THE CIRCLE AND PSYCHOLINGUISTIC WHOLENESS OF THE GROUP HERO ARCHETYPE (THE CASE OF MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE)

Коло та психолінгвістична цілісність архетипу групового героя (на прикладі кіновсесвіту Marvel)

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Abstract
The paper presents the correlation between the circle as a symbol in contemporary screen narratives and the psycholinguistic wholeness of the characters, who represent a group hero archetype. The research focuses on six films of the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise, depicting the group heroes of the Avengers and Guardians of the Galaxy. When in the plot heroes form a circle, facing outwards, they are fighting an external enemy; if they face each other, they need to resolve inner conflicts and insecurities. When the circle stays intact, the heroes stand united and successfully complete their mission. If the circle is disrupted, the heroes lose their fight to the enemy, being unable to cope with their own traumatic past.

Keywords: the Circle, film studies, narrative, group hero archetype, Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Introduction

Film studies and psycholinguistic analysis have been persistently gaining popularity due to their interdisciplinary nature. The goal of the present research is to disclose the correlation between the circle symbolism in mainstream cinema and psycholinguistic narratives of the Marvel Cinematic Universe leading characters, who compose a group hero archetype in several films of the franchise.

The group hero is an emerging psychological archetype of the hero found in stories where heroic exploits are credited to the actions of the entire group, not a single individual (Hall, 2016: 214). The biggest impact on mass public have the cinematic stories about groups of heroes, where the relationships between the characters is as central to the story as their battles with villains, the most easily accessible examples being The Avengers and Guardians of the Galaxy (Hall, 2016: 216).
The MCU is replete with supercrips (Grue, 2021: 12). Their superpowers come at great costs, either physical or metaphorical. Almost every member of the Guardians of the Galaxy struggle to socialize and have family. They either have some serious psychological traumas or belong to the species with psychological peculiarities disabling them in some aspects of communication. They have to repeatedly risk their lives together (in this way having transcendence experience) to become friends and family. The Avengers have complicated psychological traumas, defining their initial inability to work together and threatening to split their group in half.

The group of heroes undertakes their journey of self-discovery. The idea behind the individuation process is to strike a certain balance between personal interests and the interests of their families, community, and society. The process of individuation includes many psychological tasks to be solved, metaphorically presented as archetypal figures (Bassil-Morozow, 2018: 122). Jung postulates that circles as symbols of wholeness frequently occur at the beginning of the individuation process (Jung, 1940: 164–165). In every age in the Western world, circles, being complete and perfect, had played an important role as symbols for the unity and wholeness of the soul (Jung, 1959).

**Methods and Techniques of the Research**

First, the scenes with the heroes group standing in a circle are cataloged and analyzed to identify the psychological characteristics of the action. At the second stage, the narratives of the leading characters are investigated to reveal the heroes’ past traumas and their (in)ability to restore the original wholeness of the self. The images of the circle are correlated with the speech patterns of the researched characters.

**Results**

Several scenes present the group heroes standing in a circle facing the enemy or looking at each other. The types of circles correlate respectively with the outward and inward fights. In *The Avengers* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* the original six superheroes stand in a circle, facing an external enemy (first an alien army, then an army of hostile robots led by artificial intelligence). By the time, the Avengers have learned the intricacies of teamwork and each other’s skills in a battle. The tension among the group members has dissipated and all the individual actions are focused on the fulfillment of the team goal.
The first time the Guardians stand together in a circle, they face each other, as their group is highly dysfunctional due to multiple discrepancies, hatred towards each other and inability to cooperate. They are definitely not heroes, as the entire team consists of murderers, thieves, bounty hunters, and other criminals. Yet, as a team, they overcome an even worse evil and in the process find a purpose and a cause to serve. Each individual member begins the story out for themselves, looking for revenge, for profit, or simply to survive. In group hero stories such as Guardians, figuring out how to work as a team in spite of large differences is a major part of the story. Dealing with the social pressures and psychological factors within the team is just as important as dealing with epic battles and external deeds (Hall, 2016: 219).

In Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2, the heroes are first standing in a circle facing Ego, who is yet to reveal his true evil personality. They have a new member to the team, Nebula, who unwillingly proposes her assistance to ensure her own safety. Still, she perceives the Guardians as the lesser of two evils and is ready to participate in their fight. There is another moment when the Guardians stand together in a circle on Ego planet, having fought the Souvereign fleet and getting ready to fight Ego himself. Here, Nebula is a willing part of the circle, making her input into the common victory and becoming a rightful member of the Guardians. It is a transcendent experience for them all as the Guardians are ready to fight and possibly die for the greater good, protecting the Galaxy. Standing united, they win the fight.

In Avengers: Infinity War, the heroes are scattered, split apart by old traumas and lack of understanding. They lose the fight and the fate of the world depend on their ability to overcome the deep-rooted hostility. In Avengers: Endgame, the heroes stand in a circle facing each other, meaning that they will have to deal with their resentment and mistrust. Intense and prolonged trauma, which rips apart the very fabric of the psyche leaving a space whose nature is best expressed in metaphors such as the empty circle or the black hole (Connolly, 2018: 315). The floor drops under their feet, presenting a dark tunnel into the Unknown, namely into their past, where several Avengers will have to meet their long-suppressed traumas and reconcile them.

Before the time heist, the Avengers stand with the Present Nebula; after the time heist, they reappear with the Past Nebula and without Natasha. It is a prominent symbolism of everything going first right and then wrong. There are Tony Stark (who is going to face his late father), Captain America (who sees the late Peggy Carter), Thor (who meets his late mother), the Smart Hulk (who faces the late Ancient One), Natasha (facing Hawkeye who has lost his wife and three children), and Nebula (facing her old self and Thanos). Nebula, having been
trained as an assassin, is good at fighting the external enemy. However, when it comes to fighting her own traumatic experience and insecurities, she is weak and lacks integrity. The two female characters participating in the adventure cause both visual and clandestine disruption of the circle. Natasha is missing, having sacrificed her life to accomplish the mission, while the place of the Present protagonist Nebula is taken by the Past villainous Nebula.

Natasha’s narratives represent the self-actualization and acceptance of death; it is the heroine’s ultimate transcendence experience. Maslow (1964) calls it the “good death” or “eager and happy dying”, when such emotions as wonder, awe, reverence, humility, and surrender fill the character. In stark contrast, Past Nebula’s speech, full of fear, hatred, and revengefulness, proves her rigid focus on past traumas and inability to change. Present Nebula has come a long way from a distrustful and bitter psychopath to a caring and loyal sister. Without those ‘visits to a personally defined heaven’ (Maslow, 1964), Past Nebula is unable to change. All the other heroes come whole from their experiences with the past, but Nebula loses the fight with her old self, disrupting the circle, breaking the wholeness for the Avengers and causing further turmoil in the plot.

**Conclusions**

Circle symbolizes the process of individuation and potential wholeness for the group hero archetype. The outward look of the heroes represents the fight against an external enemy, while the inward look means a battle against their own traumatic past fears and insecurities. The intact circle means the wholeness of the group hero archetype. The narratives are those of integrity, the greater good, salvation, and reconciliation. The lack of wholeness of at least one character causes the break of the symbolic circle and disruption of the wholeness of the group hero archetype. The narratives reveal the themes of revengefulness, bitterness, anger, distrust, and hostility.

**References**


