

Kristján Guðmundsson: *Psychology and the Cinema*, Bratislava, april 2010.

Three types of films studied:

1. Psychology.

2. Form.

3. Genre.

Origins

The course came about when we (at Kvennaskólinn í Reykjavík) were asked to offer an elective course for second year students. But of course young students can't learn psychology? Or can they?

Psychology and the Cinema

Since then the course has always been selected (sometimes 2 or 3 groups). Mostly 2nd year (17 year old), but lately I have experimented with younger and older students.

For whom?

A school for 16-20 year-old students, that after high school usually go straight to university. Straight to their chosen field, whether it be psychology, film studies or whatever.

The system

4 x 60 minutes per week for 14 weeks.

Class 1 and 2 = show a whole film.

Class 3 = discussion, assignment.

Class 4 = lecture and further information.

Textbook?

a) 50 page workbook

b) Handout for special pictures

c) Bloggside:

<http://www.operantconditioning.net/kviksal/>

50 page workbook (work in progress)

1. Student lists all the pictures studied (1 page).
The rest is the same for all 15 movies:
2. Facts about and type of movie (i.e. director, actors, genre, similar films ...).
3. Analysis of the movie (i.e. plot-point I & II, point of no return, Campbell analysis ...).
4. Psychological analysis (psychological problem, mental disorder, development ...).

Grading

1. Home assignment every week (workbook 2x graded).
2. Special assignments every 2-4 weeks (unique movies require a special set of questions).
3. Student contribution every 4 weeks (students find similar films, with similar topics ...).

What do the students say?

The students just love this course. They have so much more experience than we (old people) have with this kind of material. They hadn't even invented the TV when I was a kid!

What should I tell the Europeans?

The students asked me to tell you that this course is not as easy as it looks / sounds. The assignments are every week, but enjoyable!

On the negative side. Haven't you heard?

- *the subject matter is enjoyable in itself, and therefore not a subject matter for teaching?*
- *books are important, movies are for relaxation!*
- *the movie was o.k. But the book was better.*
- *actually the course is not that difficult.*
- *nearly all of my movies are American (trash).*

1. PSYCHOLOGY: Films with much **psychological content**.

The Shining (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) or **Taxi Driver** (Martin Scorsese, 1976) – growing *unspecified psychological disorder*.

Dirty Dancing (Emile Ardolino, 1987) or **Pretty Woman** (Garry Marshall, 1990) – *voyeurism, fetishism*.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Milos Forman, 1975) or **K-Pax** (Iain Softley, 2001) *mental institution, insanity*.

1. PSYCHOLOGY: Films with much **psychological content**; continued.

Memento (Christopher Nolan, 2000) or **50 First Dates** (Peter Segal, 2004) – *retrograde amnesia* (aka. *short-term memory loss*), not able to learn anything new (e.g. George) .

Shine (Scott Hicks, 1996) or **A Beautiful Mind** (Ron Howard, 2001), or **Spider** (David Cronenberg, 2002) – *schizophrenia*.

Primal Fear (Gregory Hoblit, 1996) or **The Three Faces of Eve** (Nunally Johnson, 1957) or **Sybil** (Daniel Petrie, 1976) or **Voices Within: The Lives of Truddi Chase** (Lamont Johnson) – *Multiple Personality* (aka. *Dissociation Identity Disorder*).

1. PSYCHOLOGY: Films with much **psychological content**; continued.

The Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991) or **Red Dragon** (Bett Ratner, 2002) or **Manhunter** (Michael Mann, 1986) or **Hannibal** (Ridley Scott, 2001) or **Hannibal Rising** (Peter Webber, 2007) – *antisocial personality* versus *schizophrenia*; also *gender identity disorder (transvestism)*.

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) or remake: **Psycho** (Gus Van Sant, 1998) or **Deranged** (Jeff Gillen & Alan Ormsby, 1974) or **Ed Gein: The Butcher of Plainfield Michael Feifer**, 2007) or **Ed Gein: In the Light of the Moon** (Chuck Parello, 2000) – *paranoid schizophrenia*; *gender identity ...*

1. PSYCHOLOGY: Films with much **psychological content**; continued.

Rain Man (Barry Levinson, 1988) or **What's Eating Gilbert Grape** (Lasse Hallström, 1993) – *autism, Asperger syndrome; also eating disorders (obesity)*.

Glen or Glenda (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1953) or **Plan 9 from Outer Space** (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1959) or **Ed Wood** (Tim Burton, 1994) or – *homosexuality, transvestism, drug addiction, terrible moviemaking ...*

2. FORM: Extraordinary films due to **form**:

Groundhog Day (Harold Ramis, 1993) or **After Hours** (Martin Scorsese, 1985) – unique *script*.

One Flew Over... (again) – *acting*.

The Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991) or **Marathon Man** (John Schlesinger, 1976) – *British stage acting versus. Method acting*.

2. FORM: Extraordinary films due to **form**; continued

Alfred Hitchcock films (**Vertigo**, 1958, **North by Northwest**, 1959, **Psycho**, 1960 ...) – *suspense*.

Memento (again) – *editing*.

A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) – *sound and violence*.

3. GENRE: Different **types** of movies:

*Horror: **The Exorcist** (William Friedkin, 1973) or **The Shining** (again) or **Jaws** (Steven Spielberg, 1975) – *closed scripts*.*

*Romance: **Pretty Woman** (Garry Marshall, 1990). **Notebook** (again) – *myth*.*

*Comedy: **The Party** (Blake Edwards, 1968) or Jim Carrey (f.ex. **Ace Ventura**, 1994 and 1995) films – *improvising*.*

3. GENRE: Different types of movies; continued:

Stars: Rebel without a Cause (Nicholas Ray, 1955)
– *James Dean*; or *Maltese Falcon*, (John Huston,
1941) – *Humphrey Bogart*.

Hollywood formula: Steven Spielberg films, Indiana Jones: **Raiders of the Lost Ark** (1981), **IJ and the Temple of Doom** (1984), **IJ and the Last Crusade** (1989), **IJ and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull** (2008) – Joseph Campbell's *mythological analysis*: 8 characters in 12 steps.

3. GENRE: Different types of movies; continued:

*Blockbuster: **The Exorcist** (William Friedkin, 1973) or **Jaws** (Steven again) – *maximum profit.**

*Classic: **Casablanca** (Michael Curtiz, 1942) – contrast with **Play It Again, Sam** (Woody Allen, 1972) – *comparison.**

*Bad: **Plan 9 From Outer Space** (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1959) or **Attack of the Killer Tomatoes** (John De Bello, 1978) – compare with **Ed Wood** (Tim Burton, 1994) – *transvestite.**

ONLY 8 TYPES ARE ALLOWED IN THE MYTH:

1. A **Hero** – usually a man, at the beginning, middle, end.
2. **Allies** – friends of the hero, they come and go.
3. A **Herald** – brings the hero the bad news.
4. A **Mentor** – a wizard, usually an old bearded man.
5. A **Joker** – for comic relief.
6. A **Femme fatale** – usually a woman that is good – bad – good – bad ...
7. A **Shadow** – the evil, the devil, ...
8. **Guards**, dead: traps, hidden spears ... or alive: soldiers for the bad guy.

Typical development of the myth (step 1-6):

01. The would-be **Hero** is in the normal, ordinary world doing his laundry.
02. A **Herald** (in disguise) brings him the news that only he can save the world.
03. The would-be hero: I´m retired, I don´t do this anymore.
04. Various **Allies** join the quest and are willing to help our would-be hero.
05. An old bearded **Mentor** gives our hero information and weapons.
06. The hero hesitates, is supported and finally decides!

Typical development of the myth (step 7-11):

07. Our hero goes into a phonebooth and changes his attire (blue and red).
08. Various Allies help the hero, without them being heroes themselves.
09. Some of the allies are not heroic at all, rather stupid and funny **Jokers**.
10. Our hero is helped by a woman (?) that turns out to be a **Femme fatale**.
11. The hero with various allies takes on tests, small at first, maybe one **Guard** (of some future **Shadow**) and a riddle, then two elephants and a flamethrower ... Slowly bigger and bigger tests. Some of the allies come and go, get injured or die, and our hero uses his weapons. We get the impression that he is getting somewhere!

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Typical development of the myth (step 12-17):

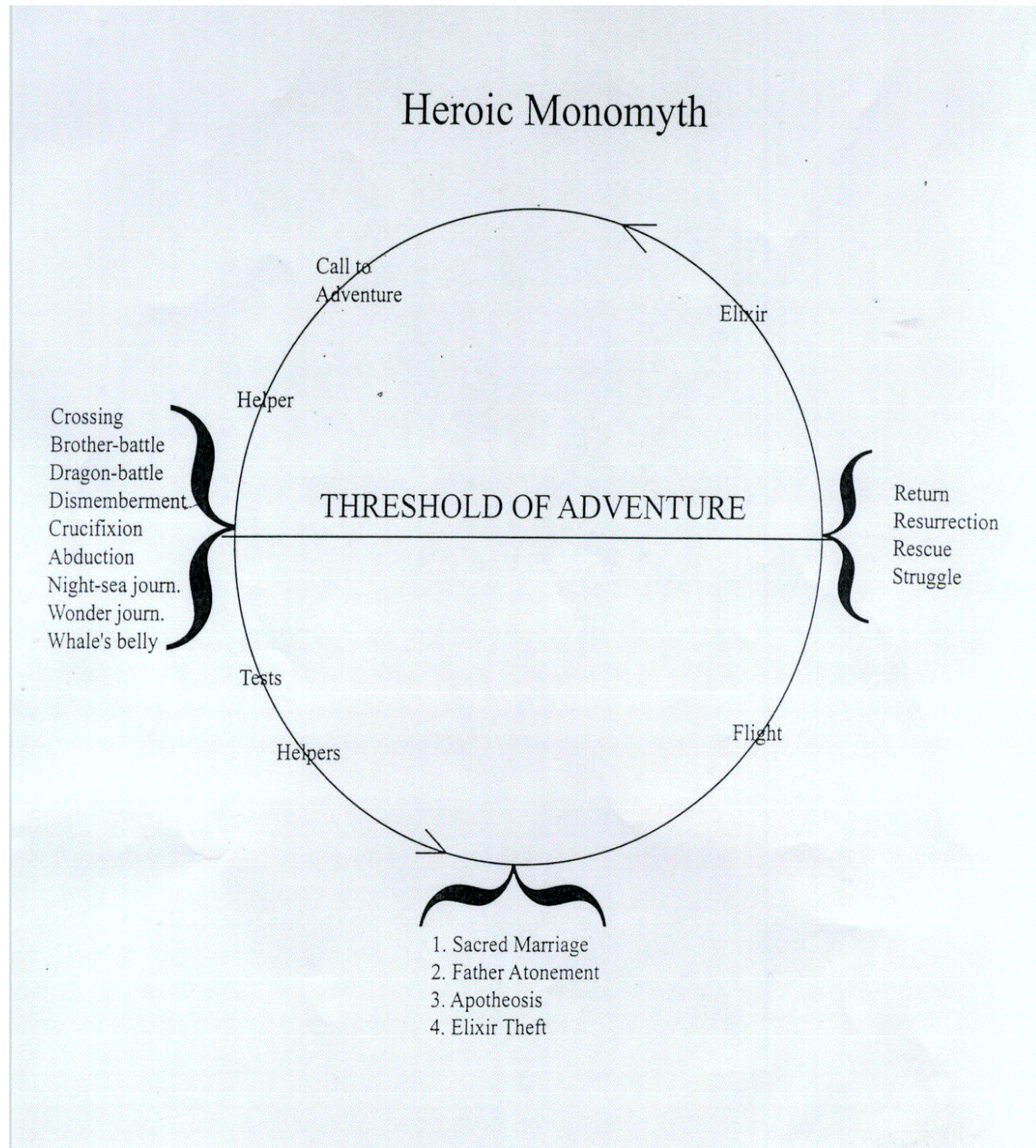
12. Hero, allies and Femme fatale approach the Shadow by killing his Guards.
13. Our hero enters the underworld (tunnel, warehouse, secret headquarters).
14. Where our hero actually meets face to face with his Shadow.
15. Femme fatale betrays our hero and joins the enemy.
16. Our hero loses his friends and his weapons.
17. The hero is surrounded and absolutely helpless (closes his eyes).

Typical development of the myth (step 18-22):

18. The hero (or someone close to him) dies (metaphorically?)
19. The dead person is miraculously resurrected!
20. Our hero is vindicated and gets his reward (lady, kingdom, honour, sword...).
21. The Hero is chased all the way back to the ordinary world.
22. The hero returns, but is misunderstood and is not recognized at home for the hero he actually is (just Kent Clark in casual wear, a small hobbit, psychology teacher or an uninteresting archaeology professor).

The Joseph Campbell theory is about roles, but also about storyline and world of adventure.

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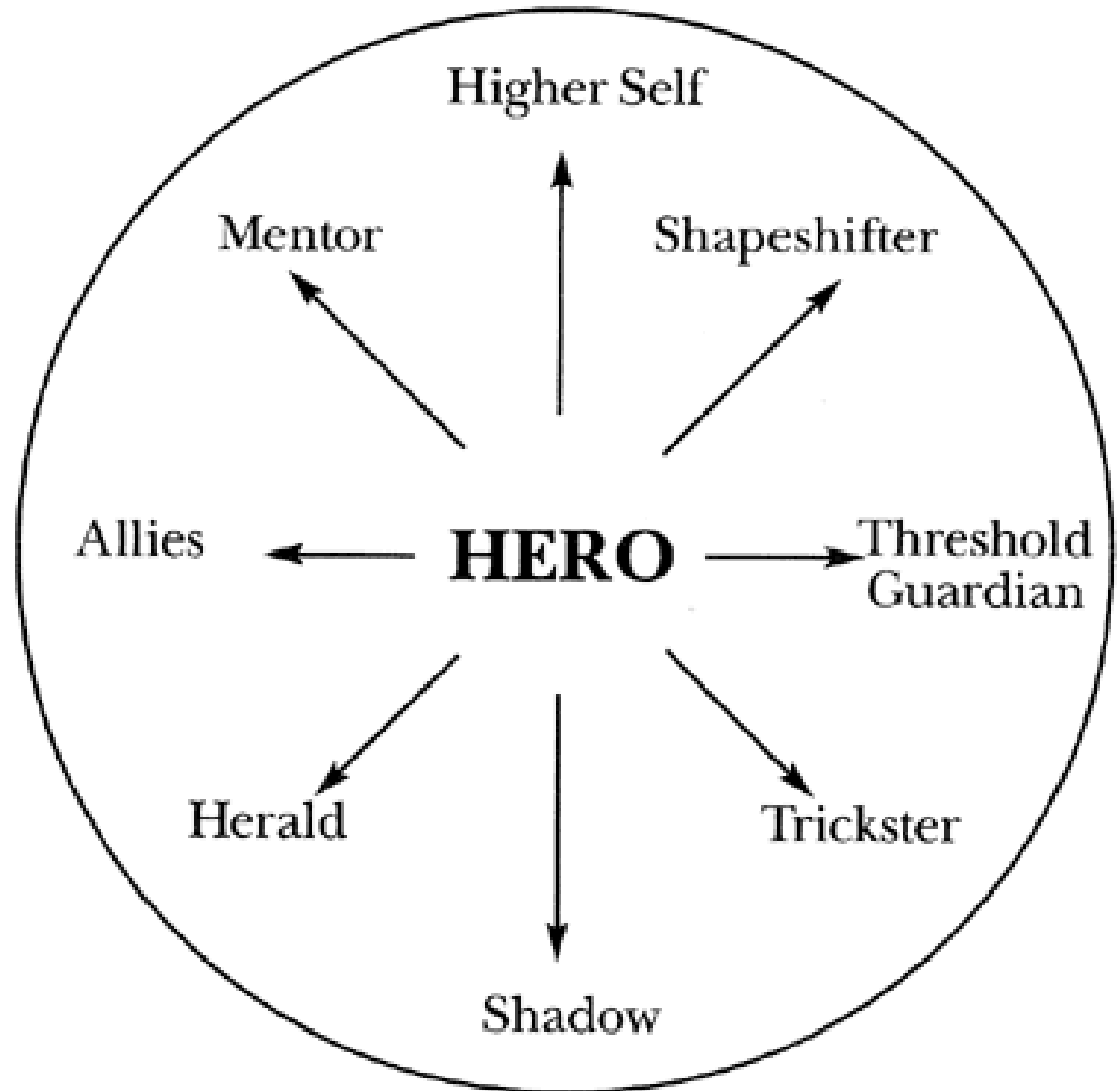
The Archetypes as Emanations of the Hero

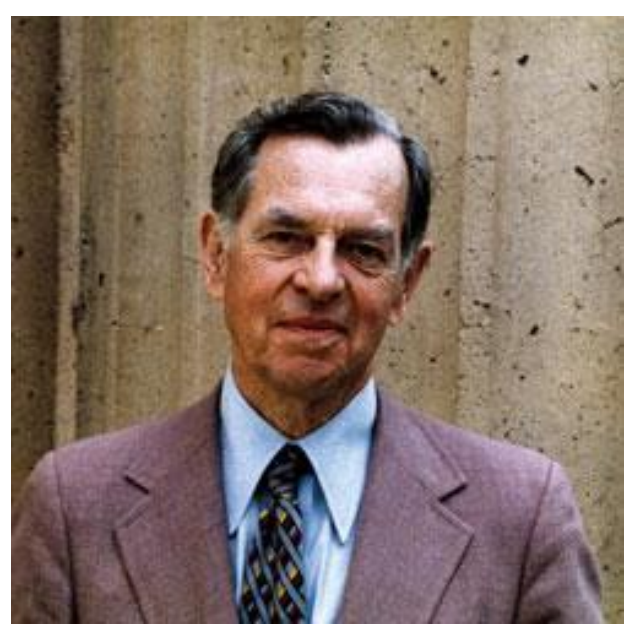
The

Joseph

Campbell

theory:





- Joseph Campbell professor of *mythology*. Book: **The Hero With the Thousand Faces**. Campbell compares stories of heroes from many different cultures.
- Who is the man standing beside Campbell? (George Lucas e.g. **Star Wars** etc.).

The Hollywood success story

1. First we have a successful movie: **The Exorcist** (William Friedkin, 1973).
2. Then we get: **The Exorcist II: The Heretic** (John Boorman, 1977).
3. And: **The Exorcist III** (William Peter Blatty, 1990).
4. Finally we get: **Exorcist: The Beginning** (Renny Harlin, 2004).
5. But actually that movie was first made as: **Dominion: Prequel to the Exorcist** (Paul Schrader, 2005).

What makes a horror movie?

1. An ugly face!
2. Splatter. Blood or green stuff coming out of your mouth.
3. A theme song informing you of terrible things to come – da da da – conditioning you to expect ...
4. Sudden loud noise – at the proper moment – da.
5. White noise? Tones below (above?) our sensory levels.
6. Subliminal stimuli.
7. A closed circle from a healthy family, community, to an invasion of some sort, war between good and evil, resolution and finally back to the healthy family.

What makes a funny movie?

Apart from verbal humour (two really ugly people got married, they had a child and threw it away), we have **physical humour**.

1. Behaving unexpectedly.
2. To be at a surprising place.
3. Being of the wrong size.

This is performed in 6 ways:

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. Slapstick. | 2. Violence. |
| 3. Magic. | 4. Surrealism. |
| 5. Imitation. | 6. Parody. |
| (7. Mime). | |

Finally this is all done most effectively through a consistent character (e.g. **Mr. Bean**).

Films analysed so far – either whole film, or parts 1-10:

01. **Ace Ventura: Pet Detective** (Tom Shadyac, 1994).
02. **Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls** (Steve Oedekerk, 1995).
03. **After Hours** (Martin Scorsese, 1985).
04. **Attack of the Killer Tomatoes** (John De Bello, 1978).
05. **Beautiful Mind, A.** (Ron Howard, 2001).
06. **Casablanca** (Michael Curtiz, 1942).
07. **Clockwork Orange, A.** (Stanley Kubrick, 1971).
08. **Deranged** (Jeff Gillen & Alan Ormsby, 1974).
09. **Deuce Bigalow: European Gigolo** (Mike Bigelow, 2005).
10. **Dirty Dancing** (Emile Ardolino, 1987).

Films analysed so far – either whole film, or parts 11-20:

11. **Dr. Stangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb**, 1964, Stanley Kubrick).
12. **Ed Gein: The Butcher of Plainfield** (Michael Feifer, 2007).
13. **Ed Gein: In the Light of the Moon** (Chuck Parello, 2000).
14. **Ed Wood** (Tim Burton, 1994).
15. **Exorcist, The** (William Friedkin, 1973).
16. **Fight Club** (David Fincher, 1999).
17. **Funny Bones** (Peter Chelsom, 1995).
18. **Funny People** (Judd Apatow, 2009).
19. **Glen or Glenda** (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1953).
20. **Groundhog Day** (Harold Ramis, 1993).

Films analysed so far – either whole film, or parts 21-30:

21. **Hannibal** (Ridley Scott, 2001).
22. **Hannibal Rising** (Peter Webber, 2007).
23. **Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle** (Danny Leiner, 2004).
24. **Indiana Jones & the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull** (Steven Spielberg, 2008).
25. **Indiana J. & the Last Crusade** (S. Spielberg, 1989).
26. **Indiana J. & the Temple of Doom** (S. Spielberg, 1984).
27. **Jaws** (Steven Spielberg, 1975).
28. **K-Pax** (Iain Softley, 2001).
29. **Maltese Falcon**, (John Huston, 1941).
30. **Manhunter** (Michael Mann, 1986).

Films analysed so far – either whole film, or parts 31-40:

31. **Marathon Man** (John Schlesinger, 1976).
32. **Memento** (Christopher Nolan, 2000).
33. **North by Northwest** (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959).
34. **Notebook, The** (Nick Cassavetes, 2004).
35. **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest** (Milos Forman, 1975).
36. **Party, The** (Blake Edwards, 1968).
37. **Plan 9 From Outer Space** (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1959).
38. **Play It Again, Sam** (Woody Allen, 1972).
39. **Pretty Woman** (Garry Marshall, 1990). **Primal Fear** (Gregory Hoblit, 1996).
40. **Psycho** (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960).

Films analysed so far – either whole film, or parts 41-52:

41. **Psycho** (Gus Van Sant, 1998).
42. **Rain Man** (Barry Levinson, 1988).
43. **Raiders of the Lost Ark** (Steven Spielberg, 1981).
44. **Rebel without a Cause** (Nicholas Ray, 1955).
45. **Red Dragon** (Bett Ratner, 2002).
46. **Se7en** (David Fincher, 1995).
47. **Shine** (Scott Hicks, 1996).
48. **Shining, The** (Stanley Kubrick, 1980).
49. **Silence of the Lambs, The** (Jonathan Demme, 1991).
50. **Taxi Driver** (Martin Scorsese, 1976).
51. **Three Faces of Eve, The** (Nunally Johnson, 1957).
52. **Vertigo** (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958).

FILMS MOST OFTEN ANALYZED:

01. **A Clockwork Orange** (Stanley Kubrick, 1971).
02. **Psycho** (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960).
03. **Taxi Driver** (Martin Scorsese, 1976).
04. **Rebel without a Cause** (Nicholas Ray, 1955).
05. **The Silence of the Lambs** (Jonathan Demme, 1991).
06. **Casablanca** (Michael Curtiz, 1942).
07. **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest** (Milos Forman, 1975).
08. **Pretty Woman** (Garry Marshall, 1990).
09. **Raiders of the Lost Ark** (Steven Spielberg, 1981).
10. **Vertigo** (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958).
11. **The Exorcist** (William Friedkin, 1973).
12. **Three Faces of Eve** (Nunally Johnson, 1957).