CULTURAL FUNCTION OF ART AND SCIENCE IN ODYSSEY OF HUMANKIND: “PSYCHOANALYSIS OF THE MOVIE INTERSTELLAR”

İNSANIN YOLCULUK SERÜVENİNDE BİLİMİN VE SANATIN KÜLTÜREL İŞLEVİ: “İNTERSTELLAR FİLMİNİN PSİKANALİZİ”

Ali Barış KAPLAN

İstanbul Medipol University, Communication Faculty, Media and Visual Arts Department İstanbul / Turkey

Abstract: It is possible to take endeavour of mankind in his odyssey in searching for eligible better living niches and fields a very far back until his mythological narratives and the fantastic world of tales. Nevertheless, at the present day, particularly the cinematic visual narration, that is formed and assisted by science and technology, has been reiteratively raising and dealing with the odyssey of human being based on survival motive in exploration of new worlds. The movie Interstellar (2014) is constituted and evoked an “esperance, curiosity and interest” about to find a new home in its theme by citing to the familiar known symboles/images, and also by utilization of scientific references. Film has used its epic narrative, which edited as a motion picture that utilized by archetypes of collective unconscious, for composing and evoking the emotions of “fancy, curiosity, interest, hope and collective eros/affection”. As a subject of this study the movie Interstellar is an epic work of art with its theme structure that confide in science and putting emphasis on the importance of love and faith in mankind’s odyssey, has valuable necessity to be debated and explicated. On the frame of these assessments this study intrinsically analyzes the film psychoanalytically based on archetypal motifs.

Key Words: Culture, Odyssey, Archetype, Movie Interstellar

Doi: 10.17361/UHIVE.2017.1.0006

(1) Correspondent Author: Ali Barış KAPLAN, İstanbul Medipol University, Communication Faculty, Media and Visual Arts Department İstanbul/Turkey, abkaplan@medipol.edu.tr, Geliş Tarihi / Received: 28.02.2017, Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 11.03.2017, Makalenin Türü: Type of article ( Araştırma – İnceleme / Research - Analysis) Etk Kurul Raporu: Yok – None of Ethics Committee
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to figure out the cultural function of art and science by analyzing a science-fiction film text in terms of archetypal motifs used in the film as a common narrative form. In this context, one of the significant movies, Interstellar, is being analyzed considering its narrative structure and archetypal signifiers.

This research, referring archetypes depicted in the film, is trying to understand the function of the science-fiction film as an art form by taking advantage of psyché-analytical approach.

The adventure of humankind in time is narrated by epics, fairy tales, paintings, music, and movies, in short, all narratives of oral and written cultures. And human is the never changing problematic of the narrative forms which changes in their content and form. For understanding and comprehension of their interior reality at first and then exterior reality, humans have motivation for positioning their existences in time and always in search for other potentials through the languages they have invented. So as to surpass the ever after feeling of lack for something and loneliness, “science and art” which are again invented by humans, who are in pursuit of new ways, have been the utmost guides or companions to them in this process of search. Because “science and art” have an understanding on life towards the search/finding/exploration of a reality which transcends the existing by the alienation from the given. And the existence of science and art with this perception and comprehension – unless they are in the hands of hegemonic societies – will produce technological outputs or intellectual works on behalf of all humanity and the collective. Interstellar, a science-fiction movie, is a text that should be taken seriously in this respect.

Under the guidance of quantum physics and the theory of relativity, Interstellar searches for the possibility of transportation of the humanity to other galaxies. In its fictive narrative, by making reference to both science and mythology, it comes up with a perception which transcends linear time frame. While it sets forth a narrative which enables the oscillation of the humanity in time, it constitutes a consciousness for the transcendence of the perception of a stable and human-centered world. To produce this consciousness, it benefits from scientific knowledge (pure physics and psychoanalysis) and art.

On the Basis of Theoretical Fundamentals:
“Odyssey of Human being, Cultural Mediums of Re-production and Storytellers”
“...the History, every time and first of all, is a choice and is to be the limits determined by that choice” (Barthes, 2006: 23).

The word “culture” goes back to Latin *colere* verb meant “to till, to cultivate”. The main contribution of Romans to the concept of culture was thereby the word itself. But they attributed a concrete and technical meaning to the word as reclaiming the land for the cultivation. And the word “cultus” (cult), meant to worship God, which comes from the root *colere* shows the closeness and coherence of religion and culture. German lawyer and historian Pufendorf brings forth an important description to explain the concept of culture in seventeenth century. “Culture gives every individual the opportunity to have a really humane life by the virtue of the contribution of other humans, inventions and works; their own intellectual activities and efforts; and with all that divine inspiration.” (Dollot, 1994: 17-22-25-26).

Even in the early nineteenth century, a scholar had the opportunity to be able to have a comprehension of the totality of scientific knowledge of his/her time. But nowadays in which sciences are separated in different branches and sub-disciplines, it has become difficult to master the knowledge outside their own disciplines. This case is also at issue in the comprehension of life of the ordinary man. As technological development which is the result of scientific advances changes the everyday life, it also affects the concept of culture.

The means of communication has evolved into the means of masses to express themselves. The firstly emerged mass media such as newspapers, periodicals and magazines has affected significantly cultural environment and cross-cultural/interpersonal communication. And then the mass media such as cinema, radio, television and nowadays internet and new media has taken place in social life. The audio-visual means of communications which bear the fascination of images have the power to present the possibilities and novelities that people formerly could not imagine. A new cultural environment has been formed since the mass media has not only affected the masses but also has the ability of economic exploitation. “The cultural industries” has emerged as a sector which “produce and sell culture” that tends towards people’s av-
verage taste and even disrupts their ability of thinking. Today the communication and conscious industry has an important role in the signification of reality. Here it is the “conscious industry” that is the medium between man and reality. The products of conscious industry don’t present narratives intended to understand life and to criticize and think. On the contrary, it has an attitude of the adoption of life as is and “forgetting”. This attitude prevents humans to get the ability of perception and comprehension, in other words a mental structure which is cognitive. Montaigne's words “The real bother of our fathers who take care and spend money is to make us have a foresighted and virtuous scientific mind rather than to obtain more knowledge” indicates that the obtained knowledge becomes meaningful when it makes the human relations better (Dollot, 1994: 53).

Today, the artistic, literary or scientific works are released to the market by the concern of profit. Modern culture should enable to establish a high-level interpersonal communication environment which contains all fields of thought and reason instead of a culture based on the expertise and the engineering. Today collective cultural forms are produced by the mediation of cinema, television and new media platforms. “The most important feature of today’s mass media which addresses heterogeneous audiences without any spatial link is the ability of being everywhere at the same time and transfer of message at the time of incident (Kaya, 1985: 13). But according to Dollot, the real cultural development of a society is measured by the quality of the members and the relations between the members of it. And the culture which doesn’t give the opportunity of the participation of a higher life has the characteristic of a caricature of the real culture. This life and cultural wealth is beyond reach unless you refer to works of big creators which take place in historical process (Dollot, 1994: 71-77).

Centuries ago many artisans and symbol producers such as epic writers, fairy tale and story tellers, gravestone makers, lead-light glaziers, ceramists, coppersmiths, stone carvers, carpet weavers and icon painters who garnish temple walls was producing products that addressed to collective unconscious and were familiar to everyone. Thus, the old storytellers revealed a narrative corresponding to the expectations of people by producing recognizable forms and images. These narratives (texts/forms) have functioned for the continuity and adoption of life experienced and therefore they have used the common images and symbols of collective unconscious. Today mass culture products are not creative, but multiplier and transponder. Mass culture which expresses the togetherness of ambiguous, artificial, mobile, rootless, incompatible,
variable, consumerist crowds and humans within this culture are not cognitive and they feel that they belong in nowhere, almost they have been deterritorialized. Since the culture created by people and also popular culture are produced by mass media today, all narratives are ideological, in meta state and they are no longer the subjects of culture.

As the social life and human relations change, reality also becomes sophisticated and the perception of life requires more improved mental processes. A cultural homogenisation which imposes an ideology of consumption manifests itself in the painting, language, music and visual arts. This strategy of cultural homogenisation has been ongoing through the narrative forms which are basic and repetitive in content and form. Like technological products are consumed as outputs of science, consumption of art products also has evolved into fetishism (Oskay, 2000: 76-83).

In the given culture, the intensity of the necessity “to possess and to consume” and the transformation of art/science into a temporary pleasure object prevents the art/science and technology from fulfilling their real functions. At this point, in order to move the adventure of humanity up, art and science should be kept away from the ideology of given culture which imposes “consumption and forgetting” and liberate themselves from this. The improvement of life and the possibility of a better life should not only be reduced to material dimension. The adventure of search for the better and migration of human beings not only mean a spatial change. Since the search and the phenomenon of relocation/migration also contain an intellectual change and potential, it should be evaluated that art and science/technology’s potential to carry the human beings to a better living space (and a cultural environment). Today’s human being is used to move together as a participant in various displays. Nowadays, scientific researches and arts for mass also emerge as teamwork. The participation of modern man in various displays and rituals essentially occurs as a passive participation. Since these rituals are not towards to understand/criticize the outputs of science, technology and art but to consume. Today, the lifestyle of human being has been programmed, packed and put in front of him/her as a guide by the means of communication. The awareness of events and facts around him/her and the transformation of his/her attitude and behavior are beyond his/her own will, they are in the hands of hegemonic powers which have all the means of communication.

As a very important element of culture and science, technology has a function that drags people behind it. While scientific researches stay as studies of which people don’t understand and know entirely, technology attracts
the attention of people since it is applicable to life and visible. Technology transforms material life completely, provides benefit and comfort, and is visible in daily life. Because of this, today’s man is closer to use/consume technology – since he/she is lack of mental acknowledgment – he/she is more distant and foreigner to science. At this point, the function of art is important. Art can stand by science in transfer of scientific knowledge, exploration of the new and production of a perception which transcends the given. Within this context, art has a function of setting out a common language and narrative with science in the transfer of scientific knowledge. An art text which benefits from common images and symbols (archetypes) incidental to collective unconscious has a potential to tell a scientific knowledge by narrating and create a scientific concern and belief. Precisely for this reason, our research case is Interstellar movie text.

Cultural Function of the Movie Interstellar: “Analysis of the Film Based on Archetypal Motifs”

“The history accelerates history, the society corrupts society, but also the evil which damages them both has its own historical substitution: the history and the society produce their own resistance against this damage.”

(Derrida, 2011: 271).

The human adventure ongoing for centuries has always been in pursuit of the better and new ways with epics, fairy tales, religious stories and sermons, manuscripts, the formal narratives of artisans, all forms of folk culture. On the one hand they have grabbed the given life; on the other hand they have expressed their hope for a better life with the implicit or explicit forms. And today humans both integrate to cultural environment and still keep the hope of the search for a better world by using the means of communication and applying these means (such as newspaper, radio, television, cinema and new media). In this context, Interstellar has importance as the output of science and art and especially with regard to its wonder-provoking in scientific knowledge.

The movie which uses familiar codes of the collective unconscious and refers to archetypical motifs has an important function in recreation/exploration of a man which “believes/trusts and wonders” science. While the movie as a modern narrative storyteller uses many archetypal motifs – the coming end of the world and the importance of science and love in the journey of finding a new living space – in setting out its narrative, it puts “love” in the center of story.

As the material fabric of life changes, the cultural environment also varies and corresponding to this the human relationship with
reality changes. Indeed, the appearance of reality differs by space-time and culture. Every truth is a truth of a certain period/section and every knowledge is an extension of its own epoch. In this case, the truth is a form of conversation that humans make with their own selves through the techniques of communication invented by them (Postman, 1994: 32-34). Then cinema is only one of these colloquial languages now while fairy tale was in the past.

The art of storytelling is as old as the beginning of the use of languages. Before the invention of writing, stories as the forms of traditional oral culture had been transferring from mouth to mouth and been constituted. The first stories had become epics from the catchy parts of big events in ancient ages. The epic of Noah’s flood, Sumerians’ the epic of Gilgamesh are examples of this. Some stories had been detached from oral epics and written by adding new events. The poetry form had been mostly used in old literature and hence in traditional narratives, stories and epics (Çağdaş Dünya Ansiklopedisi, Cilt 8: 57-58).

In the field of literature, the narration of human adventure ongoing with poetry, epic and fairy tale has been reached to a higher level by novel. And then the texts has been produced in order to understand human being, show the dilemmas of human being and change its destiny through the means of audiovisual communication’s narratives which have critical characteristics. And the cinema as a narrative form which uses the power of visuality describes and pictures the relocation/migration of humanity on the way of exploration of the new and the different. Hence the sample of our study, Interstellar refers to both mythology and the language of symbol (the common language which is given to humanity by historicity) with its epical story and describes the humankind’s adventure of going on a space travel by the hope of finding a new home.

Levi-Strauss stated that societies are never alone, but in strict relationship with each other and each part of humanity contains many large and small communities in itself. Strauss also pointed out the differences originated from closeness. Individual wills such as being own self and being different are examples of this. He remarked that even the tradition is developed by the will of exploration of the new and practice of it and becomes norm within the process. Here, the source of both change and tradition are originated from the will of “not being fallen behind other societies”. In this context, the differentiation and diversity of cultures should lead us to examine the common themes/symbols/languages and relations which unites them (Levi-Strauss, 1997: 24). Strauss, one of the founders of
Cultural Anthropology, pointed out that the codes of symbol language which is the output of the mankind’s common adventure should be analyzed by examination of tradition, kinship relations, myths and symbols.

Indeed, Jung, the founder of Analytical Psychology, also stated that the collective unconscious forms a common scheme and language. Our perceptions are constituted by the psychological processes articulated to physiological processes and they are rather cultural. The way of understanding human being is to present the elements which determines his/her perception about reality. In this context, the mental course which Jung called as collective unconscious should be deciphered and analyzed what the archetypical images say us today. Archetypes are the primary/primordial images which are formed in mind to signify something or a phenomenon. Therefore, they are the primordial forms that sign a meaning (Jung, 2004: 13; Jung, 2005: 20). Then, understanding human being and its problem in the present time is only possible by understanding his/her “oscillation within space and time”. Perhaps for this reason in Interstellar the communication and relationship between daughter and father requires a perception and insight beyond real time. The communication between the father who goes on a space travel and pass into another time zone by passing through a worm hole and the daughter who stays in the world (within the given time-space) is not only possible by the oscillation of the communication codes but also the oscillation of the “love and belief” that are affective/intuitive faculties within space/time. The movie fictionalizes its narrative by feeding the scientific (quantum physics and the theory of relativity) and the artistic (dramatizations and collective themes such as love/belief/wonder) with each other.

Many variables such as demographic, economic and cultural factors, geographical and climatic reasons such even as catastrophes that we can count may cause the emergence of phenomenon of migration; it whether occurs on Earth or towards to an exoplanet in other galaxy. Here, the real problem is disruption of balance between all these factors. In the case of an imbalance, humans whose established order was broken down migrate and try to improve and pursue their order in new worlds that they reached or explored. Therefore, migration occurs in the case of the incompetence of the given cultural environment for humans like as in the movie of Interstellar. In the movie, the world is no longer sufficient for feeding its habitants. And the sons of a world which loses its plant cover, vitality, the diversity of species, fertility and is about to die and of the last piece of land that fights for survival go on a space journey to find a new home. The cause of this journey is the will
to survive as well as the belief about the existence of other lives and the desire for discovering the different. This desire is rooted from scientific knowledge that is quantum physics. Our heroes make scientific knowledge (theoretical one) visible (empirical) in the practice of the movie. The hero who passes through a worm hole finds a habitable home in another time dimension as well as turns back to the world which he leaves behind and communicates with his daughter.

According to Freud, there is no time in unconscious, the opposites can be together. In unconscious something can be found in multiple places at the same time as well as disguise as multiple outlooks. In this framework, Freud considers “dreams” and “symbols” that signs meaning to us as a royal road to the unconscious. (See Freud, 2001; Kaplan-Ünal, 2011: 128-129). In fact, Interstellar movie text itself and the director as the creator dreams on behalf of audience and humanity by referring to the gains of history (science, technology and the language of symbol). With the narrative structure corresponding to the common human fantasy, the movie carries man to the universes of multiple time and spaces.

In both worlds of fairy tales and science-fictions, it is told that the adventure of humans’ journey by transcending their world that is narrow for themselves. During the journey, the hero struggles with the problem of conflict/settlement derived from the confrontation with unfamiliar worlds (Roloff-SeeBlen, 1995: 8-10). In a fairy tale, it is given that the process of the conflict with the evils of the hero who gets away from the present situation and goes to another place and then the path to his success. The main reasons to get away from home are to fill a gap, to get something and to save ones from the hassle. And there are companions which helps the hero, who sets off on journey voluntary or mandatory, during the journey (Propp, 1985: 36-45).

The main element that helps the hero in the movie Interstellar is the belief on scientific knowledge. The thing what both the hero and his daughter who would get older as a scientist believe intuitively is the knowledge that the journey in time and gravity problem will
be achieved and terminated, and a new world will be explored. The common motif which connects (they can communicate) the father and the daughter with each other is belief and love. The companions to both figures, being our heroes are intuitive power and scientific knowledge. Archetypal motifs are never terminated but transformed. The companion motif beside the Man Hunter in archaic periods such as dog, horse etc. is for Interstellar era just turned into a monolithic robot with artificial intelligent Tars/Case that at the back always follows, accompanies, assists and obeys the hero, Cooper. (See Picture 2)

The main archetypal motifs used in the movie Interstellar is as follows:

“Love/Eros” archetype is the main motif which connects the hero of the movie and the daughter with each other. In addition, the basic motivation of the space scientists and surely the chief hero who struggles for the salvation of the humanity is the goodness of collective, love and collective Eros.

There is the rescuer/savior hero motif in the movie. A former NASA pilot goes on a journey, sacrifices his own life and shows the courage of it on behalf of the salvation of humanity.

There is the companion archetypal motif in that the supporters accompany the rescuer hero during the journey. The companions to the hero are space scientists, astronauts, science/technology (Monolithic Robots Tars and Case) and intuitive power that help the hero. (See Picture 3)

It should be mentioned here that the spiritual power accompanied to the hero Dr. Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) in the form of archetypal anima image is presented by daughter Murphy (Jessica Chastain), Miss Brand (Anne Hathaway) and hero’s emotion longing home (earth) and daughter. The rescuer anima image of mother Earth is reanimated and rebirth in the form of constructed Cooper-base that accompanies to mankind as a new home or Elysium. The archetypal hierogamos image of hero longing to is accompanied by Miss Brand and both are reborn in ‘nova anima’ image - in new home- in another planet in another galaxy.
There are the challenges which the hero copes with during the journey and the evil motifs; are those Dr. Mann, black hole Gargantua and communication problematic in Tesseract. The movie exposes the life and death struggle between Mann, described as a bad astronaut because of his selfishness and Cooper, the good guy and the rescuer by making Kabul and Abel mythological references. (See Picture 4a and b, and also 6b)

And the world which loses its function of being a habitable “home/lap/space” is a sign of an archetypal motif of negative mother. The humankind goes on a journey to find an inclusive habitat for themselves. Therefore, they look for a positive mother who/which is a “life-giving, fertile, nurturing and protective” one. Fatal sand storms and dying ecosystems indicate mother Earth’s the other horrible face (negative anima/mother) in term of archetypal Janus motif. (See Picture 5)
In the movie, watch (time), book and library are used as an archetypal motif that has a very important meaning. The book is a metaphorical sign of all cultural heritages which the humanity has accumulated for thousands of years. The book as a product of mankind’s abstraction capability is not only a cultural heritage but also a kind of organic living being which also has a psychic side. In brief, the book is the archetypal signifier/motif of science, communication and language. As previously mentioned above the common motif which connects the father and the daughter with each other through library, watch and books out is belief and love. And a very catalyst in this communication was just gravity and the language of Morse alpha-beta code. Therefore herein the watch’s tic-tac code of Morse in an oscillation mode within time and space via the gravitational force behaves as if Cupids with arrows whose are the carriers and companions of collective Eros, love-affection and memories between father and daughter, and with remained entire humanity left at back. (See picture 6a and b)

CONCLUSION

"Maybe we are late for the end of history but it is not possible to miss the beginning of the history...The beginning is always seen as it happened previously for the ones who start from reverse direction" Derrida (Sim, 2000: 48-49)

As Derrida stated in the words above quoted, the human perception differs by time and space and our perceptions constitute historicity. Then the historical is in fact a choice and beyond this choice there are also potentials that we didn’t choose. The history is not completed and the history can be recreated by a critical manner at every time. The skepticism of Derrida in philosophy provides us a possibility that the meaning, the history and the reality can be infinitely recreated. Because the reality is also relative like “time and space” which its context is.

Here the movie Interstellar problematizes the human perception of “time-space” by making scientific references and investigates the potentials of new life. The movie also opens the perception of reality up for discussion in such a method. It reveals a narrative as to the human thought is plural and, in this context, the reality is also plural. The basis of our perception is human thought. And also the basic
forms of thought are everything that orders the universe of cultural data. Then to understand the present and predict the future it is necessary to understand and examine how humans think in historical process. At this very point, the archetypal motifs used in the movie become important. The common symbols (archetypal motifs) used in fairy tales, mythological stories and different narrative forms are also used in this movie. Thus, the movie which projects the future of the humankind by referring scientific knowledge doesn’t forget the historicity of humankind. The method of the movie to understand humans is a holistic form and perception that replace them everywhere in time. Thus, the perception of “the common adventure of humanity” as a whole is created in micro and macro cosmos.

Interstellar gives the audience the hope of a better future by arousing “curiosity” on science in the journey of finding other worlds instead of the world which loses its function of being a living space. The culture that the time brings as a whole is like a common language. And this movie suggests a new “consciousness” for a freer new world in which “the science, technology, art, belief, labor and conscience” is not exploited – on the contrary is functioned for the sake of the collective goodness – in one day in the future.

REFERENCES


DOLLOT, L., (1994). Kitle Kültürü ve Bireysel Kültür, çev. Özlem Nudralı, İstanbul: İletişim


OSKAY, Ü., (2000). Tek Kişilik Haçlı Seferleri, İstanbul: İnkılap


Author’s Note: This article is modified and enlarged version of the paper that is presented in International Symposium on Migration & Culture 1-3 December 2016 Amasya/Turkey. For the symposium proceedings book see: http://gockultur.amasya.edu.tr/