Myth, Mind and the Screen

Understanding the heroes of our times

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Contents

1 Jungian theory, textual analysis and audience play

While all the arts are rich treasure-houses of symbolic material, this is especially true of televisual and cinematic fiction with their ability to employ images, speech, narrative and music. Feature films and television drama are confined only by the limits of form and human imagination when they rework myth and adapt it to the needs of our time. The screen is an aesthetically rich medium, and through its sensuous pleasures spectators hope to be drawn into one or a number of diverse experiences.

How do fictions stir the spectator's psyche? The short answer is through emotion. When they view fiction and drama, most viewers expect to be recompensed for their cash outlay by being entertained. Entertainment encompasses many different kinds of delight from imaginary wish fulfilment to the pleasures of terror experienced in a virtual rather than a real milieu; from the sensuous gratifications of saturated colour and engulfing sound to the power trip of flying with a gravity-defying camera. All these forms of pleasure have in common that they appeal to and stir the emotions. Indeed, from our point of view, the significance of the well-rehearsed storytelling and generic formulae at the heart of mainstream cinema lies in the studios' recognition that the impact of emotion is potent. For the best part of a century Hollywood's executive producers have expected their writers and directors to build into almost every mainstream movie scenes which are designed to rouse strong affects in the minds of audiences. Yet despite its obviousness on both the large and small screen, emotion remains a topic to which theorists writing about film and media studies have given inadequate attention.

What then is the power of the emotions? At base, nothing less than to disturb the equilibrium of the psyche. Such a disturbance can in real life be either beneficial or harmful, according to the individual's circumstances and the nature of the complexes that are energised. As we shall see, they may involve the spectator in a form of narcissistic introspection. However, the effects upon audiences of emotions aroused by drama and fictions (including those played out on screen) are in general benign precisely because they refer to a virtual rather than a real world. Story worlds

allow for play with emotions just as much as with characters, situations and ideas vicariously experienced. Spectators make discoveries about a hypothetical, not a real, situation. In doing so they also improve their understanding of human nature in general and of their personal psychology in particular (see Preston 1970: 5–6). The emotions aroused by fictions on screen are real enough, but they and their consequences are by no means inescapable, as they often would be in daily life. Rather, experiencing affects aroused by fictions can resemble being drawn by one's emotions into a rehearsal for a possible, imagined future that just might (but more likely never will) occur in the individual's life in the real world. In most instances (and invariably in the case of the fantasy genres such as science fiction, horror or musicals, for example, where there is little or no direct representation of life in the real world) the imagining stimulated by the fiction is principally invested in psychological role play.

When individuals draw images from the outer world and make them part of an inner world that preoccupies them, they may be responding in a narcissistic way. Heinz Kohut understood narcissism as a condition that naturally persists throughout life – and which can be either healthy or unhealthy. When it is pathological, narcissism shows itself in a psychological predisposition to gather the outer world to the self in order to sustain a pretentious persona that covers up feelings of emptiness. Narcissistic development, by contrast, involves a positive process of self-scrutiny and 'the construction and attainment of ambitions and goals' (Samuels, Shorter and Plaut 1986: 97). In this way healthy narcissism can help a person grow in self-knowledge and contribute to individuation (ibid.: 98; Samuels 1990: 124–5). Screened fiction has this potential to help the individual grow in self-awareness – and in particular to gain fuller experience of his or her own emotional being.

According to Jung, the unconscious in its normal stable state is contained by consciousness. This is the case because the energy of the latter is greater than that of the former. Therefore, when unconscious contents overflow into the conscious, either the level of conscious activity has reduced or the intensity of unconscious activity has increased. Jung demonstrated that there were a considerable number of conditions in which the loss of conscious energy could occur. It happens naturally in sleep when we dream, and also when we daydream or associate freely. Even in the waking state, our emotions, whatever we might prefer to think, are not within our control. Emotions happen to us, and they are capable of overwhelming the individual and allowing drives of which we are wholly or partly unconscious to take over and alter our attitudes (Jung 1939: 278–9; 1956a: 442). They are 'instinctive, involuntary reactions which upset the rational order of consciousness by their elemental outbursts'

(ibid.: 1939: 278). Their import for human affairs is great because 'emotion is the chief source of consciousness. There is no change from darkness to light or from inertia to movement without emotion' (ibid., 1954b: 96).

The prospect of losing conscious control frequently arouses fear, particularly if we suspect that control may be seized from us by other people. Here is a source of the cinema's power, one which makes it simultaneously both disturbing and reassuring. In front of the screen, the constant flow of storytelling material occupies sight and sound with lavish colours and sounds. As Konigsberg says, we seek to use the film as a transitional object and 'slip into a state of half-wakefulness, into a reverie that weakens our defenses and sets loose our own fantasies and wishes to interact and fuse with the characters and even the landscape that we see on the screen' (Konigsberg 1996: 885–6). Spectators are likely, therefore, to allow themselves a form of play in which for the moment they adopt, without the risk of becoming locked into it, one of the virtual roles that, as a transitional phenomenon, the film has prepared for them. As fans, they are likely to align themselves with their heroes and heroines and partake imaginatively in patterns of life and adventure with little if any connection to the world they inhabit by day. For all their desire to do this, however, the plenitude of fantastic imagery playing across the screen is likely, for the duration of the film's running time, to inhibit spectators from evolving further their own fantasy material. But after the film has ended, active imagination takes over and develops the recollected cinematic imagery by fusing it more completely with personal fantasy material. In the process both are liable to change.

A lowering of the level of consciousness is experienced in the dark warmth and security of the cinema as it unreels its manifold diversions. Its sumptuous images and sounds, its compelling characters and stories arouse many emotions and stir drives of which the individual may be unconscious. Because of the fictionality of their object, whatever the specific nature of these emotions (fear, anger, desire, wonder, horror), they are usually experienced as virtual rather than actual, and therefore ultimately as pleasurable. When the action on screen greatly excites spectators, it seems probable that their emotions set in train the affective process which alters the configuration in the memory of the images even as they are being screened. So the filter through which the unconscious alters and dissolves images and narrative events in conformity with its own predispositions may be assumed to begin its action at once.[2] We shall describe the way that this automatic process can be brought into the service of criticism when discussing the active imagination.

[2] Tony Cryer is due thanks for help with this point.

To repeat, then, where popular audiences find a fiction engaging their emotions, there Jungian analytical psychology leads us to expect to discover minds engrossed at levels beneath those of which most of them are conscious. Emotion opens the deeper levels of the psyche. The airing of deep-seated collective needs and desires is a driving force in not only the formation but also the reception of myths. Here in the illustrated dark, unconscious and semi-conscious desires form and find their goals. And they do this through the parallel mechanisms of *projection* and *introjection*. Jungian theory shares the Freudian interest in these two mechanisms, both schools of thought finding them meaningful in accounting for the transference of energy between conscious and unconscious. And since affect is the force that drives them, they are activated the more strongly the more fully the movie engages the spectator's emotions.

Whether inside or outside the cinema, psychological *projection* is a potent mechanism. It refers to individuals' propensity to displace difficult emotions or parts of the personality that they refuse to recognise in themselves on to people, objects or other figures encountered in the environment. Through projection, therefore, figures in the individual's surroundings reflect meanings which are profoundly personal back to the subject. For Jung (who differed in this from Freud) this was a normal, even routine aspect of psychological activity. According to him complexes are not limited to being the products of anxiety and mental stress, but are routinely experienced in the course of human existence. Not only that, but if the individual learns to recognise the extent to which images in the environment are projections of his or her own fantasy material, the process known as integration may begin to occur and some understanding of the nature of unconscious impulses may be achieved (Jung 1948c: 264–5; Samuels, Shorter and Plaut 1986: 113–14).

Film and the dreamlike experience that occurs when the barriers between consciousness and the unconscious are lowered would, however, be less potently linked were it not for the phenomenon of *introjection*. It may be described as the opposite to projection, since it involves internalising experience of the world. Introjection also plays a large part in creating empathy because it involves an investment of the object with the libido. Through it the recipient takes into his or her psyche from an exterior source both an image and the energy that it stimulates (Jung 1921: 452; Samuels, Shorter and Plaut 1986: 85). Introjection in the cinema accounts for the kind of process that Murray Smith describes in elaborating the concept commonly called identification: that is the process of recognition and psychological alignment that can occur on the part of fans when they endow characters or film stars with their allegiance (Smith 1995: 73–109).

Experienced in the cinema, psychological projection and introjection seem to resemble the same processes known in daily life, but they occur with high intensity. This is because they are enhanced by the experience of *cinematic* projection, the power of which to complement and intensify *psychological* projection and introjection appears to be considerable.

Although the differences between narrative film and dream are easily established in that fiction is subject to conscious control, the resemblances can be particularly vivid in the moment of a film's delivery and as the walls between conscious and unconscious dissolve to a translucency. A number of factors are in play. The intensity of the cinematic experience arises in large part through the ceaselessness of the illusion playing on the screen, which adds to the dreamlike nature of the fiction, unstoppable as the images that roll past one in sleep. It becomes something that happens to one rather than something one controls. This impression is enhanced by the mixing of the two currents of projection flowing in contrary directions. For the projections of the spectator intersect with those of the equipment that throws the images and sounds on the screen. At the same time, this mechanical projection itself carries the psychological projections of the filmmakers, since their own active imaginings have inevitably found expression through the script, intensified through performance, camera and sound recording, and further distilled in the editing suite (see Beebe 1996: 581). No wonder, under the intense psychological pressure that occurs where their own and the filmmakers' desires coincide, that most spectators suspend disbelief.

Projection and introjection help to explain how and why symbolic representations on the screen interact with the unconscious of large numbers of people. The importance of projection and introjection is that they invest with personally felt significance images and sounds whose original locus is observed reality. They bring about a two-way flow between screen and unconscious. This double process of psychological investment is capable of endowing not only the familiar images of everyday life with potential new meaning, but also of making available to the conscious mind symbols hitherto deep-rooted in the unconscious. The effect on the individual spectator can be almost unbearably intense. In the cinema, as with all forms of artistic representation, the terrors latent in loss of conscious control and the associated fear of going mad are lessened by the knowledge that what one is living through is experienced as if by proxy. Even so, the immediacy of cinematic images and events can have so powerful an impact that the sense of safety is occasionally erased temporarily. (This is, for instance, apparent in the case of those spectators, of whom the present writer is one, who faint at moments of particularly bloody dramatic intensity.) In front of the screen

this emotional energy cannot flow outwards into any other world than that provided by the screen narrative, which simply intensifies and returns it to the spectating psyche via his or her introjection of images and plot.

To over-simplify, we may say that in life the processes of projection and introjection cause libido to flow into and out of the individual's psyche in relation to images which, in response to its needs, it selects from among the welter of figures in that person's surroundings. We may contrast this with the current of affect in the cinema, where films proffer the spectators preselected images designed to occupy their attention completely; and with the intention, so far as can be prearranged, of arousing and enticing the libido to flow in directions that the filmmakers foresaw. Here is yet another indication, like the popularity of the major genres, that cinema depends heavily for its success on shared subjective experience.

Although on occasion the unconscious is stimulated to pathological levels and the subject faints, the more usual result is that these images and stories present themselves to the individual as potent symbols. As such, the latter may covertly manoeuvre the individual into beginning to apprehend something of the character of his or her unconscious drives.

As we shall discover in more detail in later chapters, Jung describes symbols as having the power to widen the field of the individual's consciousness (1921: 126). They do this by allowing that to be understood which was previously not known. Through their consciously realised aspects they discipline the unruly instincts; and they anchor unconscious energies in form, giving shape to the archetypal contents which they adapt to the social values and cultural norms of the day. Since they offer for scrutiny representations formed through the compensatory pressure of the unconscious, their ultimate role, if they are well understood, is to surrender their symbolic nature.

Jung refers to the way in which a symbol facilitates the transition from one psychological attitude to another as the transcendent function. It occurs when symbols enhance consciousness by bringing it into fuller relationship with the unconscious (ibid.: 480; Samuels, Shorter and Plaut 1986: 150). This is not a small claim when applied in the domain of textual studies, since the reach of a symbol can extend far beyond the single image alone and may well incorporate an entire narrative. This is the case, for example, in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (analysed in chapter 10), in which the entire journey is a symbol not only of the individual human life-cycle extended beyond death into immortality, but also of an imagined future history of the human soul. Full engagement with a symbolic film or television drama (Jung would have described such a work as 'visionary') has no less potential than to change individuals'

consciousness. It can alter the way they feel and think about themselves or the world. We should add that, although this is an experience which many film buffs say they know, it is not necessarily a comfortable process.

In psychotherapy the process to which we are referring, namely the integration of projected contents, is often the objective of the analysis. The process aims to narrow and eventually abolish the gap between unconscious and conscious by integration of the tendencies of the former into the latter. It is a potentially hazardous operation which can lead to problems if the individual identifies with the unconscious contents. In such a case, the patient's ego may either be greatly enlarged (to a state near to megalomania), or may suffer near-annihilation by the new contents. Either way the normal ego-personality is exposed to the risk of being all but extinguished. And although (psychotherapy being an accepted form of treatment) it is obvious that the conscious mind is rarely overwhelmed in this way during the process of integration (far less when being stimulated by the symbols in a screenplay), it does become strongly coloured by unconscious contents (Jung 1946a: 263; 1946b 101–2; 1956a: 442).

Because we are concerned with publicly circulated symbols to which in most instances people have been exposed relatively fleetingly in a public arena (rather than recurrently and over a long period in the obsessive privacy of the skull), they are usually experienced less intensely.[3] However, when a symbol resonates strongly with the energy of an archetype seeking to compensate for a bias in collective consciousness, the reverse may be the case. At such a time, as when in the early 1990s the image of the serial killer exercised a hold over the popular imagination, the textual analyst has occasion to work with images and myths of *numinous* power. How he or she does so can in some small degree affect the integration in the community of the unconscious contents concerned.

Like other psychological processes, integration does not have to attend on the assistance of either a therapist or a textual analyst to occur. It may indeed commence spontaneously if, for instance, a person finds a particular symbol fascinating and devotes close attention to it. In such circumstances it may well have benign effects. As Samuels, Shorter and Plaut remark, integration can lead to a state of mind analogous to enjoying mental health or maturity. It can induce a sense of wholeness and may even be the groundwork that initiates the process of individuation of the self (1986: 83–4).

[3] One exception occurs with people whose egos are fragmented or so imperfectly developed that they cannot master those cinematic symbols that trigger their anxieties (see Hewison 2000: 291–3).

But how, since symbols break with established schemata, can we learn to make a constructive reading of Jungian symbols and the contemporary myths to which they contribute? There are two principal mechanisms. The first is provided by a process Jung called *amplification*, an important part of the methodology he deployed in dream analysis. He found it more productive than merely observing a patient's mental associations. He acknowledged that collecting directed associations enabled the patient to make a good beginning in allowing patient and therapist to deal with a complex locked in the personal unconscious. It did so by revealing the hidden links among the components of the complex. However, the limitations of association were that it broke down when the analyst tried to go beyond the personal context of the dream. This always happened at the very point where archetypal images generated by energies derived from the collective unconscious were beginning to appear.

Jung discovered that to engage with such images arising from the collective unconscious, the psychoanalyst must plot the dream's archetypal imagery against parallels drawn from mythology, religion, folklore, works of art or other cultural artifacts in order to clarify the metaphorical content of the dream symbolism. This process allows the patient and the analyst jointly to build a picture of its unknown meanings through the process of synthesising personal associations with these 'historical' parallels (Jung 1943: 81; Fredericksen 1979: 188; Samuels, Shorter and Plaut 1986: 16). The significance of this method for us is that it can be reduplicated in the interpretation of screen images. Indeed, amplification has much in common with, and appears to have borrowed from, the traditional scholarly methods of textual interpretation and comparative linguistics. It depends on finding the apposite 'historical' context for each image.

> It is simply [a matter] of seeking the parallels. For instance, in the case of a very rare word which you have never come across before, you try to find parallel text passages, parallel applications perhaps, where that word also occurs, and then you try to put the formula you have established from the knowledge of other texts into the new text. If you make the new text a readable whole, you say, 'Now we can read it'. That is how we learned to read hieroglyphics and cuneiform inscriptions and that is how we can read dreams. (Jung 1935b: 83)

The technique can be adapted to the amplification of the symbolic material in all narratives, including those on the screen. The Jungian textual analyst discovers that ancient myths, religious stories, folklore and artifacts can often illuminate both thematic and psychological meanings that may not otherwise be accessible through them. As we shall see, this is the case with some very different films.

The problem with amplification as a method – whether applied to fiction or dream imagery – is precisely that it stabilises meaning. Objectivity and consciousness dominate it and threaten to domesticate its outcome. Because amplification functions by setting symbolic material into pre-existing and well-known schemata, it renders safe the inherent strangeness of symbols. It is for just this reason that James Hillman has argued against the translation of dream imagery into ideas and concepts. As Thomas Moore says, Hillman sees most modes of interpretation as Herculean but misguided efforts to 'spoil imagination, ultimately to defend against the challenging otherness of the dream or image'. Hillman's preferred method of working with dreams, therefore, requires an appreciation for the integrity of the dream. 'We should not lose the dream in the light of day; rather, we should visit the land of dream and be affected by the peculiarities of that world' (Moore 1990: 6).

The more radical archetypal psychoanalysts led by Hillman prefer that dreams should never be interpreted. Classical Jungians, in contrast, take the view that, since the function of such symbolic matter is to compensate for an imbalance between conscious and unconscious, interpretation has the benefit that it focuses material thrown up by the unconscious. However, if we understand Hillman as wishing to postpone interpreting symbolic material so that it comes to consciousness resonating with the energy that generated it, then we have an idea worth developing in relation to the practice of textual analysis.

For our present purposes it is convenient to divide texts into three classes according to their symbolic register. The first of these has already been mentioned, identified by Jung as *visionary*. Characteristic of such work is that –

> it can be a revelation whose heights and depths are beyond our fathoming, or a vision of beauty that we can never put into words . . . [Most works of art] never rend the curtain that veils the cosmos; they do not exceed the bounds of our human capacities . . . But the primordial experiences rend from top to bottom the curtain upon which is painted the picture of an ordered world, and allow a glimpse into the unfathomable abyss of the unborn and of things yet to be. (Jung 1950: 90)

The visionary narrative is one that arises from the collective unconscious almost impersonally (without foregrounding the personal psychologies of the artists who are its vehicles). The work of art of this nature is 'a true symbol – that is, an expression for something real but unknown' (ibid.: 94). Human passion falls within the sphere of conscious experience, while the object of the vision lies beyond it. Through our senses we experience the known, but our intuitions point to things that are unknown and hidden, that by their very nature are secret (ibid.: 94).

If the process of reading is not to kill off their visionary images, narratives of this kind must be responded to with the same delicacy of touch that Hillman advocates psychoanalysts should employ when working on great dreams. The analyst's response has to respect the 'feel' of their magical energy. This makes it necessary to work not only with the conscious tools provided by amplification, but also at an intuitive level. We shall say more about this after mentioning the other two classes of text.

Visionary works having the glorious, demonic or revelatory force that Jung describes are comparatively rare. However, the same tact they require should be used in analysing the second class of narrative. This contains all other screen texts incorporating symbolic material where the entire work is not an extended symbol. Once again, there is an approximate parallel with the work of the therapist. When analysing a patient's dream that may seem less than visionary to the analyst, the latter must nonetheless treat it with all the respect due to the originality it has for the patient.

The final class of movie presents the viewer with no material which seems to him or her to be symbolic (again using the term in Jung's sense). A psychoanalytic approach might be of use in deriving a reading that augmented understanding of the ways that such a text allegorically draws upon established mythological themes. In this case amplification might be an appropriate instrument to enhance knowledge about the way the text functions. However, it is unlikely that such a film would stimulate a Jungian reading of the kind we are about to describe where the analyst's active imagination is fully engaged.

As previously mentioned, amplification is a method that resembles closely standard scholarly practice in the interpretation of perplexing narratives to the extent that the scholar, like the psychoanalyst, seeks out earlier examples of phenomena similar to those which are to be illuminated. Therefore amplification exposes the textual analyst no less than the psychoanalyst to the temptation of finding an easy way to explain symbols by falling back on professional routines and applying them mechanically in order to arrive at an interpretation. However, there is a way of respecting the integrity of the symbol, and this involves analysts of symbolic texts (like the analysts of patients' dreams) in bringing their own subjectivity consciously and methodically into play. When scholars succeed in analysing a film while feeling and relishing the impact of its symbolism's energy upon their own minds, they are more likely to be able to convey to their readers a sense of its numinosity. What is needed is a methodology that allows the textual analyst to switch between objective and subjective stances.

Amplification provides the analyst with a mechanism that supports the objective attitude. The question that arises therefore is what method

should be employed that responds to the symbol's transcendent function – the function which resides in its potential for bringing together conscious and unconscious contents. What is needed is provided by adapting the framework of what Jung called the *constructive* treatment of the unconscious. Actually this does not mean abandoning amplification. On the contrary, it continues to have a significant function as a part (but by no means the whole) of the constructive process. Amplification provides a map of the known terrain; application of the constructive method suggests routes through that terrain for each voyager and shows where the map needs to be remade for him or her.

The constructive method entails building up the products of the unconscious by elaborating upon them, and teasing out the concealed purpose of symbols. In this respect Jung's procedure differs radically from what he termed Freud's *reductive* method, because there the analytical process insists, according to Jung, upon 'a reduction to the elementary processes of wishing or striving, which in the last resort are of an infantile or physiological nature'. The reductive method is oriented backwards in time either to reminiscences of actual childhood events or to elementary psychic processes. Another limitation is that it does not allow that the product of the unconscious may be authentic in its own right (Jung 1921: 422, 459). By way of contrast, the constructive method relies upon the hypothesis that the products of the unconscious have value and the potential for meaning in their own right. It is oriented forward towards the future (whether of the individual or the collective) in that the products of the unconscious compensate for the contents of the conscious and counterbalance them. It follows that, when apprehended, they sway consciousness to a greater or lesser degree in their direction. Whereas Freud sought to dissolve symbols in order to uncover the rudimentary elements that he believed they must conceal, Jungians (as Hillman's argument indicates) try to build them up while preparing them for integration. Freudians hold that symbols disguise their true meanings because the latter are repugnant to the conscious mind, which resists by repressing those meanings. Jungians argue that symbols reveal their meanings in as plain and direct a way as possible, given that their function is to communicate that which was previously unknown to the subject.

When Jung employed the constructive method as a psychotherapeutic procedure, the point of departure was the patient's own fantasy material. He developed a technique, which he named *active imagination*, designed to help patients lower the level of their conscious control and let unconscious contents surface. With their fantasies made available by this means, individuals were shown simple methods for elaborating and contemplating them. In practice the training for active imagination was adapted to

fit the particular skills and inhibitions of individual patients, but it always started with systematic exercises for eliminating critical attention, thus producing a vacuum in consciousness (Jung 1958: 78). This allows the images to develop according to their own logic and furnishes a means of exposing unconscious contents. As Stevens says,

> Active imagination is a matter of allowing the natural mind time and freedom to express itself spontaneously. It is important to make some record of what is produced so as to register it and make it lastingly available to consciousness, otherwise it is soon lost. The medium used is a matter of individual taste. The images may be written down, painted, modelled in clay, danced or acted. The important thing is to allow them to happen.
>
> This is a knack which, given patience, anyone can acquire. Active imagination requires a state of reverie, halfway between sleep and waking. It is like beginning to fall asleep but stopping short before consciousness is lost and remaining in that condition. (Stevens 1991: 202; see also Jung 1955/1956: 495–6)

This procedure starts an operation in which the original symbol is apperceived. That is to say, it compels attention and enforces its apprehension in such a way that it becomes assimilated to a series of associated images that are already constellated in the conscious mind (Jung 1921: 412–13). It makes for a kind of spontaneous amplification of the underlying archetypes that drive the fantasy material (Jung 1954c: 204–5). The individual who contemplates his or her fantasy products in this way commences as a spectator, but later learns to participate in the action as if he or she were one of the figures in the drama that passes before the eyes. The reality of the fantasy is thereby confirmed: it is an integral aspect of the individual's own psyche, and thus of the whole being (Stevens 1991: 202–3).

It may seem odd to recommend that the Jungian screen analyst borrow ideas from a process designed precisely to eliminate critical attention. Indeed it may seem, not least because the materials to be worked on are not of the critic's own origination, that the techniques of active imagination have no relevance whatever to the analysis of screen narrative. However, as John Beebe has recognised, although the images that play on the screen are unalterable, each spectator will perceive them according to his or her predisposition and experience (Beebe 1992). Furthermore, the experience of the movie that seizes the mind continues long after the screen has gone dark. In the spectator's memory the movie's content, form and possible meanings all shift under the pressure of his or her needs and personal history. So the emotional impact on the spectator of symbolic screen images is by no means wholly determined, and what they mean to him or her becomes subjectively inflected. The textual analyst

can therefore take advantage of the thrust of the emotional reactions and intuitive responses that he or she may feel to loosen the hold of conscious, directed thinking. The guidance of such personal responses offers a means productively to subvert the kind of programmatic work that professionally recognised and routinised methodologies are always likely to lead to.

As we might expect, Hillman warns of the danger of professionally systematised response, whether to images mediated through a work of art or directly encountered as products of the psyche.

> The use of allegory as a defense continues today in the interpretations of dreams and fantasies . . . Dreams have been yoked to the systems which interpret them . . . If long things are penises for Freudians, dark things are shadows for Jungians. Images are turned into predefined concepts such as passivity, power, sexuality, anxiety, femininity, much like the conventions of allegorical poetry. Like such poetry, and using similar allegorical techniques, psychology too can become a defense against the psychic power of personified images. (Hillman 1990: 24)

What Hillman advocates is naked, emotionally unguarded self-exposure to the symbol, which should be encountered and watched as if it were alive – almost like a person. We can argue that a comparable kind of exposure will be as productive for the textual analyst as it is for the psychoanalyst and patient. Active imagination has the potential, *mutatis mutandis*, to be fashioned into a key function of a critical methodology which deliberately incorporates emotional and intuitive responses together with rational analysis and the more formal procedures of amplification.

The following means of proceeding allow the analyst of the text to surrender a measure of control to the symbol. Having viewed the film as often as is found necessary, he or she should then reexperience the symbolic material by watching and listening to it as it runs not on the screen but in the memory. In so doing, the analyst actively imagines it and attends to the resonances it strikes within his or her own psyche. To help with this process, a technique that Hillman advocates can be employed. He suggests slowing down the reading process by withdrawing attention from the narrative sequence ('What happens next? And then? And then?'), and investing it instead in a poetic imagistic reading. He urges this method because he finds that in most narrative sequences what appears at first sight to be their complete meaning emerges right on cue and fully rounded at the end of the story. The reader, driven by the appetite to draw everything together, rushes towards that goal, urged on by the story itself with its implied promise that all will be revealed at its climax. (This is indeed the only meaning that interests most spectators.) By contrast, in the reading of imagistic poetry, sense emerges

throughout, and the poetry usually forces the eye to slow itself, even to move back and forwards within the text, to match the cadence of the images (ibid.: 61). In the case of the screen text, the analyst will find it impossible to slow down the process of perusal while the film is running. But this is the advantage to be gained by attending to the images and sounds in memory and withdrawing conscious attention for a while from the story line. What is most important is that in the encounter with the symbol the analyst should respond to the emotions that the image or sound arouses so as to make its personal value for him- or herself felt. A variety of possible associations may then be experienced. They may be pictorial or aural in nature. They may lead to a revaluation of the recollected narrative, or they may, by intensifying some of the emotions and intuitions to which the observer is exposed, refocus his or her attention on facets of the symbolism that had previously gone unremarked.

Having amplified the text inwardly, the analyst turns outwards again and views the actual text once more. The purpose of this screening is to discover to what degree the actual screenplay licenses these private imaginings. Inevitably, some of the associated images and ideas that active imagination produces from the original material will violate the logic of characters, plot or imagery. Such unfit associative material must be discarded on the grounds that it lacks 'tact' by being out of touch with the original source material. But frequently the associative material produced by active imagination may be used without violating the integrity and internal logic of the screenplay. In such cases it may become the stimulus for new analytical work that opens up a fresh angle of approach to the text and precipitates a critical reframing of the work.

A need for amplification *within* the symbolic text is sometimes uncovered as active imagination proceeds. This can occur when the textual analyst discovers chains or a cluster of images endowed with archetypal energies. And the clue which identifies them as symbolic is once again their unifying emotional power. It follows that the analyst should continue to exercise subjectivity and seek to make connections between those images that demand to be brought into juxtaposition through the emotional force with which they are perceived. When the process of active imagination has been completed, these same figures should also be amplified *externally* in the traditional manner.

To be recognised as such, clusters and chains of images have to share more than simply an emotive charge; scanned together they are likely to provide the schemata that allow the spectator to unlock thematic and even archetypal meanings. For example, the colour red in Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973) takes its place in a chain which increases until it

includes blood/fire/child/dwarf/passion/life/and death, to mention only some of its more obvious associations. It extends from observed images to their metaphoric values. Furthermore, it stands in opposition to another that links blue/water/eyes/glass/blindness/vision with not only life and death but also knowledge/ignorance of the supernatural. Taken together the two chains amount to an unmistakable cluster. Their combination has the effect that the possible interpretations of any one image are both directed and deepened by its association with others in the cluster (Izod 1992: 69–75; see also Palmer and Riley 1995: 14–25).

Having refined the products of active imagination discovered within the text and adapted them to a rationally defensible reading of the text, the analyst looks beyond it to embark upon the process of external amplification which we have already described. This does not necessarily require a scrutiny of folkloric, mythological or religious material as such. Commonly, images, characters and stories are amplified by cross-reference to related symbolic or metaphoric material found within the same or other narrative genres, or indeed in other art forms.

As we have mentioned before, the theory underpinning traditional interpretive critical practice recognises the procedure that we have called 'amplification' as a means by which the reader may establish the meanings of the text. Implicit in this traditional practice of textual analysis is a view of the text as an object which will release the meanings it contains when unlocked with a key that fits. The idea that the active imagination might be engaged in the process of analysis violates this static picture. However, it does complement a view of the text that recognises interpretation as an active process. Sandra Kemp summarises this position when she argues that the object *for* interpretation is an aspect *of* interpretation and cannot exist apart from it.

> This [change of perspective] does not just open up art as the plural object of plural readings, nor simply make clear that the object of interpretation cannot have 'origins' outside the interpretative act. More importantly, it redefines the art-object as a temporal matter, a *becoming-object* rather than a *being-object*. Interpretation is always a process of *bringing-into-being*. (1996: 155)

The acknowledgement of the role that the active imagination can play in the critical process marries with this view of interpretation as a bringing into being, and recognises the function of the textual analyst's subjectivity. We have been describing it at its most intense. But active imagination encompasses something far more familiar and less portentous that most of us like to enjoy as often as possible.

To what extent can the spectating subject sitting in front of the screen take part in a constructive psychological process? Krin and

Glen O. Gabbard give us part of an answer. They question why people are attracted to movies like *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) which make use of intense horror; and they note that audiences are often drawn to them even where the credibility of the plot is, to say the least, strained. This leads them to speculate that in such instances people are attracted not so much by narrative as by those scenes that compellingly touch on their most primal terrors. The Gabbards develop this line of thought in the context of a persuasive demonstration that Melanie Klein's theories of infantile desires and anxieties are productive in reading certain kinds of horror and science fiction films. She argued that as infants mature they experience the mother as alternately good and bad, depending on the extent to which she is satisfying their needs.

The Gabbards think that the moment in which the mother is split into a good mother and a bad mother in the infant's mind can be seen as a transformation similar to the one portrayed in horror films which involve the metamorphosis of a good object into an apparently identical bad object. They show how *Alien* draws much of its power from the evocation of infantile desires. It skilfully evokes early but imperfectly repressed anxieties about nurturing figures turning against us; and it does so in a manner which seems to be informed by Klein's account of the way the infant utilises introjection–projection mechanisms to deal with its primitive fears that it will be annihilated. For the child having projected 'bad' or aggressive aspects of the self into objects in the environment (primarily the mother), suffers as a consequence paranoid fears of external attack. In its portrayal of a monster that inhabits the mother ship and can attack equally effectively from without or within its victim, *Alien* evokes anxieties left over from childhood about our own aggressive tendencies that can punish us from within or without. And other horror or sci-fi films represent variants of this pattern. For example, those in which people are matched by terrifying *doppelgängers* (cf. both versions of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) replicate the Kleinian situation in which a beloved parent seems to have been taken over by a monster (Gabbard and Gabbard 1987: 226–9).

The Gabbards add to our exploration of audience activity by recalling an assertion of Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). He said that people feel a compulsion to repeat traumatic events that they originally experienced passively – and they feel thus compelled in an effort psychologically to master those traumas.

> People line up to see movies like *Alien* in order to re-encounter powerful unconscious anxieties while retaining a sense that they have some control of an active nature the second time around. Moreover, the movie provides an aesthetic

distance so that the audience knows that the terror on the screen is not actually happening to them, and they can experience relief along with their fright (Gabbard and Gabbard 1987: 226–9).

In the Gabbards' model it is not altogether clear whether people actually begin to take control of their anxiety-producing fantasy material, or merely live through it again knowing they are safe. It is possible, however, to conceive of the experience of cinema as a form of symbol play, a thought which has large consequences for the role of the spectator. To think of symbol play is to set screen narrative in a highly productive context in the Jungian schema, for Jung himself knew well the creative potential of play. He found it allowed him to discover a way forward through periods of loss of direction and mental crisis. Indeed, he learned to use it as a means of finding his own myth, that is, of exploring his unconscious, and beginning to discover the self (Jung 1961: 35–6, 197–9). As we shall see in chapter 7, Jungians believe play is so productive because it allows the rules of the ego to be broken. These are rules which map on to social norms with a quite close fit. Hence, as Samuels has said, in play 'category differences, hierarchy, reality, normality, decency, clarity, and so on, all may be discarded' (Samuels 1990: 130). In social life, on the contrary, they have to be observed if the individual is not to face penalties. Individual, undirected play, then, may be organised according to the rules of the unconscious, and in particular of the self, not those of the ego, consciousness and society.

People also play with symbols. This may be obvious enough when they are in the process of creating them, but they do so even when reading them. A convenient explanatory concept that connects play and the symbol is Winnicott's notion of the *transitional object*. In the first instance, during infancy, it is something tangible which the child holds on to as a defence against separation anxiety. It stands in for the absent mother. So such things as teddybears and comfort blankets are transitional objects; Winnicott refers to them as 'the first not-me possession' (1971: 1, 4–6). Soon the psychological presence of such tangible objects appears to be extended when the young child begins to invent a distinct personality for the teddy. This personality may in part be supplied by the child's unconscious need for a stand-in for an absent parent, but in part arises from the desire for play. The toy develops a distinct personality of its own which often resembles that of a friendly and sometimes wayward child, endowed nonetheless with superior, tutelary powers. At this point the transitional object does more than provide a physical substitute for the missing parent. It has become a quasi-symbolic object in its own right which enables the child to try in play a variety of social roles. The child can do so in

the knowledge that it is safe from any social or natural consequences that might follow were its actions real. The breaking of natural laws and social rules (teddies can fly, can be killed off and be reborn a hundred times an hour), the exploration of the actual and realisation of an imaginary universe are all common features of children's play, and they all give the players great delight.

It is apparent then that private play may also be organised on principles that derive an input from the social. No accident, for instance, that the teddy bear, the transitional object par excellence, among the other roles in which it is cast, such as experimental flying machine and accident victim, frequently plays a substitute child. Then its behaviour is described by its owner as either good or bad and the teddy-child praised or castigated according to the degree to which it conforms with norms established for the real child by its parents and school. Thus Wehr's remarks (1987: 22–3) about the mutual interaction of social pressures and drives and images that originate in the unconscious hold equally true for play with both tangible objects and symbols.

As the child matures, he or she increases the range of imaginative games beyond the limits set by transitional objects in discovering that intangible symbols offer comparable opportunities for play. For example, the young person who enjoys reading fiction speaks of the pleasure it gives to enter a different world. Such an imaginary world is a composite built upon elements that the author has contributed through the novel's text but which the reader has to elaborate in order to construct its meaning. For instance, it has long been recognised that readers have to contribute a great deal from their own experience and desires to dress out not only the visual appearance but also the personalities of the main characters of written fiction, clothing them in the lineaments of their own psychic images. At this symbolic level too the pleasures of conspiring in play with a safely absent writer give delight – whether it be caused by the breaking of social or natural laws, or by the creation of an imaginary world.

Although, because of technical differences in the processes of reading print and viewing a film, the interpretive work of the reader differs in detail from that of the viewer, in general terms their active engagement with pre-existent symbols belongs to the same order of play. This process of meaning production and play also enables spectators to take a measure of control over the elements of the fiction they see and hear, and to use them in accordance with 'rules' given by their unconscious.

Eventually the individual may discover that intangible symbols provide ways of getting in touch with psychic reality; and this observation returns us to the kind of concern with symbols upon which a Jungian analysis focuses.