Little Known Film Prompts Significant Cultural Insight:

A Depth Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

The chance viewing of a film never released in theatres, captivated me for unknown reasons, and a deliberate consideration of its psychic pull on me through a depth psychological lens led not only to a new personal insight regarding the masculine and feminine, but responding to the film's continued emotional impact led to my seeing something new in other blockbuster science fiction movies and ultimately in the larger culture. I use the lens of depth psychology with a focus on the work of C.G. Jung, an important contributor to the field, because I am looking beneath the literal reading of film, the masculine and feminine, and certain cultural phenomena. In this essay, I suggest that the seeming unconscious movement toward a new valuing of the feminine and masculine detached from the genders of female and male can be seen playing out in the larger culture, for example, in areas like organic farming and neighborhood revitalization, and this is important because becoming more conscious about this could lead to the use of this lens for addressing many cultural issues.

Keywords: C.G. Jung, archetype, shadow, anima and animus, masculine and feminine, psychology and film, feminism.

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An unexpected personal insight gained from viewing a little-known movie accidently found on Netflix, and never released into theatres, called *In Your Eyes* (Hill, 2014) led to my seeing a theme in other more popular movies and then relating this theme to something going on in the larger culture. In this essay, I suggest that this dynamic reflects something important going on, and becoming more conscious about where it seems to be showing up could lead to using it as a fresh perspective for solving problems new and old, individual and cultural.

The dynamic this essay considers includes two pieces, the first an increased balancing of what could be considered feminine and masculine approaches or tendencies, and the second a gradual detachment of what is considered feminine and masculine from the genders of female and male. This coming together of masculine and feminine is a critical part of problem resolution in the films discussed in this essay, more striking in *In Your Eyes* (Hill, 2014) and less obvious in the more popular films. On a cultural level, one might not think the issue of the feminine and masculine has much to do with fields like organic farming, urban gardening, and neighborhood revitalization, but I suggest trends such as these reflect an unconscious collective desire for a balanced approach between the masculine and feminine, terms for which I will provide clarification shortly.

The lens through which I consider this topic is depth psychology, and I refer to specific concepts developed by C.G. Jung, a major contributor to the field, which has as its starting point that there is not only an unconscious part of our total personality that impacts our personal experience, but that there also exists a collective unconscious, which contains deep drives and patterns of experience that have always been part of what

it means to be human, these being referred to by Jung as archetypes (Jung, 1990, p. 463). Jung's notion of archetypes is useful, because it provides a way of relating disorienting cultural changes to universal needs that do not change over time, even if how they specifically manifest does (Jung, 1966, p. 97). This concept provides a framework for considering how the dynamic I see related to a movement toward valuing a balance of feminine and masculine approaches is a reflection of an emerging new manifestation of something that has always been part of the experience of being human. I call on the specific Jungian archetypes of shadow, anima, and animus to find and articulate the meaning behind my experience of the film *In Your Eyes* (Hill, 2014) and importance of the insight when once connected to cultural phenomena.

For weeks, I was perplexed by the impact this film had on me. Whereas *In Your Eyes* (Hill, 2014) is categorized as a paranormal romance, for me the movie played out as a psychological journey on several levels. Clearly, each character was overcoming some kind of personal crisis, but for me the characters merged into one psyche, eventually seeing it as a mirror of my own, prompting me to revisit Jung's archetypes of anima and animus, which deal with the feminine and masculine. Only then could I could make sense of the pull this film had on me, ultimately leading to my applying my personal insight to other movies and to the larger culture.

This insight is important because if it is true that there is an unconscious desire for an increased valuing and balancing of the feminine and masculine, and if it is true that this approach can generate new solutions to some problems as can be seen in the examples I offer, then becoming more conscious about this could lead to being more deliberate in using this fresh perspective when considering other challenges. For

example, viewing the challenges of urban education, an area that has received much attention for several decades, through the lens of balancing the feminine and the masculine may generate new ideas.

The Story and Characters in the Film

In the opening scene, a girl about eight is sledding down a hill about to crash into a tree; her panicked mother watches. The scene changes to a boy about eight sitting at a classroom desk. As the girl approaches the tree, it seems like she has double vision as she sees through the eyes of the boy sitting at his desk. The scene changes to the boy who appears pleasantly surprised at the "A" he received on his homework, when suddenly he grips his desk and a kind of double vision causes him to see the approaching tree. The girl smashes into the tree, and the boy's body flails onto the floor as if he has smashed into the tree as well. The girl's attentive mother is horrified as she helplessly watches, whereas the teacher and children in the boy's classroom seem emotionally disconnected to what has happened.

The viewer is now projected about 20 years into the future. The grown woman – Rebecca – appears to be out of place as she goes through the motions of being at the side of her successful doctor husband during an important fundraising event. The grown man – Dylan – has just gotten out of prison and the conversation with his parole officer leaves one feeling that he is stuck in a self-fulfilling cycle of low expectations. He has little motivation to do anything other than visit the local bar, where predictably the man finds himself in a brawl as he tries to resist an offer to do the type of illegal work that landed him in prison previously. One feels a sense of déjà vu as the woman's body flails to the floor in the middle of the fundraiser at the same time the man is getting beat up in the bar.

Up to this next scene, the existence of the other has not been conscious, but now begins a growing consciousness of the other. Rebecca is in an upscale store in an urban area and experiences the double vision again. She stumbles and leaves the store, feeling as if she is going crazy, collapsing onto the sidewalk just outside the door, saying "Stop it!" and "I'm going . . ." (Hill, 2014*)*. Dylan is driving a pick-up truck in a rural area, simultaneously experiences the double vision, stops his truck on the highway, gets out, collapses on the ground in front of the truck, exclaiming, "You're . . . real!?". The next moment is a dramatic one, as they hear each other's voice and see through each other's eyes. Over the years, they have had an inkling of each other's presence, but there is something significant about their discovering each other through voice and vision at the very moment they have each reached a climax in their personal crises.

Over the next few weeks, the characters carry on a secret relationship without ever meeting through the voice they hear in their head, through seeing the other in their mirror reflection, and by feeling the other through touching their own bodies. What appears to be a psychic love affair is disrupted when they can no longer keep secret the impact that they are having on each other. As their newfound confidence seeps into the way they exist in the world, their new ways of being are perceived as threats by Rebecca's husband and Dylan's parole officer. Leading up to the movie's first climax, Rebecca hears Dylan's voice as she lay drugged in the sterile room within the mental hospital in which her doctor husband has committed her because he believes she is having an affair. Dylan finds a purpose in empowering her to escape from her prison, the world in which she feels trapped as symbolized by the mental hospital, and she is exuberant as she picks the lock of her room and punches her husband in the face as she

runs out of the hospital. Just minutes before, she admits to Dylan, “I’m afraid of him!” (Hill, 2014). Dylan overcomes the power of low expectations others have had of him, and Rebecca’s love for and belief in his strength and ability to save her empowers him to run from the police. The ending of the film culminates in their actual meeting and escape from Rebecca’s husband and the police as they hop a train for Canada, their future uncertain.

Film Offers Opening to the Archetypal Masculine and Feminine

The popularity of film in good times and bad is a testament to its impact on people (Slater, 2005, p. 1). Whereas sometimes one is conscious of the reason for a film’s emotional impact, other times one feels compelled to talk through their experience with others to identify what moved them. One may even be surprised about the impact of a movie and be unable to find words to articulate the meaning of the experience (Singh, 2011, p. 164). It is the latter that offers an opportunity to find some new insight, which could lead to a new attitude about one’s personal circumstances or larger culture. Film seems to be a place where people, perhaps because they are in a more relaxed state, become receptive to how the images on the screen are communicating with their total psyche. In fact, it seems the more intense a film’s impact and the more one is perplexed about it the bigger the opportunity to find something new. Jungian film theorist, Luke Hockley (2005) refers to the act of a viewer looking at the film images while simultaneously looking into themselves, and what erupts in the space between the viewer and the film, as the third image (pp. 142-143). In this case, Jung might suggest that the film is acting as a symbol, representing something not able to be articulated in any other way (Jung, 1966, p. 70). When this happens on a collective level, Jung referred to this as

visionary art as opposed to psychological art where we are conscious of the psychological story being played out (p. 89).

The impact of this film on me was significant on three different levels, beginning with identifying how the story reflected my current psychological journey, then connecting this to a more archetypal concept related to the masculine and feminine, which I saw reflected in a subtler way in recent science fiction blockbuster films, and finally, identifying how this dynamic might be showing up in the larger culture. First, whereas this film is labeled as a paranormal romance, I experienced the story between the male and female lead characters as relating more to what might be happening psychologically in a single psyche (Slater, 2005, p. 6). About halfway through the movie, I not only experienced each character as part of one total psyche, each character represented the unacknowledged feminine or masculine within one's psyche, toward the end of the movie, relating this to my needing to come to terms with the feminine and masculine parts of my psyche. The film prompted me to consciously wrestle with this dynamic, which then led to an awareness of examples of what a balanced mix of feminine and masculine might look like, leading to my seeing something in three blockbuster movies that I had not seen before, and ultimately leading to my seeing this in the larger culture.

Finding new insights requires becoming conscious of something that is unconscious, and film appears to be a potential gold mine and depth psychology an effective tool. For Jung, what allows a new insight to occur is the ability to consider opposing views, or to become aware of something one does automatically, especially when it feels like it is beyond one's control, and once conscious, a new attitude or insight

can result (Hockley, 2005, p. 47). For Jung, these new insights are partly prompted by the psyche's autonomous desire to grow (p. 48), and the process by which one reckons with opposites is called the transcendent function (Jung, 1983, p. 60). If Jung is correct about one's psyche having its own goals related to personal growth, or what he called individuation, and this growth occurs as a result of the integration of what was once unconscious but now is more conscious, it seems paying attention to situations that leave on bewildered can lead to important insights (Whitmont, 1969, p. 49).

Whereas the personal unconscious contains memories, events, and potentials related to that individual's personal experiences, the collective unconscious contains patterns of thought, feeling, and behaviors that transcend the personal and belong to all of humanity (Jung, 1983, p. 91). Jung calls these psychological instincts primordial images, motifs, and archetypes, saying they "are the most ancient and the most universal 'thought-forms' of humanity" (Jung, 1966, p. 66). There are potentially an unlimited number of archetypes, but in this essay I call on three: shadow, anima, and animus. For Jung, the shadow is where we hide all that we do not like about ourselves or do not want to remember, as well as the hidden potentials we do not see or accept in ourselves (Jung, 1983, p. 89). They are things in our unconscious that are related to our personal experience. On the other hand, the archetypes of anima and animus relate to the primordial image of feminine and masculine, these images so deep in the collective unconscious they are experienced automatically, although one's experience is colored prevailing cultural attitudes. "Their presence is felt as 'numinous'; that is, of profound spiritual significance" (p. 16). Whereas the anima for Jung represents the feminine drives of life, connection, emotion, and earth, and is active in a man's psyche when these

qualities are under developed or unacknowledged, the animus represents the masculine urge for action, capacity for judgment, and discrimination, and is active in an individual woman's psyche when these qualities are under developed or unacknowledged (Whitmont, 1969, pp. 189-201). If one accepts this definition of Jung's concept of anima and animus, The film *In Your Eyes* (Hill, 2014) illuminates nicely what it might look like for a woman's animus and a man's anima to be active and actually pushing one's personal growth process.

How Depth Psychological Lens Led to New Insights

One could enjoyably view this movie literally as the paranormal romance that it is labeled, but there are other ways to see through the literal story for the purpose of finding new meaning to apply to one's personal life or place in a larger community.

The/My Personal Unconscious

This little-known movie immediately captivated me, within minutes experiencing it not as one about two separate people but as the psychological development within an individual psyche. Throughout the movie, I questioned whether two separate characters existed, and there was a moment at the end of the film that seemed to feel like the director intended this. In one scene, after bursting through the front doors of the mental hospital, Rebecca is running for her life towards Dylan, but not able to see him yet. Dylan breaks away from the police running toward Rebecca, unable to see her yet. Then on either side of the train tracks, they see each other for a split second before a high-speed train comes between them. There is this drawn out moment when one has the feeling that the characters believe the other has been a figment of their imagination. Then the train passes and we know they are real, and they know each other is real.

If dealing with opposites is the homework required for transformation to occur, as Jung suggests, there are plenty of opposites in this story (Jung, 1977, p. 53). In addition to the characters being male versus female in gender and living in urban versus rural settings, Rebecca comes from wealth, Dylan from poverty. Rebecca has grown up in a suffocating and overprotective family versus Dylan's complete absence of parents, and Rebecca's persona, which Jung refers to as the mask one presents to the world (p. Jung, 1990, p. 465), seems to be the epitome of refinement and Dylan's of rugged unsophistication.

There is a clue leading to the archetypes of anima and animus in further opposites. Rebecca is pale, petite, soft-spoken, child-like and under the constant watch of her husband. She is also thoughtful and sees through the emptiness of the wealth and possessions acquired by her husband through his high-paying job. Dylan on the other hand, cannot avoid getting into physical conflicts, is physically strong, tan, and is seen doing manual labor. But he is also able to take quick and decisive action when needed, and later in the movie he guides Rebecca in picking the lock of her room in order to escape the mental hospital. During the course of the film Rebecca and Dylan offer to each other that opposite energy that is the potential within their own shadows, which is required in order to escape their limited situations. Rebecca cannot escape the mental institution without Dylan's voice, perhaps her animus' voice, instructing her how to calmly break out of her room, and further, when she reaches the lobby and is within site of the front door she must call on Dylan, as she admits, "I'm afraid of him," and then proceeds to punch him in the face. Visibly pleased with her newfound strength, she bounds out the front door. For Dylan, Jung might say Rebecca represents his anima,

which Jung also refers to as a man's soul, as he begins to find the strength to love and overcome the self-fulfilling expectations others have had of him. It is love for Rebecca – or a part of him that lay dormant in his shadow – that propels him to break out of his chains and seek freedom from a life in which he thought there was no escape.

The erotic scene where they discover each other as they sensually touch themselves I think represents a kind of love that they must have as they embrace the positive and negative parts of their psyche that have been hidden. But after they each find the unfamiliar pieces of themselves, reality sets in as their new relationship with each other – or themselves as I suggest – clashes with the personas within which they are trapped (Jung, 1966, pp.194-195).

It is likely that my personal unconscious latched onto this film in order to help me understand my own wrestling with things that are coming out of my shadow and new insights regarding how the almost complete absence of males going back generations in my mother's family, as well as the families of both my father and step-father, contributed to the unraveling of my marriage, as well as the confusion I have felt about my own anima and animus. Whereas Jung only implied that the anima and animus could be detached from the genders of female and male, Susan Rowland, author and first chair of the International Association of Jungian Studies, informs us that others, specifically, Jungian feminists, have gone further and proposed doing this very thing. "Therefore, men and women can participate equally in the archetypal figures of Logos-bearing animus and Eros-entwined anima" (Rowland, 2002, p. 50). Considering Jung's definition of anima and animus, one may be able to identify examples of women with under developed feminine traits and men with under developed masculine traits, reflecting Rowland's

notion of both anima and animus being present in men and women. Personally, Jung's strict definition of anima and animus does not accurately reflect my experience, and I believe it is only due to my gaining new personal insights having to do with the masculine and feminine within me made possible by detaching them from the limits of gender which freed up the possibility to see this playing out in other movies and in society.

The Collective Unconscious

What I did not know consciously at the time I experienced the film was that this had anything to do with the archetypes of masculine and feminine, meaning that this went beyond something personal for the characters and for me. The moment of this realization felt numinous and significant for me, and in the weeks after viewing the film, conversations with others about films like films like *Interstellar* (Nolan, 2014)*, The Martian* (Scott, 2015)*, and Gravity* (Curaron, 2013), all science fiction films and all released within a recent two-year timeframe, brought a sudden realization of the same shifting of valuing a balance of masculine and feminine energy and the detachment of feminine and masculine from the genders of male and female. In *Gravity,* Sandra Bullock's character, a mother who finds little motivation to survive (her daughter died in an accident), is aided by the ghost of George Clooney's character. In the end, it is love for her daughter along with Clooney's calm, decisive, and reasoned mentoring that allows her to survive. In *Interstellar,* Matthew McConaughey's character and his daughter are both an interesting combination of masculine and feminine energy, not as stereotypically presented in the film discussed in this essay. The movie for me brought together science – what could be considered masculine because of the focus on reason and progress – and

love – what could be considered feminine, and it was the love between McConaughey's character and his daughter that led to the finding of the critical code needed to save humanity. In fact, I remember saying to others that this film was about love. In both of these films, a balance of the feminine and masculine energies seemed critical to saving the day. In *The Martian*, Matt Damon's character finds himself alone on Mars accepting the fact that his rescue is not possible. His drive to live propels him forward anyway; he does not know that Earth's space program has found a way to attempt a rescue. It is the combination of his hyper intellect, perhaps reflecting the masculine, and his respect for and relating to the natural resources of Mars, that connection to nature perhaps being considered feminine, that leads him to successfully grow food, nourishment also reflecting the feminine. One could consider the moment when he finds a 1970's CD belonging to the now-dead female captain, and his almost devotional daily listening to its music, including the pro-woman song *I Will Survive* (Perren, F. & Fekaris, Dino, 1978), as the finding of the feminine within, contributing to the successful growing of food on Mars.

Increased Balance of Masculine and Feminine in Culture

The shifting in the valuing of both masculine and feminine energies in the film *In Your Eyes* (Hill, 2014) and these films caused me to reflect on how this might be playing out in the larger culture over the past few decades. It seems that when American culture seemed so one-sidedly masculine and played out in a way where the masculine was defined as male, a dramatic compensation was needed to bring attention to the feminine (Jung, 1990, p. 418). Perhaps this dramatic compensation was reflected in films like *Alien* (Scott, 1979) and *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991), this compensation being incomplete

in that instead of the archetypal feminine becoming valued, women simply developed the masculine traits that allowed them to be more accepted into the masculine world. In the science fiction film Alien, Sigourney Weaver was the first to play a female protagonist who contrary to bringing a sense of the feminine, was portrayed as being just as strategic and violent as previous male characters. One scene in particular in the film *Thelma and Louise,* where two women become fugitives after one kills the man who attempts to rape her, provoked controversy because of dramatic imagery of the explosion caused by the women blowing up a semi-truck, which some could argue acted as a symbol of the masculine. Again, whereas these films seemed to represent some kind of progress for women, they did not represent a valuing of the feminine. The films I reference in this essay seem to be moving toward an authentic valuing of the feminine in a way that is not always tied to a specific gender, and this balance is critical to resolving the issue at hand.

That ancient myths exist about the creation of the universe involving an initial unity between the masculine and the feminine or an equality between the masculine and feminine, as well as excluding the assignment of masculine and feminine to the genders of male and female suggests that how the masculine and feminine and its connection to gender is manifesting currently is just one variation and perhaps a deviation from an older valuing of a balance between the masculine and feminine (Bonheim, 1997). Perhaps these films reflect an emerging new variation of the manifestation of the archetypal masculine and feminine, and this new balance of masculine and feminine is critical to solving problems. The next task could be deliberating using this lens to generate new ideas for stubborn problems. For example, if Jung's concept of anima as that of connection, emotion, and earth could be seen to play out as an earlier focus on agriculture, and living

in harmony with nature's rhythms, one could say that the growing demand for organic farming and interest in urban gardening is a reflection of a shifting in the valuing of the masculine and feminine (Whitmont, 1969, p. 189). In addition to skepticism of technology (e.g., pesticides, growth hormones), there is a growing recognition of the value of animals in and of themselves, not just as a means to an end (e.g., industrial farming). Even though GMO's (genetically modified organisms) can produce more food for growing populations, and there seems to lack consensus that these foods are harmful, there is a growing desire to grow and harvest food in a way that is more in tune with natural processes. If Jung's concept of animus as capacity for judgment and action could be seen to play out as a focus on reason, the intellect, science, industry and economic systems, this resistance could reflect a desire for an increased focus on what could be considered feminine, reflected in concerns for the treatment of animals, the relationship we have with food, the plight of family farms, and the impact of farming methods on the larger environment. The significance of this movement can be seen by the reaction by the largest industrial farmers who are beginning to change their methods. Since these are not particularly feminist movements, it seems fair to say that the balance of the feminine and masculine approaches here do not seem tied to the genders of female and male.

This dynamic also seems present in the changing conversations related to community and neighborhood revitalization efforts. During the course of facilitating a strategic planning session for the Milwaukee Preservation Alliance, I was struck by what seemed to be a new focus on working through the tension between the opposites of what could be considered a masculine focus on economics versus a feminine focus on relationships and aesthetics. The conversation seemed difficult as the participants

wrestled with issues like economic development, looking for meaning in the past while looking towards the future, and about how architectural design contributed towards relationships among and between residents. This kind of conversation was new and unique though as evidenced by the uncertainty around how to engage the stakeholders that represented the more masculine focus. At the time, I saw it as merely interesting, but now I see it as a reflection of a natural movement from a masculine dominated approach (e.g., reliance on technology and reason alone) to one that includes an equal valuing of the feminine values of life, relationship, and aesthetics. In these two examples, there seems to be an unconscious adoption of an approach to problem solving that reflects valuing the feminine and the masculine equally, and this approach not being tied to gender.

Conclusion

Some might say movies are primarily for entertainment, and others suggest that important insights might be found only in serious films that have this as their agenda. I suggest that important personal and cultural insights can be prompted by the viewing of any film, even a little-known film like *In Your Eyes* (Hill, 2014). A depth psychological lens made it possible for me to experience this film as an important part of my individual psychological journey, and it was a new personal insight related to the feminine and masculine within my psyche that led me to see it playing out in more popular movies and then in the culture as a whole. In the movie examples, the balance of the feminine and masculine appear to be the key to solving the challenges. When it comes to the larger culture, some might argue that the feminine and masculine have little to do with organic farming, urban gardening, or neighborhood revitalization, but in all these cases there

seems to exist a noticeable tension between the perspective of science, economics, and technology on the one hand and relationship, aesthetics, and respect for nature on the other. Perhaps there is an emerging collective drive, although unconscious, towards a balance of these approaches, and detaching them from the notion of gender allows one to imagine them in a new way, leading perhaps to a new approach to considering cultural problems, like poverty or urban education for example.

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