stark: Yeah, now he wants to run. Great plan.

Strange: No, I want to protect the stone.

Stark: And I want you to thank me. Now, go ahead. I'm listening.

Strange: For what? Nearly blasting me into space?

Stark: Who just saved your magical ass? Me.

Strange: I seriously don't know how you fit your head into that helmet." (Infinity War 2018).

The dialogue above depicts their failure to be thankful for one another. There is no sign of mutual respect. A brief moment later, Stark and Strange discuss what to do next. That is the thing about it; they have to cooperate to survive. There is another example of their struggle happening moments later. Strange is reluctant to hand over the Time Stone to Thanos. However, this is where Stark expresses his trauma to Strange. Stark states

“Thanos has been inside my head for six years. Since he sent an army to New York and now he's back. And I don't know what to do. So I'm not so sure if it's a better plan to fight him on our turf or his, but you saw what they did, what they can do. At least on his turf, he's not expecting it. So I say we take the fight to him”

This is agreeable to Strange. However, Strange remarks on the sheer value of the Time Stone, as he states: “You have to understand if it comes to saving you or the kid or the Time Stone I will not hesitate to let either of you die. I can't, because the universe depends on it” (Infinity War 2018). That makes Stark compliment Strange’s moral compass sarcastically. Ironically, Stark's moral compass is not great either. The audience knows this from previous movies. However, at least they are trying to make ends meet. They do not have any other chance of surviving.

Tony Stark's backstory seems to make Strange more genuine. The audience observes how much this means to Stark. How much Stark's trauma still lingers in his head. However, none of them understands each other. Nor do they respect each other. Stark even calls it a professional courtesy when saving Strange. Rescuing him was out of necessity and not friendship. The dialogue also shifts the camera from a medium close-up to a close-up shot of Stark and Strange as it tries to capture the intensity of their faces during this ominous time. The dialogues above gain subjective access to threatening Stark's thoughts. His mindset is easy to understand. The audience gains insight and comprehension of Stark's motivation going forward. In presenting this subjective access, the cinematography contributes by presenting Stark's trauma to the audience. That is not how empathy creation works for Strange. The audience rarely gains insight into his mind. It only occurs in a moment of blind trust. Here, I refer to the outcome scene where Strange mentions how many successful outcomes lie ahead. However, the audience does not observe his thought process. We have to put faith in his capabilities as a Time Stone Keeper. Empathy is elicited for Stark, both in his thoughts and actions. Stark does not elicit blind trust. That only occurs through Dr. Strange. This appears to be an intentional choice for the diegesis. The notion that the spectator gains substantial insight into Stark’s mentality signifies him as a priority through focalization. Eventually, Stark’s character becomes easier to empathize with as Stark's motive establishes itself. It becomes easier to root for him. During the vast series of the MCU leading into *Infinity War*, Stark, as a character, has developed and matured tremendously. In terms of allegiance, it becomes more comprehensible that Stark leaves Pepper Potts and the stable life behind for a moment. It does not perceive Stark as having made a bad judgment call, as the audience empathizes with his backstory.

However, to stop Thanos, collaboration is needed. Otherwise, the mission of saving Earth will fail. At this point, it appears through the diegesis that Stark is aware of this. His trauma, well depicted in the monologue, emerges once more. The reemergence of Stark's trauma helps to evoke empathy within the audience. In previous MCU movies, Stark has had trouble solving problems in

teams. Therefore, there is an element of intrigue to how cooperative Stark can be. Through the structures of sympathy, Stark needs to mature and humble himself to clear space for others. Alignment emphasizes coalition, as I mentioned concerning spatio-temporality. In the following montages, this becomes clear too. Arguably, The Avengers franchise does signify superheroes coalescing together. That is not my argument. This is about Tony Stark and his collaboration issue, as he advocates for the collaborative method rather than solving it personally. The threat of Thanos appears to Stark too immense. They have to coalesce to demolish the plans of Thanos. The concept of spatio-temporal does show this coalition. We do follow Stark. However, in his quest to terminate the antagonist, he has montages with other supernatural beings. That is not entirely new in an Avenger movie. But Stark's urge for collaboration is. As for the previous MCU movies, Stark has had his fair share of struggles with teamwork, as I mentioned above. So how does Stark's character development relate to scenes of spectacle? Within these scenes and especially the climax of *Infinity War*, which makes the audience elicits empathy for Tony Stark. These scenes of spectacle have Stark go through a specific incident. As a spectator, we immerse ourselves with the main protagonist. It is within this process that empathy gets created. I would argue that *Infinity War* and *Endgame* have no other character eliciting as much empathy as Tony Stark. The audience has gotten to know him over the past decade. It all culminates within *Infinity War* and later *Endgame*. So, scenes of spectacle and my concept of affect function to elicit empathy for Stark. It is within these that Stark's character unfolds.

The next scene contains Stark, Strange, and Spider-Man crash landing on the planet Titan, where they collide with another faction of heroes who wants to stop Thanos. Montages before, the Guardians of the Galaxy lost Gamora as Thanos took her prisoner. The first part introduces Stark to the faction as they battle it out before realizing they have similar goals. When it comes to spectacle, the scene has low suspense. The audience knows both groupings and their intentions. Therefore, the battle is more comedic than suspense escalating. Although, the only montage that bears tension is where each member is held at gunpoint, which starts with Peter Quill telling everyone to stay calm. Stark becomes aware that Quill is from Earth too, which decreases the suspense of the montage as their common enemy gets mentioned. The spectators are not fearful of Stark's life. Especially not when Mantis refers to Thor, a friend of Stark. The standoff appears as an instinct to be in an unknown environment. Everyone would want to protect themselves from the unknown firsthand. However, the subjective access decreases the suspense of the scene.

There is parallel editing appearing that shows the location of Thor. That creates awareness of where other characters are in the present time as the occurring montage. It also depicts the progress of the quest. As the montage of Thor subsides, the audience gets back to the planning on Titan. Here we are aligned with a Tony Stark in charge or trying to. As Stark assembles the Guardians, he says to them: "we gotta coalesce" (*Infinity War* 2018). A clear depiction of Stark's maturation and mindset. However, Peter Quill challenges Stark's authority. Although, Quill and Stark's squabbles get momentarily stopped as Mantis interferes.

What is especially significant from this montage is when Strange meditates on the possible outcomes of stopping Thanos. And, out of 14,000,605 outcomes, there is only one where they will succeed. Here Stark begins to trust Strange's abilities. Through Stark's trauma, he knows that this is a battle beyond his capabilities. Allegiance is tricky here as the audience needs to place implicit faith in Strange. There is no way of telling what he had just witnessed. However, Stark's reaction appears to trust Strange, which shows their relationship has evolved. Through focalization, we, as spectators, are aligned like Stark. His confusion and trust are traits that we ourselves would have in the same situation. At that moment, Stark depicts relatability towards the audience, as he mirrors our own reaction. The audience, and Stark, have to trust Strange since we are not aligned with him. We did not observe all of the outcomes alongside him. However, Strange does not elicit much empathy in the first place. They have begun to trust each other and see their similar aim for stopping Thanos. In this montage, Stark uses his traits of being a leader, as Strange uses his authority of being the Time Stone keeper. They operate separately within their own area of expertise and unite. Although, one single outcome out of a substantial quantity is horrible odds stacked against them.

Throughout the first half of *Infinity War*, the audience gets aligned with the mature Stark. A man who thirsts for finally ending his yearlong trauma. The trauma that Thanos has given him, as the dialogue hints at. His actions transpire as understandable rather than negotiable, as he lacks the recklessness shown in previous MCU movies. Stark appears calm, calculative, and witty. Though Stark has trouble with people more competent than him, he trusts these individuals more than before. However, the trauma drives Stark. The urge to protect Earth is something that the audience links to this character and has been right from the beginning. His trauma is a narrative component. However, it also works to elicit empathy through scenes of spectacle. During the climax of *Infinity War*, Stark gets face to face with Thanos. The root of his trauma, as he stated earlier in the movie. It

elicits empathy as the audience immerses themselves in Stark's story. They can understand him and his actions.

Eventually, the faction faces Thanos at the climax of the diegesis. Throughout this scene, the audience observes Stark's battle against Thanos, with help from the faction assembled on Titan. The first noticeable part of the scene is how affect functions overall. Here, there lies an emphasis on showcasing the spectacle. In addition, there is a transparent buildup of tension and fear of the outcome. Like in other montages with Thanos, the spectacle shows through his use of the Infinity Stones. In addition, the power of the Time Stone was maneuvered by Dr. Strange. It is the magic time loops that Strange uses that stand out. As the faction battles Thanos, each member jumps in and out of Strange's time loops. These jumps appear through the *mise-en-scène* as circular sparks. Also known as Spark Portals that Strange continuously creates for each member. For instance, when Spider-Man repeatedly goes through these portals to kick Thanos. What these instances accomplish is create disorientation and enhance attention. The audience experiences these instances that quickly rise and subside repeatedly. That hooks the spectator to the screen, as the montages require their full attention. It happens so fast that it becomes almost dizzying to experience these instances. Much like Dick Tomasovic argues: the spectacle is like a rollercoaster ride. And for this experience of the time loops, I argue, is the epitome of spectacles. The audience gets disoriented by the fast-paced imagery. However, Stark does not appear within the time loops created by Strange. Moreover, Stark flies around the premises finding various items to shoot toward Thanos. That only enhances the attention-grabbing ambiance of the montage. In addition, it all peaks when the faction catches Thanos in both arms, forcing him to get on one knee. From here, they attempt to rob Thanos of his Infinity Gauntlet, potentially ending the war in toto.

In terms of the structures of sympathy, this moment bears vast significance for things to come. The dynamic between Stark, Thanos, and Peter Quill is interesting here. The audience aligns with Stark in action, desperately trying to rip the Gauntlet off Thanos. Mantis sits on the shoulders of Thanos and utilizes mind control to diminish his cognitive capabilities. It is during the mind-control that things turn for the worse. Peter Quill, who has been airborne, enters the sequence in front of Thanos. Quill asks Thanos where Gamora is, which to the audience is lucid. Montages before depicted Thanos sacrificing Gamora to obtain the Soul Stone. The news fills Quill with rage. Stark observes the interaction and interferes with "Okay, Quill, you gotta cool it right now. You understand? Don't, don't. Don't engage. We almost got this off!" (Infinity War). Stark exclaimed the latter part out of desperation. Afterward, Quill initiates hitting Thanos in the face, which leads to

him gaining back his lost strength. Stark interferes and starts removing Quill away from Thanos to maintain their dominance. And right as the Gauntlet nearly unsheathes it from the hand of Thanos, an extreme close-up shot appears. What this shot focuses on is the eye of Thanos. The eye turns from white to a whole iris, which indicates that the mind-control has subsided. The allegiance here has Stark fused with empathy as the spectator observes his struggle. However, as Quill mistakenly lets his emotions get the better of him turns sour. It is not that his actions are not understandable. However, it is the fact that the entire faction had a higher goal in mind that he dismantled out of selfishness. Quill destroyed their opportunity to save the universe. And it is not an act that is forgotten easily by the audience. In addition, the spectator knows the importance of ridding the Gauntlet of Thanos's hand. At the same time, the audience is in a position where they want Stark to succeed. In relation to Stark and affect, this is what the current montage does well: it heightens suspense throughout. In addition, to the degree where the spectator becomes uncertain of Stark's ability to overcome Thanos. In the dying moments of the montage, Iron Man and Thanos battle it out. During this battle, the audience becomes doubtful to whether Stark can survive. Heavy blows hit Thanos, yet nothing appears to damage him entirely. He even mocks Stark's attempt of offense by stating, "All that for a drop of blood" (Ibid). That confirms to the audience the sheer power of Thanos and his threat. Not only does Iron Man struggle against him, but other protagonists throughout the movie appear to as well. The scene eventually shows Thanos stabbing Stark with his own Iron Man blade, emphasizing his superiority. Stark, left on the ground in agonizing pain, has the audience on the edge of their seats mainly because Stark embodies himself as the hero. The man who should be able to overcome Thanos. An equal opponent to the might of Thanos, but even Stark must see himself defeated. Things turn worse right before Thanos is about to evaporate Stark, as Strange willingly hands Thanos the Time Stone. There is a subtext emerging here unavailable to the audience. However, there is a reason for this decision of Strange.

Eventually, Thanos gathers all Infinity Stones and annihilates half the universe. A scenery that frightens and shocks as the dying moments of *Infinity War* transpires. Two things happen in the last montage that shapes and shows Stark's mindset. First is his remark to Quill right before he vanishes into thin air: "Steady, Quill" (Ibid). That shows Stark's sympathy for Quill, as he could be angry at Quill for demolishing their earlier plans. However, he chooses to calm Quill. Stark presents himself as a calm, mature leader during this scene. An emotional moment appears when Spider-Man is about to fade away, as he has been like a son to Stark, the audience knows that. That creates a melancholy ambiance. At the same time, there is a significant amount of tension between narrative

and spectacle. From a narrative standpoint, it is the culmination of a worst-case scenario. Equally, it is an outcome that Strange is responsible for. However, I would argue that spectacle adds to the melancholy by making most of the main cast evaporate. The effect works slowly to emphasize its agenda: To elicit empathy. Continuously the audience witnesses how a protagonist loses a beloved right in front of them. Stark is about to lose someone very dear to him as he crashes into Tony's arms. Once again, a stoic Stark shows a vast amount of maturity. The audience observes Stark lose for one of the first times. The scene ends with Stark seated, curled over with his head resting on his palms, a depiction that evokes worry and fearfulness. Now, the audience has to wait for the next installment to witness what happens to Stark. In addition, how he returns to Earth. There are a lot of unanswered questions emerging from the last montage. However, the structures of sympathy certainly shape a specific image of Stark heading into *Endgame*. One of redemption, most importantly, and how he chooses to live after the Snap. From this montage, it is also uncertain if Potts were a victim of the Snap too. As a whole, Stark embodied maturity through his leadership. From start to finish, Stark matured a tremendous amount. The relationship between Dr. Strange and him shows this rather well.

How *Infinity War* and the structures of sympathy depict Stark are as follows. Concerning recognition, the audience observes how Stark evolves throughout the diegesis. From the first scene, Stark is on Earth about to get married. In the last sequence, he is on a different planet, injured, and wears a damaged suit. Through the *mise-en-scene*, Tony Stark goes through a change. The audience recognizes this change after the film.

Alignment and affect show Stark going through scenes that evenly mature him and sharpen his motive. Predominately shown through scenes of spectacle, Stark has to evaluate new information. The audience witnesses these choices. And how they affect him on his journey. Most of these choices work within scenes of spectacle. These scenes grow exponentially in size and suspense throughout. The most difficult decisions Stark experiences happens through spectacle sequences.

When it comes to allegiance, the morality of Stark changes too. In the first scene with Strange, Stark shows his classic traits of egocentrism. However, Stark's ignorance regarding his knowledge of Thanos and the Infinity Stones signifies the old version of him. His relation to Strange also shows how he wants to be the very best at everything. Stark hates being the lesser man in the room. Eventually, through the scenes of spectacle, Stark matures tremendously. However, it is not easy for him. Repeatedly he gets thrown into an unknown environment. Whether that being

extraterrestrial threats, new acquaintances, or other planets, Stark matures through being out of his comfort zone. He has to put his faith in teamwork and people who are experts in their own way. Making space for Strange is not easy for Stark, as he is a potential threat to his ego. However, what is significant here is how the audience gets invited to change allegiance. During the first scene where Stark meets Strange, we observe Dr. Strange as a reliable character. Stark is stirring the pot during this sequence by making arrogant remarks at Strange. Although we get aligned with Stark, he mimics himself as ignorant in the face of someone more knowledgeable than himself. There is a progression of allegiance transpiring here, as, in the end, we empathize with Stark much more. The audience may even begin to depict Strange as unlikable, based on us having to put implicit faith in him. A faith that is not earned truthfully. That even helps in favor of Stark, as he elicits empathy through the losses he undertakes.

*Infinity War* makes Tony Stark more likable. Mostly, this is due to previous movies of the MCU. The audience knows of his mistakes from the past. Even though he did manage to redo his mistakes, like Ultron, Stark did invent it in the first place. The same goes with the Iron Man suit and how that caused havoc as well. The Sokovia incident is not Stark's fault on his own. However, Stark still felt it was his moral obligation to fix it for the better. As Stark sits defeated, the audience observes him as a beaten man, a rather unusual position for him to be in. I estimate that the *Infinity War* made Stark mature faster than ever. From the start, where he was reluctant to cooperate, to finish where he saw the benefit in it. Tony Stark, as a character, becomes similar in growth to that of the mythical Phoenix. Therefore, the audience, obviously puzzled to how they will fix Thanos' doing, will rest assured that somehow, someday, Stark will prevail. He will come back stronger. That is what the audience recognizes within him. The empathy builds during *Infinity War*, with Stark constantly facing new situations and people working as a precursor for things to come. When Spider-Man evaporates, Stark gains even more empathy. Now, he is on Titan, all alone.

From Stark's first appearance in *Iron Man 1*, there has been a growth in this character. The audience aligned with a much different Tony Stark through the first two Iron Man movies. Back then, Stark did not have the same amount of empathy established. We did not expect the same from this character, as we will from *Infinity War* and further. In the very beginning, Stark was an irresponsible, selfish, and borderline narcissist with unresolved issues with his father. At the start, the allegiance was not favorable in Stark's direction. He was a character that embodied a love-to-hate trait. Throughout a decade, allegiance has shifted more in favor of him. How is that so? First, he has matured. Once he got a purpose, his father laid the groundwork for Stark to become

unstoppable. He got his act together after watching a film made by Howard Stark. Although it did help Stark extinguish some old beliefs of his father's disdain, the audience observed how new problems arose. If it was not for the moral implications of the Iron Man suit, it was the trauma of nearly dying after an alien attack. As of *Iron Man 3*, the audience witnessed a vulnerable Stark. That elicits a vast amount of empathy, as he beforehand seemed to be rather emotionless. The audience has observed all of his failures and how he has learned from them. Even though Stark did mature through the phases, the trauma of the attack on New York still lingered. It lingered but also rooted itself deep inside him for many years. Something that does help to empathize tremendously with him. The audience can understand why he acts the way he does due to the backstory, which we know.

However, with said backstory, there are new expectations for him. After *Infinity War*, the audience anticipates Stark to redeem and redo the incident on Titan. There is an expectancy of him to be sturdy. In addition, expectations of him to be relentless and not give up. Stark also acts as a mediator for solving the riddle of Strange. There is a significant question heading into *Endgame*, which ties to Strange's notion of only one good possible outcome for them. How can the circumstances that just happened be undone? That is up for Stark to solve, as we, the audience, await and trust him to solve this.

### *Endgame*

For *Endgame* (2019), the plot revolves around reversing everything that has happened and bringing everyone impacted by the Snap back to life. *Endgame* pictures Stark trapped on a spaceship in the second montage. Usually, the audience recognizes Tony Stark to be fit and healthy. However, in *Endgame*, Stark appears skinnier than usual. In addition, the audience also observes battle scars from *Infinity War* on Stark's face. The audience gets aligned with Stark in a spaceship and almost running out of oxygen. Given the circumstances of being near death, Stark already elicits empathy as he records a goodbye message to Potts. Stark shows disappointment, through his thoughts. The subjective access and being lost in space do evoke feelings of hopelessness. That is where the trauma of Stark takes control. Being battle wounded has weakened Stark, visible through his body and mind. Likewise, this is a blow to Stark's ego. Before *Infinity War*, Stark did make mistakes. However, Stark would always find a way to repair and restore said mistake. Most of the time, Stark was to blame, like Ultron. The audience recognizes Stark as a problem solver, a

character that learns from his mistakes. This is why the scene is so disconnected. It makes the audience question if there is any solution this time.

Eventually, Captain Marvel saves them and lands them on the lawn of the Avengers Headquarters. While inside the Headquarters, Stark shows resentment. First, towards Dr. Strange as he calls him "the Bleecker Street magician". Still not comprehending that there was a reason for Strange's action. However, Stark does show a vast amount of disappointment about the loss. It is a comprehensible reaction. However, it is a different Stark, looking weak and puny.

Furthermore, Stark tells about his notion of having a protective suit of armor around Earth. An idea that the audience recognizes him mentioning movies before *Endgame*. What Stark gets upset about is that no one listened to him. If said suit of armor had been there, there would have been no Thanos to destroy half the planet. All of this encompasses Stark's loss of hope. That alongside Stark being unable to kill Thanos. Even though he acts rudely, the audience can still empathize with him. His actions of rudeness and verbally abusing the remaining factions are simple truths. The alignment to Stark's character is incongruent, as Stark collapses and gets bedridden for a while. A novel demeanor displayed by Stark leads the audience to question who will take his place as a troubleshooter. Stark presents himself differently, as he is not used to being bedridden and weak. A positive outcome of this situation is Stark getting reunited with Pepper Potts, as she takes care of him. That reunion does show hope for the future in Stark's personal life.

The Snap is irreversible. Stark knows that which affects the audience. A bedridden Stark elicits empathy. It also evokes uncertainty within the audience. They are used to Stark figuring things out. During Stark being bedridden, he depicts vulnerability. It is not something Stark frequently shows, which makes the audience empathize with his struggle. In addition, there is a confidence at play that tells the audience that he will return with full force, even though he at the moment stands in deep contrast to how the audience usually recognizes him. That is what makes the time spent with Stark as weak so incongruent. The audience knows and recognizes Stark as the complete opposite of trait.

The revenge on Thanos happens as Stark is bedridden. It is relatively bittersweet revenge, as the Snap still happened. Afterward, a fast-forward happens to five years later. There has been a significant change in Stark's recognition. Stark is a family man now, as a scene depicts him living with Potts and his daughter. The spectator gets aligned with a Stark, who has something to lose. In addition, the hopelessness trait appears to have diminished. During the past five years, Stark has settled down. Something that before the clash with Thanos also were a goal of Stark. However,

during *Infinity War*, Stark aspired for greater things in defending Earth against Thanos. After the devastating defeat, the audience gets aligned with Stark in a new position. Unlike most of the Avengers faction, Stark has created something new during those five years. He has something to lose. Stark has given up hope for anything to be resolved and has made the best out of a terrible situation. After a visit from the Avengers faction, Stark begins to survey how to make time travel more stable. The minor turn of events comes when Stark is doing the dishes. A picture of Howard Stark sits on a shelf. Stark's eyes lock in on it. Meanwhile, the camera gradually zooms in on his face. Then an extreme close-up occurs as Stark reaches for another picture on the shelf. One of Peter Parker and Stark. These photos increase Stark's motivation. Motivation to keep going and possibly redeem himself. The following sequence pictures Stark in the midst of solving the time travel issue. The photos encourage Stark's motivation. Furthermore, when Stark figures out the problem singlehandedly, the audience begins to align with the usual Stark, who personifies confidence and hopes rekindled. In order to elicit empathy for Stark, the montage also covers his relationship with his daughter Morgan.

As I mentioned, he has something to lose. That is also his primary condition for rejoining the Avengers: preserving the new. However, the scenery of Stark partaken in fatherhood creates relatability too. They are humorous and depict an ambiance of a healthy father-daughter relationship. Given the ambiance of Stark's rural family life, there is still an expectation at stake. This expectation lingers within the audience. An expectation of Stark fixing the problem that is the Snap. Even though Stark elicits empathy through relatability, the audience cannot align fully with this version of him. The return of Stark as the troubleshooter of the Avengers excites the spectators, as he gets recognition through being the fixer of all problems. Through the eyes of the spectator, it is only Stark who can. That is the power of MCU's seriality: Tony Stark gets recognition for being the confident genius. There is an expectation for him to become organized and fix the problem. No matter the niceness of the scenery, it is also relatively uncommon for Stark to be in a state of complacency. Although, the audience recognizes from previous movies that Stark has had a goal of settling down. However, said goal did not appeal to the character as much as saving Earth. That indicates and clarifies Stark's loss of hope until his major breakthrough. He had lost all hope for redemption. Therefore, making space for him to settle down. His discovery sets him up for a possible redemption that is comprehensible.

Concerning Stark's character growth, the scenes of Stark's family home and surroundings signify how much he has matured. His maturity is at its peak for *Endgame*. However, it does make

the allegiance negotiable. If Stark had not figured out a solution, it would be incongruent with the character trait. Besides, on a deeper level, the audience expected Stark to prevail. There might have been more doubt because of the affective mimicry at stake between Stark and the spectator. But, after the shot of Stark looking at Peter Parker, the audience becomes aligned with the problem solver once more. The scene is multifaceted. There is elicited empathy for Stark and his newfound family life that depicts his character growth and maturity. On the other hand, there is a sense of urgency at stake. A sense and even intrigue to when Stark will solve the problem. In addition, there is an underlying consensus that Stark eventually will get out of the complacency. Even though it is a neat feature to see him cuddled up with his family. The audience knows that Stark aspired for something considerably larger. Stark was supposed to save the world. Although the diegesis of *Endgame* gives Stark something to lose if he does embark on another journey. This is where the tension lies in this scene. Furthermore, this is where allegiance lingers. Eventually, Stark leaves his family to redeem himself once more. The audience gets aligned with a Stark who does have a family to lose if things turn sour. That creates anticipation for what is to come with his character.

After Stark's discovery of making time travel safe, he reconciles with people from his past. As mentioned above, Steve Rogers is one of them who appears to have put their differences aside. Stark even hands Rogers his old shield, which he has not held since the *Civil War* movie. The reconciliation with Rogers is the first clue to how Stark's character makes ends meet. Another sign of Stark's growth as it appears their feud is in the past. Therefore, after Stark's discovery, the audience gets aligned with Tony Stark in a mature fashion. Before his discovery, Stark still had resentment for Rogers. The reconciliation is not the only thing that signifies Stark's maturation. This moment is significant because of the sheer contrast between the two characters. Within this relationship, allegiance favors Stark as he depicts growth and maturity through his actions. Given their history of disagreements and quarrels, it is within the diegesis of *Endgame* they finally reconcile. The Captain America shield works as a symbol of reconciliation. Tony Stark resented Steve Rogers for lying to him about his parent's killer. Stark also called Rogers a liar earlier in *Endgame*, which told the audience that he still held a grudge. However, Stark's act of reconciliation changes that notion. This act makes for an allegiance change within the diegesis of *Endgame*, as it shows Stark's maturity. Steve Rogers, who through the MCU story world, has been a vast critic of Stark's morals appears to reciprocate the reconciliation.

During the Time Heist, has Stark experiencing his past trauma of the New York attack. The entire purpose is to regain the Infinity Stones before Thanos. During said heist, they miss their

opportunity of capturing the Space Stone. That is where things get interesting. As the events of New York transpire, Rogers and Stark have to travel even further back in time to recover the Space Stone at a different juncture. Tony Stark has a vague idea that the Space Stone was at a military camp in the 70s. Another flashback transpires, and the audience recognizes that they are witnessing 1970. However, the specific part of said sequence is that Stark meets his father one last time. After capturing the Stone, Howard Stark appears. That startles Stark as he almost stumbles into various apparatus as he goes to meet his father. Tony Stark makes up an alias: calling himself Howard Potts. The scene carries tension as to the audience knowing the rules of time traveling. If anything goes wrong, they cannot come back. There is also the risk of failing to get past Howard Stark. At the same time, Tony Stark has a chance to speak to his father. Nearly forgetting the briefcase shows the audience of Stark's clumsiness. The situation carries value in reconciling with his father. He gains insight into his father's closed mannerisms towards him. A part of Stark's life left undone. Both Stark and Rogers appear to linger. They show an urge to prolong the experience. Howard Stark showing affection and admiration for his unborn son makes Tony want to linger on, as he wants to prolong the experience to heal the wound that has followed him for decades. Ending things with an awkward hug decreases the tension, and the scenes subside successfully. Even though the audience does not get any clear internal thoughts from Stark, it is still a scene that evokes vast access to some of Tony Stark's unhealed wounds, and one of them is healed substantially during this scene. Throughout the scene, Tony Stark performs and appears to be nervous around Howard Stark. This performance shows Stark's discomfort with being in the presence of his father. It is also a physical manifestation of Stark's unhealed emotions towards his father. The sound effects of the scene also contribute in terms of narrative cueing. What sound adds to the scene is an increase and decrease in tension. Especially, when Stark is about to put the tesseract down into the suitcase, the rise of violins adds to the buildup of anticipation. However, violins decrease as Howard Stark appears. For the altercation between Stark and his father, sound effects are infinitesimal. That makes the audience focus intently on their conversation. There are no violins to increase the tension between them, only the natural sounds of the venue and their conversation that echoes. The sound effects diminish to make room for the present moment. The diegesis wants the audience to pay full attention to their conversation without any narrative cueing.

Meanwhile, the cross-cut editing between Stark and Rogers also shows contrast, as narrative cueing remains with Rogers throughout. When Howard and Tony emerge from beneath the ground floor and step outside, the violins increase, applied to show that this is the last time they will ever

see each other again. The violins produce a melancholic ambiance. The narrative cueing works to emphasize the empathetic moments. Eliminating the music coerces the audience to engage with their conversation. What makes their conversation impactful is its reconciliation aspect. The audience knows that this is their last conversation. Eliminating, or decreasing the sound effects to a minimum aids in capturing their final correspondence. The power of this scene lies within the audience's knowledge of Stark's relationship with his father.

The scene creates empathy for both Stark and Rogers. In addition, the audience sits and relates to each character's struggle during said scene. The audience can put themselves into the shoes of Stark mainly. By doing so, the audience begins to imagine how they would have handled such a situation. Would they have struggled? The circumstance prospers for a chance to mend an old wound. A trauma from the past that needs healing is relatable. That is what the audience recognizes through Stark and Rogers. However, how the narrative sets up the trauma works through two aspects. First, is the acting itself by Tony Stark, who is awkwardly forgetting things and stumbles into various objects when he encounters his father. The very incongruent portrayal of his character as the audience observes Stark raddled. This trait is an external display of Stark's unhealed wound. At this moment, the audience observes how Tony Stark handles his spontaneous encounter with his deceased father. Secondly is the sound of the scene that increases whenever tension rises. In addition, diminishes whenever the narrative wants the audience to focus on their actual conversation. Through the dialogue with Stark, the audience witnesses his reconciliation as he hugs his father at the end. An act that shows how Tony Stark appears to have understood his father on another level than before. There is not any direct internal access to Tony Stark's mind here. However, the narrative sets up his thought process in dialogue format.

It is not a particularly action-packed montage. But, it builds substantially upon Stark's wounded past. During this montage, there is a vast portion of empathy for Stark, as it is relatable to have some unhealed wound, especially from one's parents. The urge to say something one has contemplated about yet never did get the opportunity. Stark mentions that he only remembers the good parts now. That within itself is a vast leap of maturity on display. The audience aligns with Stark, filled with resentment towards Howard Stark in previous movies. When Stark states that his father did the best he could, he shows how much he has let go of resentment. Something that can be difficult and has relatable value. Spectators who have gone through similar experiences will deem Stark more likable.

The difference between *Infinity War* and *Endgame* is that *Endgame* emphasizes narrative over spectacle, whereas *Infinity War* focuses on the scene of spectacle perpetually. However, the original idea was to make one movie instead of two, which could lead to an imbalance between the movies. Imbalance, in terms of *Infinity War*, has a more significant focus on spectacles than *Endgame*. *Infinity War's* diegesis operated through spectacles. Especially the object spectacle, which the audience has to comprehend and observe. The power of the Infinity Stones and the battle to attain them before Thanos makes said movie stand out as a large-scale attraction. At the same time, *Endgame* is much more narrative-driven.

The driving force behind *Endgame* is, within itself, a narrative component of being non-linear. Especially in the sense of applying flashforwards and flashbacks into the diegesis. The flashbacks also increase the storytime, going from the 70's to 2023. That makes *Endgame* storytime vaster than *Infinity War*. In addition, *Endgame* applies a slow-paced buildup that revolves around traveling back in time. The time travel aspect also creates and enhances the narrative tension, as the third act has the Avengers fight a 2014 version of Thanos and his accomplices.

In *Endgame*, the narrative controls spectacle. Stark has more screen time that does not revolve around a spectacle sequence in *Endgame*. That is what makes *Endgame* different from *Infinity War*. A more significant focus on Stark's character deals with rehashing old wounds. A substantial amount of screen time handles Stark's sounds like the time-traveling aspect. It is argumentative that the scenes that depict time travel are a spectacle in and of themselves. However, it is much more related to a narrative structure. Through the diegesis of *Endgame*, the spectacles become subjugated by the emphasis of the narrative. That is until the very end, where spectacle and narrative clash. In addition, there is a degree of wrapping up phase three in *Endgame*, which motivates a deeper narrative. That also means setting up phase four, without the presence of Tony Stark, of course.

After retrieving the Stones, Stark creates a new Gauntlet, called a Nano Gauntlet. Bruce Banner puts on the Gauntlet and snaps his finger. Meanwhile, Nebula's 2014 self opens a gateway portal to 2014 and gains Thanos access to the year 2023. My point is that spectacle usage increases significantly during the final act. Increasingly, the narrative is preparing said the audience for the climax, with a spectacular showcase, a typical Hollywood structure. Especially affect towards Stark's character is predominantly occurring during the climax. During act three, the audience engages with Stark through the scene of spectacle, as the time travel aspect creates new problems. Also, during the third act, spectacles emerge through the battle for the Infinity Gauntlet. From

*Infinity War*, the audience knows the impact of said Gauntlet. The object spectacle turns the anticipation up for the final battle. It creates a thrilling battle as to who has the Nano Gauntlet.

As Thanos initiates a bombardment towards the Avengers Headquarters, the application of spectacles increases tremendously. Before the final act, Stark elicited most of his empathy on a narratological basis. Here, I mean through the flashbacks and flashforwards that transpired. Within those scenes, the audience aligned with Stark as he finally got to say goodbye to his father. He made peace with Steve Rogers and created a family. During act three, the audience witnesses Stark seeking revenge, who has been on a mission to protect Earth since *Iron Man 1*. As the battle transpires and everyone impacted by the Snap emerges, a moment of reconciliation between Stark and Peter Parker emerges, as they embrace briefly before returning to battle. During said battle, the tension accumulates through the Nano Gauntlet. It adds intrigue and suspense to the scene as the audience knows the destruction said Gauntlet causes. The culmination of Stark's character engagement transpires when he meets Dr. Strange again. However, Strange is still unable to speak the whole truth behind his plan, as he states: "If I tell you what happens it won't happen" (Endgame 2019), a reference to *Infinity War* and how there is only one way to beat Thanos. Moments later, Strange, filmed in a medium close-up, gestures to Stark said one opportunity. At the same time, indicating it needs to happen now. The next shot pictures Stark in a medium close-up as he processes an act of attack on Thanos. The following montage show Thanos and Stark locked in on each other. To the audience, it is unclear what Stark's plan of attack is. However, Thanos manages to rid himself free of Stark and initiates another Snap, unsuccessful as the camera films an empty Gauntlet around Thanos' hand. Then the camera shifts onto Stark, who has assembled the Infinity Stones on his Iron Man suit, which has the same nanotech material as the Gauntlet. The audience knows from previous attempts that the Gauntlet is unstable in the hands of a mortal. Therefore, there is a preconceived notion of a fatal outcome for Stark in the near future. As the camera transmits into a medium close-up again, Stark remarks: "I am Iron Man" (Endgame 2019) and snaps his fingers. That instantly gets followed by the sound effect of rumbling, and the screen turns white for a moment. The same effect happens as the audience recognizes from *Infinity War*: The Snap and its repercussions. As the rumbling quiets down, the camera turns back to Stark, who grunts and collapses. In relation to eliciting empathy, this is where Stark peaks, as Pepper Potts tells him: "You can rest now" as Stark slowly dies adjacent to the people he sacrificed himself to protect. What makes this more special is the notion I mentioned earlier made by Steve Rogers. During *The Avengers* (2012), Rogers remarks that Stark would never be the self-sacrificial type. Stark did just

that: the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good at the climax of *Endgame*. That shows the spectators how much Stark has grown. An arc that turned 180. Tony Stark became just what Steve Rogers predicted he never would be. Stark depicts his growth by making the ultimate sacrifice when needed the most. It also signifies his growth and maturity, as he would have been too selfish earlier in previous movies. Especially, during the first phase, the audience recognizes him as the debonair, playboy, eccentric billionaire type. It is the ultimate reversal and the ultimate cessation of the character. That is what makes the end powerful: his arc transgressed and evolved into a hero who would sacrifice himself in order to save others.

After Stark's death, the audience listens to a monologue. Tony Stark made it right before embarking on the Time Heist. Through the subjective access of the monologue, it is unequivocal that Stark was aware of a conceivable fatal outcome. The monologue speaks directly to Pepper and Morgan Stark, as he refers to the post-Snap world that Morgan has to grow up in. In the end, Stark refers back to a previous conversation he had with his daughter. That also tells the audience of the video's intended receiver. Equally, it functions as Stark's final words and a wholesome depiction of his character's growth. The audience elicits substantial amounts of allegiance towards Stark as it depicts maturation on a vast scale. It shows his thought process before the time-traveling and that it could be lethal for him. The trajectory of Stark's character has gone from being a love-to-hate type of protagonist to making the ultimate sacrifice. The funeral scene has all of Stark's closest relations throughout his extensive storytime. It is a sequence with the intention of creating a melancholic ambiance, enhanced by the narrative cueing of violins. In addition, a set prop from *Iron Man 1* makes an appearance. It slowly drifts away on a bed of flowers and onto the lake. The ensemble of characters, time spent on the montage, and an old set-prop tell the audience and recognizes Stark's importance to the MCU. The camera moves away from the floating "Proof that Tony Stark has a heart" prop and proceeds to film the funeral attendees. The funeral of Stark has the characters closest to him stand most adjacent to the afloat object. The characters who have had probably the most screen time with Stark. His family, Morgan, and Potts, kneeled front and center as the camera moves backward on the remaining attendances. The funeral scene works as a way to commemorate Stark. The audience affectively engages with how prominent the character has been throughout the phases. Equally, does the audience grieve his passing but also commemorate his growth. An arc has come full circle. The audience has invested in Tony Stark for over a decade. That is a substantial amount of time to observe a character. In that sense, the affective engagement peaks in this scene. It

has been an empathetic buildup that finally reaches its end. Tony Stark matured and grew, and the audience observed the process.

## The Importance of Tony Stark in the Marvel Cinematic Universe

According to my analysis, Tony Stark's character growth is a notable feature in the Infinity Saga. Through phases 1-3, Stark elicits a vast portion of empathy like no other main character. His backstory engages the audience. After the post-credits of *Endgame*, Stark's funeral upsets the audience, as it symbolizes the end of an era. And the cessation of the character. The allegiance for Stark turns pleasantly engaging at the very end. A character started at the other end of the spectrum. For *Iron Man 1*, Stark wore the traits of arrogance and morally questionable acts, as one of the first shots portrays him displaying in front of a vast storm of missiles from Stark Industries. That was how the audience recognized Stark at the very beginning phase: excessively debonair and arrogant. Allegiance for Stark was debatable at the beginning stages. The audience perceives the change of him going forth, coupled with the structures of sympathy most assuredly. Notably, after the attack on New York, the audience begins to sympathize with Stark, as they perceive him undergoing trauma. That aspect also humanized him substantially, as before he embodied a larger-than-life personality.

As a character, Tony Stark is the force behind the success of the MCU. That is a bold statement, perhaps. However, it is an observation with merit. The extra material of *Endgame* has a seventeen-minute tribute video of Robert Downey Jr.'s character Tony Stark. The video symbolizes the substantial repercussion of Stark in the MCU, who has transcended the franchise from the very beginning. *Iron Man 1* was the initiation of the MCU in blockbuster cinema. Therefore, Tony Stark is a character who has elicited a substantial amount of screentime, with a vast portion of empathy to follow. Through the structures of sympathy, the audience has a unique relationship with Stark. However, Robert Downey also gains praise through the video. Downey assembled and supported other Marvel actors, including Tom Holland and Chris Evans. In addition, Stan Lee, the Marvel Comics creator, and inventor of Tony Stark, enthusiastically states that he feels like he is talking to Stark when conversing with Robert Downey Jr. Not only on-screen has the character of Tony Stark gained prominence. The actor has had equally as much praise for his efforts and passion for the role. That also adds yet another layer to the funeral scene. Equally, it is a scene that pays homage to a beloved on-screen character Tony Stark. Likewise, a scene celebrates the impact and impression left behind by actor Robert Downey Jr. There is a dualistic scene at stake then, both displaying the

importance of work done by the character on-screen and the off-screen acts of the actor too. Benedict Cumberbatch (Dr. Strange) notes his difficulty in containing his real-life emotion during the funeral scene. Cumberbatch states: "You have to just treat it as a normal day at work but I didn't and I couldn't" (Endgame extra material). Furthermore, the director states: "Because Tony Stark did begin this journey for everybody, he carries more weight in the ending than anybody else, for sure". The latter quote emphasizes the power of the writers of the MCU franchise. Within that, there is a substantial amount of directorial and narrative structures that dictate the success of Tony Stark. Stark is a vital component of MCU. However, he is important because the writers structured him that way. Although, each quote signifies Stark's notable role within the franchise, likewise Robert Downey. Not only a death of a character but also a death of an era. Without a doubt, Tony Stark elicited the most empathy in MCU. Tony Stark accumulated from beginning to end, the most quantity of it. Therefore, the emotional impact of Tony Stark's on-screen death hits the audience that much harder. A character has evolved through twelve years of MCU movies. The background story immersed the audience through three solo franchise movies. In addition, four Avengers films made the character change and evolve in the face of extraterrestrial threats. However, Stark also developed through making amends for his own personal mistakes.

In addition, the notion of personal mistakes is something that Robert Downey relates to, as well. Downey's father was a film director, and his mother an actress. Robert Downey Jr. got his acting debut at five years old. A movie directed by his father, Robert Downey Sr. Therefore, Downey has performed all of his life. He got his breakthrough role in the early 90s by playing Charlie Chaplin. That displays that Downey was a prominent actor long before Iron Man. throughout the 90s and early 2000s, the actor had drug-related issues and got fired from ongoing productions. It was not until he became clean in 2003 that he slowly got back on track (IMDB 2022). Though it was a slow revitalization, he did manage to get an audition for *Iron Man 1* in 2006, and the rest is history. How this relates to his portrayal of Tony Stark is the notion of overcoming personal issues, as Stark learns from his mistakes, like the actor portraying him. There is a unique bond between actor and character at stake here. Likewise, the audience accumulates a bond throughout a decade. In 2006, there was a risk-factor in signing Robert Downey to the project (Endgame extra material). However, the extra material never really clarifies why that was a risk. Mostly this is due to this being an homage to a significant character. However, casting Robert Downey turned out successful after all. A director mentions the essence of Downey on-set created the identity of the MCU. Especially, Robert's sense of humor and wittiness transformed and

amalgamated onto other MCU films. Robert Downey Jr's charm and wittiness appear to have landed him the role of Tony Stark. Their similarity is paramount. Considering that he was a star before the success of *Iron Man 1* only elicits more similarity between the character and actor.

From first-hand experience, Robert Downey comprehends how it feels to hit rock bottom. Tony Stark does not necessarily hit rock bottom, but Stark endures personal tragedies and traumas. Fame and stardom is another aspect where Downey Jr is similar to Tony Stark, as he has been an actor for most of his life. Robert Downey Jr has transferred some of his own personality traits into Tony Stark. Especially in how each carries a similar charm. A charm that Stan Lee states are very similar to the extra material of *Endgame*. The Marvel Creator stated that he felt that he was actually talking to Tony Stark, even though he was having a conversation with Robert Downey JR.

Concerning alignment to Stark, I want to mention how it bears merit through the MCU. Regarding Stark, alignment happens through his inner thoughts and motivation, as they drive his actions. The subjective access is notable when assessing his character arc. In periods of less access to the contemplation of Stark, less empathy boosts. The cognitive aspect of Stark makes his character extraordinary to the audience. In the beginning stages of Stark's arc, he embodied the irresponsible traits of an egotistical billionaire. During this time, particularly in *Iron Man 1* and *Iron Man 2*, access to Stark's internal motivation becomes subjugated by his outward mannerisms.

Furthermore, Tony Stark begins to share more of his contemplations, mostly seen through extreme close-up shots inside his Iron Man armor. Likewise, the cinematography focuses on his mindset outside of the Iron Man suit. These elements gain prominence after *The Avengers* (2012) and later *Iron Man 3*. Especially *Iron Man 3* has a substantial insight into Stark's mindset as he struggles through the trauma of New York. The shots of Stark inside the Iron Man helmet are the epitome of subjective access working alongside temporal-spatiality. They reveal his character's actions as the audience observes the thinking process of Tony Stark. For instance, the flight rescue scene in *Iron Man 3* conceals the thoughts of Tony Stark.

Meanwhile, the focus primarily is on Stark and his goal: saving the flight passengers from certain death. Alongside that, there is the concept of affect at stake as well. Affect here functions to create tension and anticipation. The question ruminating Stark's success will linger as the scene transpires. As I mentioned earlier, this scene also reveals a mature Stark in action, as he is thinking of other people's safety. In general, Stark becomes gradually more concerned with the safety of the Earth's inhabitants after *The Avengers* (2012). That is the motivation of Stark: to protect Earth from external threats. The audience recognizes this after witnessing his trauma. Likewise, this is what

lingers in the aspect of alignment and affect. The latter part builds tension to any scene, making the audience observe with anticipation. That makes the affect so powerful: the audience has to care about what happens to Stark. In addition, the audience become substantially more invested in Stark after immersing themselves in his trauma. There is a higher chance of his allegiance to be likable. If his morally questionable actions in *Iron Man 1* and *2* had prevailed throughout all phases, Stark would never have gained the grand emotional payoff at the cessation of *Endgame* (2019). However, the question of a morally transparent Stark after *Iron Man 2* is not my argument. A process occurs over time. Stark's moral compass develops towards protecting the people of Earth. But he still makes a vast mistake that causes them harm.

For instance, during *Avengers the Age of Ultron* (2015), Stark creates Artificial Intelligence that ends up causing tremendous damage to the city of Sokovia. Stark learns from his mistakes, which again makes him morally good. The audience witnesses Stark maturing and less time evaluating if he is evil or good. The MCU movies leading up to *Infinity War* focus on Stark's mistakes. Expressly, how his good intentions repeatedly turn against him. Through time, the audience begins to perceive Stark as a problem solver. Not a perfect one, but that only makes him elicit empathy. His tenacity is strong, leading into *Infinity War*, which is why the end of the movie is shocking as it hits the audience and still manages to stick allegiance to Stark instead of against him.

## Conclusion

Through the MCU phase one to three, I have acclaimed that Tony Stark is the one who elicits the most amount of empathy. At the very beginning, Tony Stark wore character traits opposite to those primarily shown in *Endgame*.

Through the movies leading up to *Infinity War*, the audience recognizes Tony Stark, who mimics the traits of a morally ambiguous character rather than a protagonist. As *Iron Man 1* and *2* show, Stark gets portrayed as selfish and uncaring. The audience also witnessed him as the CEO of a weapons manufacturer firm, which does not help the case of building allegiance towards him.

However, the subjective access gets the audience more aligned with Stark, as it reveals significant moments that define him. For instance, Tony Stark's relationship with his father, or lack thereof. In addition, Stark's trauma after *The Avengers* (2012) events helps the audience empathize more with him as a character. These moments define the bond between spectator and character, as they contain insight into the mentality of Tony Stark. As the moral of Stark becomes more

transparent through trauma, the audience gets aligned with a maturing character. Tony Stark's development engages empathy as the audience observes his struggles.

The keyword of Stark's character transformation is maturation. Over time, Stark's decisions turn from being self-centered to making the world safer. It is through the traumas of Stark that empathy gets elicited, primarily. Allegiance to Stark happens through the maturation process. The MCU franchise has consecutive movies with Stark as the main character, as I have outlined during my paper. Each shows him affectively engaging with both the spectator and the diegesis. These instances emerged primarily through a spectacle scene, which depicted an action of Stark, either good or bad.

The affect engagement shows Stark as a unique character insight in the spectacle scenes, like saving civilian flight passengers, thus making him more likable—or making amends for his mistakes that cause substantial collateral damage. Tony Stark affects the spectator in how he learns from his mistakes.

Therefore, when *Infinity War* emerges, Tony Stark has matured and grown. The audience has witnessed and aligned themselves with him as a more sympathetic character and even more human. Stark appears to show affection and maturity. At the beginning of *Infinity War*, the audience witnesses how he plans to marry Pepper Potts and settle down from the lifestyle he has been living. At this point, however, the audience also recognizes that Stark has other internal motivations: saving Earth from extraterrestrial threats. During *Infinity War*, the audience aligns with a Stark who lets his trauma dictate his actions. He decides to fight for the protection of Earth, as a threat is nearby. The accumulation of empathy is already mainly in Stark's favor. Allegiance and understanding for why Stark decides to take the battle on him to get depicted as reasonable.

The structure of *Infinity War* is what Erlend Lavik would call a large-scale attraction. That is also where the audience usually gets aligned with Stark. The audience witnesses Stark getting acquainted with and collaborating with a new faction with the same motivations as himself. Tony Stark is constantly getting a new obstacle thrown at him in *Infinity War*, either collaborating with others or gathering new information, as he is unaware of the Infinity Stones. Stark goes through a maturation process in collaborating with more intelligent people than him. Stark still has some maturing to do, as he carries the emblem of arrogance, usually shown through the relation to Dr. Strange. It is within this relationship that Stark appears arrogant. The audience aligns with a Stark that has a selfish mindset, also in terms of knowledge. Stephen Strange has more knowledge of the Infinity Stones than Stark. Stark's challenge for *Infinity War* relies heavily upon him needing to

humble himself and make room for others. Both in terms of people being more knowledgeable than him and maturing in collaborating with others. A growth process that the audience gets aligned with during *Infinity War*. Instances that depict Stark's growth emerge through spectacle scenes, primarily.

During *Endgame*, there is a structure related to Lavik's concept of small-scale attraction that emphasizes the plot more than spectacle, though still having spectacle scenes present. As I mentioned earlier, the movies were intended only to be one instead of two. However, I must treat them as two separate movies still. Within *Endgame*, the audience aligns with a Stark who is defeated. Unlike *Infinity War*, *Endgame* has a more slow-paced buildup that applies narrative-driven implements. The time-traveling aspect has Stark cope with his past and make amends. As Stark meets his father, he has a chance to make things right. That moment both elicits empathy for Stark and shows character growth.

The peak of Tony Stark's character growth emerges at the climax of *Endgame*. A selfless sacrifice to save Earth is what Tony Stark does at the very end. This moment is significant because it culminates in terms of narrative, affect, and engagement. It is a moment that only could be effective with Tony Stark. The audience has observed Stark through three consecutive narrative phases. Within these phases, the affective engagement goes through a process depicted primarily through spectacle scenes. It is within these that Stark elicits empathy through different choices and actions. These instances create a bond between the spectator and Tony Stark, as they are experiencing his maturation process. At the very beginning of *Iron Man I* (2008), it is a character growth that had him aligned more with the characteristics of a morally grey character than a heroic protagonist. Within the moments of affective engagement, the audience understands and relates to Stark. A character who has experienced trauma, loss of his parents, and acts of selfishness. Over time, allegiance turned in favor of Stark instead of against him. The affective engagement of observing the journey of Tony Stark is what creates a strong emotional bond. A bond extends further than the diegesis itself.

My analysis has a consensus on how the affective engagement gets built. That goes through both the subjective access of Tony Stark, which gains insight into his mindset. This is shown to become a valuable asset to elicit empathy for Stark. In addition, affective engagement is provided primarily through scenes of spectacle. This combination elicits empathy for Stark. Its crucial function is to make the character appear more relatable. That primarily goes through Stark's traumas, which helps to build allegiance to him. The more subjective access the audience gains, the

more empathy Stark gets, accumulating through the phases. For the spectator, this subjective access makes Stark appear human, and it initiates a similarity aspect between them. Therefore, during the spectacle scenes, the audience cares more about what happens to Stark. That is also why the death of Tony Stark hits that much harder. The audience accumulated a bond during the decade.

As an endnote, I will acclaim, as I did in my discussion, that Tony Stark's success also lies within the production staff, writers especially. Meanwhile, the actor Robert Downey Jr also assimilated much of his personality into the role of Stark. Tony Stark and his ability to affect and engage the audience within the MCU is unique. He is successfully executed, both in production and on-screen relation. As I mentioned earlier, characters are the entry to a film's diegesis. It is what connects the audience to the screen. That is what makes affective engagement an exciting topic. It shows that spectacles in blockbuster movies can entail depth in character development.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines character engagement in movies. In particular, how the engagement structures empathy for a character and how that gets produced. My focal point is how particularly spectacle scenes can create and establish empathy for a character. During my thesis, I label my own concept of affect as a way to way alongside Murray Smith's structures of sympathy to create an amalgam of narrative features and spectacle scenes. I argue that a spectacle scene can provide more than stunning imagery. Likewise, it can provide in-depth character insight. This hybrid installs what I call affective engagement within a diegesis. A bond between a spectator and a movie character arises through this engagement process.

My thesis provides a theoretical review of spectacle as a concept, coupled with prominent character engagement theorists. These later shape the framework for my analysis of the Marvel Cinematic Universe character Tony Stark. The serialized story world of MCU is vast, and to gain transparency for my thesis, I intend to focus on the character growth of Tony Stark, eliminating various other prominent characters also worthy of surveying.

Through my theoretical walkthrough of spectacles and character engagement, I begin by analyzing Tony Stark's character growth from start to finish. The arc of Tony Stark can be argued to be the most notable one in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which is a notion I agree with, as this thesis argues that Tony Stark elicits the most empathy throughout the first three phases. Through Tony Stark, the story unfolds, as his story embodies uniqueness.

What mainly makes Tony Stark intriguing to examine is how his arc changes throughout the phases. This thesis argues that Stark presents himself almost with morally grey characteristics at the very beginning. It is exact argued that he presents the traits of arrogance and selfishness. However, at the end of phase three, Tony Stark has matured into making the ultimate selfless sacrifice and gains a grand emotional payoff from the spectators. What makes this possible, my thesis argues, is that the accumulation of empathy for Tony Stark increases exponentially throughout the phases. That is made possible by letting the audience gain access to Stark's traumatic past, which helps him elicit empathy. In addition, Tony Stark shows maturity through the diegesis by making amends with

his traumatic past and failures. The maturity of Tony Stark transpires through three Iron Man movies and four Avenger movies. My analysis consists of the last two movies of phase three, focusing on Tony Stark. That will transfer into discussing the character and the actor's sheer significance. In particular, how Tony Stark / Robert Downey Jr. has assimilated his personal experience and characteristics into the role.