

The superhuman in the successful cinematic imaginaries¹

O sobre-humano nos imaginários cinematográficos bem-sucedidos

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Abstract: *One element that explains the global success of some movies is the capacity that their imaginaries have in seducing the audiences in different cultures. This paper analyzes a group of cinematic narratives to reveal part of the symbolic elements and main meanings in the imaginaries that emerges from the most popular movies from 2001 to 2015. In order to do that the analysis is based uses market data, a research about the most popular themes and genres in the period and the concepts about the imaginary and myths from Gilbert Durand and Mircea Eliade. The results show the popularity of a combination of adventure, action, science fiction and fantasy genres that has in common the superhuman archetype in the core of the narratives.*

Keywords: *cinema; imaginary; myth criticism; superhuman; Hollywood.*

Resumo: *Um dos fatores que explica o sucesso global de algumas produções cinematográficas é a capacidade que os imaginários que emergem delas têm em seduzir audiências e penetrar em diferentes culturas. Este artigo analisa um conjunto de narrativas cinematográficas para revelar parte dos elementos simbólicos e dos sentidos dominantes no imaginário que emergem dos filmes preferidos pela audiência. Para fazer isso, parte da contextualização dos mercados, do levantamento dos gêneros e temas de maior audiência entre 2001 e 2015 e dos conceitos*

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sobre imaginário e mito em Gilbert Durand e Mircea Eliade. Os resultados apontam para a popularidade de uma combinação dos gêneros de aventura, ação, ficção científica e fantasia, que têm em comum o arquétipo do sobre-humano no núcleo das narrativas.

Palavras-chave: *cinema; imaginário; mitocrítica; sobre-humano; Hollywood.*

Introduction

The research presented in this article comes from the collection of predominant genres and themes in the group of most commercially successful films between the years of 2001 and 2015 to develop a study about the aspects of shared imaginaries by the most popular movies of the beginning of the millennium.

Once we understood the imaginary in the Durandian conception – dynamic set of symbolic elements produced in an anthropologic path (DURAND, 2002) that is articulated, generating symbolic meanings and functions materialized into narratives -, the cinematographic imaginaries are analyzed in this study through the method of mythocritique proposed by Durand. We seek to map the imaginary that emerges from the set of cinematographic works that had the audience's preference.

The importance of understanding how the imaginary works is highlighted by Morin, to whom the creators of movies project on air the structures of the imaginary, our psyche being located in the images of these movies or vice-versa:

The cinema makes us understand not only theater, poetry and music, but also the internal theater of our minds: dreams, imagined pictures, representations: this little cinema we have in our heads (MORIN, 2005, p. 203).

As we will see next, movies with genres and themes that predominate in this little cinema we have in our heads in the beginning of the millennium were majorly created in the logic of production of Hollywood.

Successful genres: Hollywood's soft power

In 2015, the six main movie studios (Universal, Disney, Fox, Warner, Sony/Columbia and Paramount) collected about 68% of the world's box

office.³ Out of this amount, about two thirds came from outside the North American market (USA and Canada).

Such result shows the high capacity of penetration of titles produced in the United States on other cultures. In 2015, China, despite of all the protectionist and censorship restrictions that are imposed in the exhibition of foreign films, contributed with almost one fourth of the international revenue of movies produced in the United States. In Brazil, the North American productions got 84% of the box office⁴ and in France, in the same year, north American movies got 52% of the box office.⁵

The dominance of the world cinematographic market – that occurs since the 20's, when the American studios have overcome the European technology, especially the French – arises as the product of the articulation between business strategies and the capacity of perception of tastes of the audience (BAKKER, 2004 apud SEDGWICK and POKORNY, 2004)

Throughout the decades of 1910 and 1920, the North American cinematographic industry begins to produce high budgeted films - which leads us to the escalade in costs of production, something that the European industry did not risk following, and also the creation of an ecosystem (productive chain) completely and highly professionalized for film production - launches the feature film format, begins to develop fictional narratives, based in literary successes, dramas and mythical narratives and the main studios assume the distribution of the films in the national and international markets, with the creation of subsidiary distributing companies and movie theaters (SEDGWICK and POKORNY, 2004).

3 Data available on Rentrak and in the annual balance sheets shows the following results in 2015: Universal Pictures – US\$ 6.9 billion; Disney 0 US\$ 5.85 billion; 21st Century Fox – US\$ 4.033 billion; Warner - US\$ 3.421 billion; Paramount - US\$ 2.885 billion; and Sony/Columbia – US\$ 2.838 billion.

4 Data from Ancine – Observatório do cinema e do Audiovisual (OCA) and from Box Office Mojo.

5 Data available in the document Results 2015: Films, television programs, production, distribution, exhibition, exports, video, new media do Centre national du cinema et de l'image animee. Available at: <http://www.cnc.fr/web/en/publications/-/ressources/9459748>. Accessed in: Oct. 3rd, 2016.

In addition to that, studios adopted a system of production inspired in the idea of an assembly line⁶ of the auto industry and the North American internal market is consolidated as the biggest of the planet.

In a wide census about the mainstream culture in the world, Martel builds the hypothesis that, beyond the economic power of studios, there is a combination of current factors – many of them outside the market logic - that maintain the dominion of entertainment industries placed in the United States, especially the cinematographic industry:

They [the explanations for the north American cultural dominance] have to do with multiple causes, here evoked in general lines: in the beginning, an original crossing between the research stimulated in the universities, de-centralized public financing, a valued counter culture in numerous alternative focuses, the energy coming from the mobility and the idea of social mobility so strongly rooted in the American society, the trust given to singular artists and the exceptional vivacity of ethnical communities, thanks to the original model of integration and defense of a “cultural diversity” in the American way. Formation, innovation, risks taken, creativity, boldness: it is in the universities, in the communities and in the non-lucrative sector that these tendencies are manifested in the United States, outside the market and in a very de-centralized manner (MARTEL, 2012, p. 448).

Beyond the economic power, the main corporations (Comcast, Viacom, Time Warner, 21st Century Fox and The Walt Disney Company) who command the cinematographic industry have in the power of seduction of aesthetics and the contents of movies they produce and distribute a decisive factor for their elevated degree of penetration and acceptance in the markets of numerous countries. Thus, it is created a virtuous cycle in which the economic success feeds the aesthetic and content success and vice-versa. The high degree of seduction generates high revenue, with the dominance of 68% of the worldwide box office, that, in turn, generate sophisticated clusters, ecosystems and productive

6 The idea of adopting the same system of the auto industry for cinematographic production comes from Paramount Pictures, founded in 1912 by the Hungarian immigrant Adolph Zukor with partnership with the brothers Daniel and Charles Frohman.

chains for the American cinematographic industry which stimulates and supports numerous factors pointed by Martel.

It is also important to reinforce, in relation to the success of products from big studios in the period investigated here (2001-2015), the relevant role that marketing strategies have⁷ and the use of visual effects that, thanks to the state of the art of technologies of computer generated images (CGI), widened the aesthetic and narrative possibilities of the creators.

With these factors pointed out, this study turns to the qualitative factors that impact on aesthetics and the content of a movie, such as screenplay, direction, cast, teams and technical resources, among others, and for the complex combination between them. The investigation focuses on the imaginary built by movies, a general aspect in which the screenplay and the archetypical images have a primordial role. Because, as Morin says (2005, p. 204): “cinema allows us to see the process of penetration of the man in the world and the inseparable process of penetration of the world in mankind”.

From the hypothesis that the most successful movies share some characteristics in the field of the imaginary that operate as connectors in the cultural identification that the global audiences establish with them, this investigation seeks to map and describe this imaginary from the identification of the main symbolic elements shared in movies and the interpretation of their meanings and understand a part of the anthropologic unconscious of the contemporary world.

To create a portrait of the most successful imaginary in the international cinema between 2001 and 2015 starts by researching most frequent genres⁸ and themes that were successful in that period. Based on the five biggest worldwide box offices registered yearly between 2001

7 The so called “Blockbuster Era”, whose initial landmark was the campaign of the movie *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), have, among their main characteristics, the adoption of intensive marketing campaigns, with abundant and innovative propagation and plans of distribution that leads to the massive occupation of movie theaters.

8 Classificatory categories that allow establishing relations of similarity or identity between many works, based on narrative (what is told and how is told) and technical criteria (NOGUEIRA, 2010, p. 3-6).

and 2014,⁹ it is possible to see that the main genres¹⁰ present in the most successful productions in the beginning of this millennium are: Adventure (82%), Action (57%), Fantasy (32%). Animation (20%) and Science Fiction (18%).

Table 1. Movies with the biggest box office in the world - 2001 to 2015.

Year	Biggest Box office	Second biggest Box office	Third biggest Box office	Fourth biggest Box office	Fifth biggest Box office
2015	Star Wars: The Force	Jurassic World	Fast and Furious 7	Avengers: Age of Ultron	Minions
2014	Awakens Transformers: Age of Extinction	The Hobbit: The Battle of Five Armies	Guardians of The Galaxy	Maleficent	Hunger Games (1)
2013	Frozen	Iron Man 3	Despicable 2	The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug	Hunger Games: Catching Fire
2012	The Avengers	007: Skyfall	Batman: The Dark Knight Rises	The Hobbit:	Ice Age 4
2011	Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows (2)	Transformers Dark of the Moon	Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Waters	Twilight: Breaking Dawn (1)	Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol
2010	Toy Story 3	Alice in Wonderland	Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows	Inception	Shrek Forever After
2009	Avatar	Harry Potter and The Half-Blood Prince	Ice Age 3	Transformers: The Revenge of The Fallen	2012
2008	Batman - The Dark Knight	Indiana Jones and The Kingdom of The Crystal Skull	Kung Fu Panda	Hancock	Mamma Mia!
2007	Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	Harry Potter and And the Order of Phoenix	Spiderman 3	Shrek the Third	Transformers

⁹ According to the data of Box Office Mojo, available at: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/?view2=worldwide&view=releasedate&p=.htm>. Accessed in: October 10th, 2016.

¹⁰ According to the classification of International Movie Data Base (IMDb) (<http://www.imdb.com/>), Each movie is classified in up to three genres.

Tabela 1 (continuação)

Year	Biggest Box office	Second biggest Box office	Third biggest Box office	Fourth biggest Box office	Fifth biggest Box office
2006	Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest	The Da Vinci Code	Ice Age 2	007 Casino Royale	Night at the Museum
2005	Harry Potter and Goblet of Fire	Star Wars: The Revenge of The Sith	Chronicles of Narnia	War of the Worlds	King Kong
2004	Shrek 2	Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Askaban	Spiderman 2	The Incredibles	The passion of The Christ
2003	Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	Finding Nemo	Matrix: Reloaded	Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl	Bruce Almighty
2002	Lord of the Rings: Two Towers	Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets	Spiderman	Star Wars: Clone Wars	Men in Black 2
2001	Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone	Lord of the Rings: The fellowship of the Ring	Monsters INC	Shrek	Ocean's Eleven

Source: Box Office Mojo

Table 2. Movies with the biggest box office in Brazil - 2011 to 2015.

Ano	Biggest Box office	Second biggest Box office	Third biggest Box office	Fourth biggest Box office	Fifth biggest Box office
2015	Avengers: The Age of Ultron	Fast and Furious 7	Minions	Fifty Shades of Grey	Jurassic World
2014	The fault in Our Stars	Maleficent	Rio 2	X-Men Days Of Future Past	Noah
2013	Ironman 3	Despicable Me 2	Thor 2: The dark	Minha Mãe É uma Peça	Fast and Furious 6
2012	The Avengers	Twilight: Breaking Dawn (2)	Ice Age 4	Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted	Alvin and The Chipmunks
2011	Twilight: Breaking Dawn (1)	Rio	Harry Potter and The Deathly Smurfs	Hallows (2)	Puss in Boots

Source: Ancine.

When we think about the results of the box office in the years 2011 to 2015, we observe that the tendency registered in the previous decade was maintained in the predominance of the combination of the genre adventure and action in the international scenery (Table 1) and in Brazil (Table 2). In the comparison between these two scenarios, the only differences are in the popularity of the genre comedy and animation in Brazil in relation to the international average.

Table 3: The most watched genres on cinema (2011-2015).

Genre	International	Brazil
Adventure	84%	76%
Action	64%	48%
Sci-Fi	32%	20%
Fantasy	28%	24%
Thriller	24%	16%
Animation	16%	36%
Comedy	12%	32%
Drama	12%	20%
Family	4%	4%
Crime	4%	8%
Mystery	4%	0%
Romance	0%	8%

Source: IMDb.

In the popular combination of the genres comedy and action, stories are narrated characterized by protagonists looking for achievements (retrieving someone or something) and explorations (facing the unknown) with the predominance of scenes of fight, fugue, chase and catastrophe. In general, in the most successful movies of these genres between 2011 and 2015, the scenes with fight, escapes, persecutions and catastrophes fill 20% to 30% of the total duration of the narrative. Such scenes are

fundamental for the cathartic effect¹¹ of the movie, catharsis that is also given by the “resolution of the ruptures on the status quo” (O’BR”EN, 2012, p. 3).

The format of the cinematographic narratives of action was modelled, in part, by the aesthetic and dynamic of the movies produced in Hong Kong in the 60’s that were a great influence in the Hollywood productions in the 70’s, especially because of its transnational success. To Morris, the productions of the cinematographic industry of the British Colony in China – notably those in which martial arts scenes prevail - have a fundamental role in the creation of the action genre in the cinematographic industry of the United States and many other countries (MORRIS, 2006, p. 1).

What is seen in the beginning of the millennium is that successful action and adventure movies usually include elements of sci-fi and/or fantasy.

In this matrix that mixes elements of adventure, action, sci-fi and fantasy, we highlight the themes of superheroes, coming from comic books (The Avengers, Ironman, Batman, Guardians of the Galaxy) and supernatural universes based on literary works (Harry Potter, Twilight, The Hobbit). They represent about 40% of the biggest successes between 2011 and 2015 both in the international and in the Brazilian scenario. Therefore, stories and characters that are known in other platforms repeat their success on cinematographic versions.

Joshi and Mao (2012), in a study about the literary adaptations for the cinema, shows that a movie has a greater chance for success (as well as a greater chance for producing sequels) when it is adapted from a book and reproduces with fidelity their content.

Another point of highlight is the success of franchises in this period (The Avengers, The Hobbit, Harry Potter, etc.)

The cycles of aesthetic and thematic predominance are explained by a dynamic that involves business and aspects of popular taste. The

11 The catharsis, according to Aristotle (2004), is the process of purgation or elimination of passions that is produced in the viewer when, in the theater, he watches the presentation of a tragedy.

success in the box office has often engendered tendencies whose result are movies with similar stories and aesthetic characteristic, forming lineages subject to life cycles: “Highly successful movies in the box office send signs of the audience’s preference for the studios that produced them and also for rival studios” (SEDGWICK and POKORNY, 2004, p. 304). This is an important component in the formula of minimizing risks of investments.

The lineage that predominate in the popular taste in the beginning of this millennium are adventure and action movies, that develop themes of sci-fi and/or fantasy. To identify the redundant symbolic elements in the audience’s favorite movies can reveal what is in the core of the imaginary that has been successfully shared in mainstream cinema. We seek to map these elements in the next section.

The super-human in the imaginary of successful movies

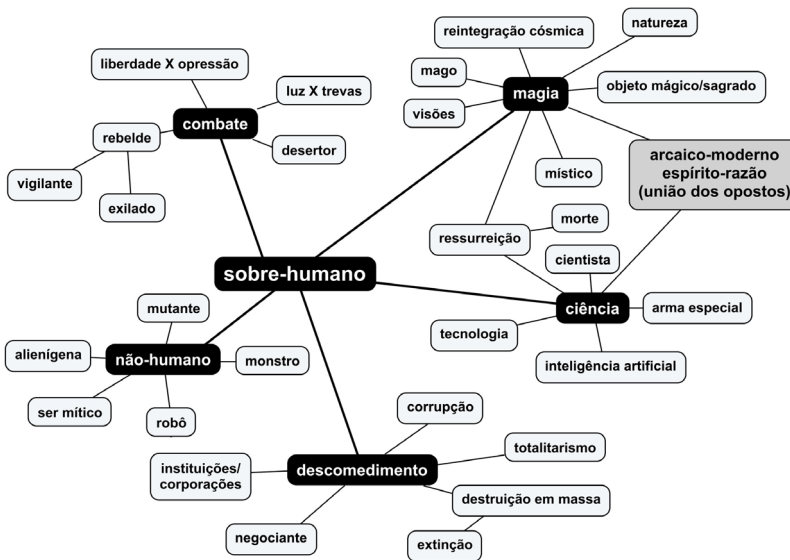
Supported in an anthropological perspective, inspired by the works of Gastón Bachelard and Carl Jung and from a wide study about symbolic production in different societies and historic periods, Gilbert Durand (1921-2012) develops his general theory of the imaginary, in which archetypal images and mythical narratives occupy a central role. One of the methodological products of his theory is the Mythocritics, which Durand (1985) establishes as a method that comes from the collection of themes, motives, situations and combinations of situations, redundant characters and scenarios in the narratives to identify mythemes (the smallest significant element of a myth) present in the speech in a patent or latent way. From mythemes and meanings or lessons that are brought to us, it is possible to establish correlations among the meanings found in the narratives and the myths of a determined time or culture that work as reference.

The mythocritics are inserted in the Durandian hypothesis that the myths are matrix models of all speech. Myths circulate, according to Durand (2012, p. 131), as dominant or countercultural forces in societies

throughout history. Cultural productions would be, thus, oriented and disoriented by founding myths.

The mapping of the group of blockbuster movies¹² allows us to identify the characteristics of the audience's preference, according to what we've seen in the first part of this study (genres of adventure and action combined with sci-fi and/or fantasy), leads to the identification of the most redundant symbolic elements shared by them (Image 1).

Image 1. Map of the main symbolic elements and mythemes (2011-2015).



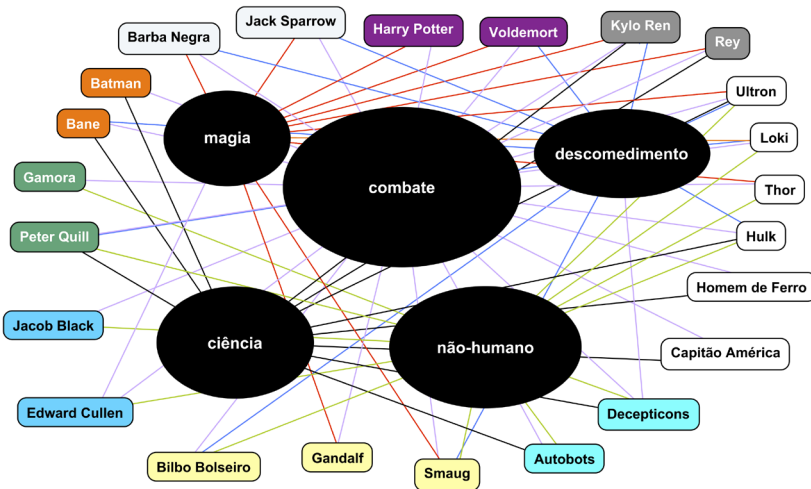
Source: My own making..

12 The mythocritics was applied to the movies: Star Wars: The Force Awakens (J. J. Abrams, 2015), The Avengers: Age of Ultron (Joss Whedon, 2015), Transformers: Age of Extinction (Michael Bay, 2014), The Hobbit: The Battle of The Five Armies (Peter Jackson, 2014), Guardians of the Galaxy (James Gunn, 2014), Ironman 3 (Shane Black, 2013), The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug (Peter Jackson, 2013), The Avengers (Joss Whedon, 2012), Batman: Dark Knight Rises (Christopher Nolan, 2012), The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (Peter Jackson, 2012), Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2 (David Yates, 2011), Transformers: Dark of the Moon (Michael Bay, 2011), Pirates of the Caribbean: Sailing in Mysterious Waters (Rob Marshall, 2011) and Twilight: Breaking Dawn (01) (Bill Condon, 2011). These stories correspond to about 60% of the biggest global box offices between 2011 and 2015 and all of them have in common the genre of adventure and action in combination with sci fi and/or fantasy and having the theme of superhuman in the core of their imaginaries.

The map (Image 01) shows the most frequent symbolic elements present in the most successful movies between 2011 and 2015 in the genres adventure, action, sci-fi and fantasy and its convergences, by similarity of meanings and functions, in five mythemes: magic, science, non-human, combat and immoderation. These mythemes, in turn, have as symbolic element in common the archetypal image of the “super-human”, that is present in all the movies analyzed and becomes central in the imaginary that emerges from the set of narratives.

Another aspect is that the combination of the identified mythemes characterizes the main superhuman characters that lead the analyzed movies (Image 2):

Image 2: Map of themes associated to the superhuman lead characters.



Source: My own making.

The map (Image 2) that shows the connections between the main super-human characters of the movies analyzed and the most present mythemes in these movies, reveals that the characters considered as beings with abilities that go beyond human nature are represented as product of modern science, gifted with magic powers and/or non-human

characteristics (aliens, robots, mutants, etc.), according to the synthesis on Table 4.

Table 4. Characteristics of superhuman in the characters.

Narrative Universe	Character	What characterize him/her as super-human In the narrative universe		
		Use of Science and technology	Magic Powers	Non-human nature*
Dark Knight	Batman	■		
	Bane	■		
Star Wars	Rey	■	■	
	Kylo Ren	■	■	■
Harry Potter	Harry Potter		■	■
	Voldemort		■	■
The Avengers (Marvel)	Ironman	■		
	Captain America	■		
	Thor			■
Transformers	Hulk	■	■	
	Loki			■
	Ultron	■		■
	Autobots	■	■	
The Hobbit	Decepticons	■	■	
	Bilbo Bolseiro			■
	Gandalf			■
Guardians of the Galaxy	Smaug			■
	Peter Quill	■		■
Twilight	Gamora	■		■
	Edward Cullen			■
Pirates of the Caribbean	Jacob Black			■
	Jack Sparrow			■
	Blackbeard			■

Are born as non-humans or take non-human characteristics

Source: My own making.

Thus, the combination of symbolic elements that group around the mytheme of magic (wizard, magic, mystic or sacred object, nature, cosmic reintegration and visions), science (scientist, technology, special weapon, artificial intelligence) and death and resurrection, that associate to both themes, is what define the superhuman ability of the lead characters and antagonists in narratives, beyond, in some cases, the insertion of properly non-human elements (mutant, monster, robot, alien and mythical being).

The superhuman, in a significant part of these imaginaries, is, thus, intimately linked to symbolic elements that refer to the combination of scientific-technologic and magic themes, themes that are frequently in the narrative core of the most successful audiovisual productions since the beginning of the 2000's.

It is interesting to reinforce that the scientific-technologic themes in commercially successful audiovisual productions have extrapolated science fiction and reached numerous genres, including action and adventure, such as movies and series about superheroes ('Ironman', 'The Avengers', 'Batman'), medical and police dramas ("CSI", "House", "NCIS", "Grey's Anatomy"), comedy ("The Big Bang Theory"), and horror ("The Walking Dead"), among others. Such phenomenon is, paradoxically, followed by an opposed movement. Narratives in which symbolic elements related to magic and the supernatural (fantasy) predominate in their imaginaries have attained practically the same popularity, especially in the movies of the 2000's (ANAZ, 2016, p. 94).

Such phenomenon is the reflection of the successful sharing between creators and audiences of an imaginary in which the "re-enchantment" of the world started to share space with the un-enchantment of the scientific "absolute truth" (ANAZ, 2016, p. 103).

In addition, the mytheme of combat – with its symbolisms of light vs dark, freedom vs oppression, desertion, rebel, vigilante and exiled is associated to practically all the superhuman characters and the immoderation – with its elements of corruption, mass destruction

Extinction, totalitarianism, negotiation, institutions/corporations - predominantly to the antagonists (villains).

Product of the combination of these mythemes, the archetype of the superhuman in the contemporary cinematography is related mainly with the archetype of the hero, in its different variations - from the vigilante hero in the Dark Knight trilogy to the passive hero in the Hobbit trilogy; the mentor, as Gandalf (*The Hobbit*); and the shadow, as Loki (*The Avengers*), among others.

This redundancy of the superhuman can be an empiric indicator of the interest of global audiences, in the last decades, for narratives that transcend the historic (particular and profane) and reach the mythical level (universal and sacred).

The contemporary demand for mythical universes

The significant success of adventure and action movies that are combined with sci-fi and fantasy is a 2000's phenomenon, but its roots are in the first decades of the Blockbuster Era, that has its first landmark with the successes *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), *Star Wars: A New Hope* (George Lucas, 1977), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977) and *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978).

Anaz (2016, p. 95) shows that the 80's consolidate the rise of themes associated with modern science and technology, with half the most successful titles dealing with these themes - such as, for example, *ET* (Steven Spielberg, 1981), *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985) and *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989). In the 90's, 40% of the movies with bigger annual box offices have magic as the main theme in their narratives.

Thus, there is a progressive growth in participation of symbolic elements associated to science and technology and to its contrary, magic, in the imaginaries of the successful narratives (Table 5).

In the phase preceding the Blockbuster Era, the so-called "New Hollywood" or "American New Wave", in which prevails the emphasis on realism, creative freedom and the influence of counterculture ideas, the theme which predominate in the most popular movies worldwide were more realistic protagonists and antagonists without superhuman abilities, such as in *Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), *Butch Cassidy*

and the Sundance Kid (George Hill, 1969) and who's afraid of Virginia Woolf (Mike Nichols, 1966), for example.

Table 5. Participation of themes related to science and technology and magic in the imaginary of movies with bigger box offices in the 60's and the 2010's.

Decade	Science and technology	Magic	Total
1960	20%	0	20%
1970	20%	10%	30%
1980	50%	5%	55%
1990	40%	20%	60%
2000	30%	40%	70%
2011-2015	65%	15%	80%

Source: Anaz (2016, p. 95).

This change points to the possibility that the superhuman as central theme in the imaginaries of one of the successful movie lineage from the 2000's is an index of wider phenomenon: the construction of contemporary mythical universes, in a process of mythologic update that would have in the cinema one of its biggest platforms.

Not that the update of myths is a recent phenomenon, nor the cinema is its protagonist.

Durand, Jung, Eliade, Campbell and Armstrong are some of the intellectuals that identified a re-mythologization in Modern Age, paradoxically the age who proposed to be the most de-mythologizing one, with the predominance of paradigms of classic science, positivism, functionalism and historical materialism. Durand (2004), for example, indicates that in the second half of the 19th century, in the boom of positivism, there was a rehabilitation of archetypical and mythical images in the scientific, philosophic and artistic scene, with the productions of Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Émile Zola, Freud and Thomas Mann, among others.

The myth, discourse that rationalize the imaginary, belongs in the process of biopsychosocial balance of the human being in the world. To deal with the existential anguishes of the self-conscience of death and time (DURAND, 2002) and give meaning and value to life (ARMSTRONG, 2005), homo sapiens, from the cognitive revolution that occurred about 70,000 and 45,000 years ago that gave the ability to imagine what is not there (HARARI, 2015), develops narratives that give meaning to their existence and the things in the world, narratives that are articulated in imaginary orders, such as mythologies.

Intellectual who studied religion and one of the influences in Durand's studies, who participated with him of the circle of Eranos,¹³ Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) understands that the archaic man, the one who imagined the founding myths, feels indissolubly connected to the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms and lives according to extra-human models (according to reality and the law, with the platonic archetypal models), while the modern man tries to connect primarily to the scientific view of history (ELIADE, 1992a). For the first, time is predominantly cyclical, with the same repetition (eternal return) of model facts and ways of acting established by mythical entities; for the second, it is predominantly linear and irreversible. "Predominantly" because, both for one or the other, the linearity of history and the mythical eternal return are present.

Thus, even with the disenchantment/demagification of the world (Max Weber) carried out through centuries by monotheistic religious ethics and by the modern scientific thinking – with its consequences of loss of religious meaning (and reconnection) of life and human and technical submission (Martin Heidegger) -, the contemporary man, in order to tolerate or escape historic time, seeks to reconnect to the myth and mythical time. Some mass communicational phenomena, such as the successful cinematographic franchises hereby analyzed, bring

13 Cycle of conferences that began in 1933 that gathered intellectuals of different fields of knowledge to make interdisciplinary reflections about symbols, the imaginary and the myth. Amongst the participants of the meetings of Eranos were Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, Gilbert Durand, Henry Corbin, Joseph Campbell, Erwin Schrödinger, Heinrich Zimmer and Max Knoll, among others.

indications of a remythologization or mythologic update that surrounds the contemporary desacralized culture, being, as we observed here, the superhuman as central symbolic element common to all of them.

To Soares (2010, p. 31),

The modern man, as desacralized as he intends to be, can't see himself as free from the original mythic experience, even if it resonates, in the current days [...], no longer as the direct voice of gods, but as the oblique echoes of the own ancestral human psyche.

A good part of the successful products in popular culture brings indications of the necessity of the contemporary man for the myth – the same necessity their ancestors had -, being the cinema one of the sources to satisfy it. One can think, thus, that the narratives (cinematographic and otherwise, fictional or non-fictional), operate in two levels:

- In the historic level, more immediate, in the field of society's ego and superego, in which time is profane – continuous, linear and irreversible and the representation of phenomena is particular; and
- In the mythical level, more remote, in the field of the anthropologic unconscious, in which time is sacred – cyclical/eternal return – and the representation of phenomena is universal.

Many narratives of cinematographic production seem to desire the mythical level due to this operation of the idea of archetypes (Jung) and establishing a universality for the story

Which results in processes of cultural identification with the audience that surpass geographic and ethnical frontiers and become, thus, an important factor for the commercial success of the movie. This phenomenon can be observed even in non-fictional narratives.

Generally, the mythical level can be compared with Aristotle's poetic, to whom History is limited to show what happened, while poetry shows what could happen, turning poetry into a more philosophical and virtuous activity than History (ARISTÓTELES, 2008, p. 54).

In the audience's point of view, the demand for narratives that emphasize the mythic can be a result of a combination: of seeking, of being

human, of a biopsychosocial balance – due to the anguish of self-consciousness of death and time; of the urgency of giving meaning to life and establishing connections with the origins of the human being on the planet and with the macro-cosmos in which they are inserted in; and the attempt of escaping the “terrors of History” (ELIADE, 1992a).

In the last decades, cinema has been satisfying part of this demand with movies that update founding myths in new mythical universes, in which the superhuman is highlighted as central symbolic elements, even if with different qualities.

Image 3. Basic scheme of sources of content in narratives.



Source: My own making.

Conclusions

In the first part of the investigation, it was possible to identify that the movies that combine action, adventure and sci-fi and/or fantasy predominated in the popular taste globally between 2001 and 2015.

We reinforce, once again, that the success of these movies is not the only product of the imaginary created and shared, but also from factors such as marketing strategies and distribution adopted, the cast’s notoriety and the use of visual effects, among other elements.

After thinking about this aspect, in this study, the mythocritical analysis was centered in a representative sampling of these commercially

successful movies and revealed that the most redundant symbolic elements in them converge to five mythemes: combat, non-human, magic, immoderation and science.

The mythemes, in turn, converge to a symbolic element that is common to all the narratives analyzed: the archetype of the superhuman, defined, in a wide manner, by a being gifted with abilities (scientific/technologic and/or magic-supernatural and/or morphological) that go beyond human nature. Thus, the representations of the superhuman in the movies analyzed appear as a product of modern science, gifted with magic powers and/or as something of non-human nature.

In the hypothesis hereby developed, the redundancy of the archetypical image of the superhuman becomes an empirical indicator of a demand (or an adhesion) of the audiences for themes that extrapolate realism and history and are inserted in mythical universes.

Such phenomenon can indicate a movement of mythological update (re-mythologization or re-enchantment) in progress in the imaginary of the contemporary society. Thus, it is possible that the imaginaries shared by the narratives of mainstream cinema seek to answer the demand for biopsychosocial balance of the being in the world (Durand) and, also, they can be attempts of the man of escaping historicist reductionism (Eliade) they are subject in the modern world.

Mythocritics also indicated that the demand, in the field of the audience, for narratives that bring up the mythical level have been answered by cinematographic production (creation) that link to the archetype of the super-human two essential mythical lessons:

- punishment for immoderation (hybris), through the action of a being that is (or puts him/herself) above a corrupted world; and
- the triumph, in the fight of opposed forces, of the action that (re) conducts everything to balance and harmony of Cosmo.

If we take as reference the classification of regimens of images proposed by Durand (2002) – in which images that compose an imaginary

are from the daytime (heroic) or from the nighttime (dramatic or anti-frasic) -, the mythical lessons (to punish and to triumph) indicate that the archetypical image of the superhuman in the narratives analyzed are linked mainly with the apolineal and prometheal myths and it is filled by daytime images, that are ruled by the logic of combat, purification, separation and elevation.

Such results, that point to the adhesion of a big part of global audiences to mythical lessons hereby identified, do not mean necessarily that these narratives operate, similarly the founding myths, as proponents of models of conduct in contemporary society. To check if such phenomenon occurs, the findings of this study must be seen only as a starting point for future studies that investigate the impact of these narratives and the imaginary they share in the perspective of reception.

Another possible conclusion in the field of this investigation is that, in order to reach the universality of their symbolic elements from the mythical narrative level, the successful cinematographic production between 2001 and 2015 analyzed here (movies that mix adventure, action, science fiction and/or fantasy) explore predominantly one of the narrative axes and the representation (daytime/nighttime) in the field of imaginary, resulting in homogenizing themes and characters, without fully exploring the archetypical potential of characters, including the superhuman.

The mythical narrative level offers possibilities of constructing more complex characters and themes from a balance in the use of the three axes of representation. Although some of the narratives analyzed explore, in some moments, images aligned with the nighttime/mystic and the nighttime/dramatic axes, ruled by the logics of rest, balance, harmony and diachronic integration between heroic (separation) and mystical (mixture), they make it in a timid way.

In order to make a qualitative leap in terms of the imaginary they share, the challenge for this successful combination of genres is in to create movies with heterogenizing representations that fully develop possibilities that the archetypes and myths offer to narratives.

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