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The New Myths of Speculative Fiction Cinema: How  
Mythical Thought is Returning in the Contemporary  
World





## The New Myths of Speculative Fiction Cinema: How Mythical Thought is Returning in the Contemporary World

*Os Novos Mitos do Cinema de Ficção Especulativa:  
Como o Pensamento Mítico Está Voltando no Mundo  
Contemporâneo*

*Los Nuevos Mitos del Cine de Ficción Especulativa:  
Cómo Está Volviendo el Pensamiento Mítico en el  
Mundo Contemporáneo*

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MARCO FRAGA SILVA <sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper argues that the decline of myth and mythical thought is reversing and that the substitute of ancient myth in modern societies – politics – has been replaced by the speculative fiction genre of cinematic storytelling. With this in mind the paper creates a link between: our species ability to tell stories and our necessity to consume them; the importance and characteristics of myth and mythical thought; the human craving for mythical stories; the contemporary speculative fiction trend worldwide in the box office; and a study of the most influential films of all time.

**Keywords:** Cinema; Media; Myth; Speculative Fiction; Storytelling

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<sup>1</sup> Doutorando em Arte dos Media pela Universidade Lusófona de Lisboa. E-mail: marcoffs@sapo.pt.

**Resumo:** Este artigo argumenta que o declínio do mito e do pensamento mítico está sendo revertido e que o substituto do mito na sociedade moderna – a política – foi substituído pelo gênero cinematográfico da ficção especulativa. De forma a confirmar esta suposição este artigo cria uma ligação entre: a habilidade da nossa espécie em contar histórias e a nossa necessidade em consumi-las; a importância e características do mito e do pensamento mítico; a necessidade humana para consumir narrativas míticas; a hegemonia do gênero da ficção especulativa no box office mundial; e um estudo dos filmes mais influentes de todos os tempos.

**Palavras-chave:** Cinema, Media, Mito, Ficção Especulativa; Storytelling

**Resumen:** Este artículo argumenta que el declive del mito y el pensamiento mítico se está invirtiendo y que el reemplazo del mito en la sociedad moderna – política – es ahora el género cinematográfico de la ficción especulativa. Para confirmar esta suposición, este artículo crea un vínculo entre: la capacidad de nuestra especie para contar historias y nuestra necesidad de consumirlas; la importancia y características del mito y el pensamiento mítico; la necesidad humana de consumir narraciones míticas; la hegemonía del género de ficción especulativa en la taquilla mundial; y un estudio de las películas más influyentes de todos los tiempos.

**Palabras clave:** Cine, Medios, Mito, Ficción Especulativa; Storytelling

## Introduction

Myth and mythical thought have been declining since the seventeenth century due to the rise of science and the scientific method. Claude Lévi-Strauss believed that mythical thought is as critical and complex as the scientific thought (2001, p. 5-6). He also said in his paper *The Structural Study of Myth*, published in 1955, that myth appeared to be replaced by

politics in modern societies (1955, p. 430).

This paper argues that mythical thought decline is reversing and that new myths can be found in the field of entertainment. Speculative fiction (fantasy, horror, science fiction) has replaced myth in Western civilizations and, through its capability to create mythic and fantastic narratives, appears to be filling a gap and a craving for more mythical content by the modern Man. Joseph Campbell, in an interview with Bill Myers, published in book format in 1988, said that myths offer us the life models we need but they have to be the right ones, the appropriate ones “to the time in which you are living”; the ever-changing world cannot maintain out-of-date morals, so, for a modern world we need new myths (1988, p. 16) and for now speculative fiction cinematic narratives seem to be carrying the torch. The world’s increasing intricacy demands that the modern stories reflect this complexity. Cinema continues to introduce myths to societies and peoples in need of escaping, entertainment, and understanding the world.

This paper claims that through the apparatus of cinema, the genre of speculative fiction has replaced politics in the contemporary myth-making, or mythopoeia. Furthermore, the collapse of myth in modern societies is attenuated or even reverted by the speculative stories of fantasy, horror, and science fiction being produced and consumed; the hegemony of the speculative fiction genre in the box office worldwide is a clear sign of the consumers’ hunger for these upbeat narratives filled with universal archetypes and role models.

## Franchised Myths

The adaptation of myths to the cinema medium is made in two ways: adapting a myth directly or incorporating ancient myths and mythical themes into films. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) uses both methods (HAFÇI and ASLITÜRK, 2017, p. 497, 500). The modern myths of speculative fiction may lack the traditional religious context of the ancient ones but the fandom devotion to some characters and franchises is undeniable. Furthermore, the new rituals, an important facet of myth, can be found in fandom activities where fans dress up as their favorite characters as a tribute and reenact their favorite scenes.

The new franchised myths, produced by big corporations like Walt Disney Studios, are being distinctly delivered to the public. The MCU is being fragmented through several media and platforms using the aesthetic of transmedia storytelling. Jeff Gomez, in an interview for Indiewire, shared three basic rules for transmediating a narrative: 1) the story must have positive qualities that inspire the public; 2) the production team must have adequate technical skills; 3) the relation between transmedia producers and fans must be carefully woven, validating their participation (BERNSTEIN). In the era of Cultural *Convergence*, fans network with ease and create contents collectively using intuitive digital tools (JENKINS, 2006, p. 2, 18, 21). The many channels on YouTube discussing the next Marvel Studios movie and the next George R. R. Martin TV series are proof of that. These digital hunter-gatherers and prosumers embrace the new mythic narratives in such a way they become gospel.

Films (and TV series) about superheroes, artificial intelligence, supernatural monsters, films about the beginning – new cosmogonies – and the end of the human species – new apocalypses – invade our screens on a regular basis. They are a part of our daily conversations and the way we perceive the world. They are the new myths.

For Lévi-Strauss all versions of a myth were equally important (2001, p. 435). Therefore, the appropriation of the Oedipus myth by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung was legitimate. It could be argued that the appropriation of Thor and Odin and the magical realm of Asgard by Marvel Comics, and the cinematic adaptation, is now part of Norse mythology.

## Storytelling and Myth

Most fauna and even some flora have the ability to communicate. Language is not a unique characteristic of our species and, according to the Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness, even conscience is probably not exclusive to humans (HARARI, 2017, p. 142). If there is one thing that separates us – *Homo sapiens* – from other species is the ability to tell stories through complex language. But even this ability was most definitely a characteristic of other hominids such as the extinct *Homo neanderthalensis* (D'ANASTASIO et al, 2013, p. 6) who had the articulatory apparatus for speech allowing them to create their own myths.

Lévi-Strauss understood myth as a particular type of language, speech, linguistic phenomena, or system of communication (2001, p. 430).

The stories told by the campfire were mythical in scope: stories that tried to explain the sun, the moon and the stars, the water cycle, the seasons, the wind and the origin of Man. For tens of thousands of years, millions of storytellers spun their tales and enriched the human experience by giving them ideas, role models and worldviews. Brian W. Sturm, in his paper *The Enchanted Imagination: Storytelling's Power to Entrance Listeners*, said that when people listen to a story they experience a storylistening trance, an altered state of consciousness, and while the storyteller verbalizes the story the listener creates the “true” story in his mind, with the overlay of personal experiences and memories (1999, p. 2).

We as a species need our myths and our mythical thought just as we need the relatively new scientific thought. Lévi-Strauss said “the kind of logic which is used by mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science”. For him, the “difference relies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied” (2001, p. 444). Before the rise of science and scientific thought in the seventeenth century, science used to be explained by myth and superstition. The author Stanisław Herman Lem said that it’s very difficult to understand how ancient technologies emerged and that “[s]uccessful technologies used to have myth or superstition as their “theoretical foundation”: their application was either preceded by a magic ritual (...), or they themselves became a form of ritual” (2013, p. 11).

The definition of myth will never be satisfactorily complete. As societies’ morals, dreams, and desires change so do myths evolve, ergo its definition changes. Nevertheless, a brief dictionary definition is presented here, before a longer one, bearing in mind a Frank Herbert’s quote from *Chapterhouse: Dune*: “Many things we do naturally become difficult only when we try to make them intellectual subjects. It is possible to know so much about a subject that you become totally ignorant” (1985, p. 114).

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary online there are a few interesting definitions: myth is usually considered a traditional story that presents the worldview of a people, a set of beliefs, or natural phenomenon; myths can be told as parables and allegories or can be stories around something or someone, a public figure or a fictional one that embodies special

ideals; the word myth has also come to signify something false (MYTH, def. 1-4). Mark Morford and Robert Lenardon reject the concept of falseness attributed to myth: “Myth in a sense is the highest reality; and the thoughtless dismissal of myth as untruth, fiction, or a lie is the most barren and misleading definition of all” (1977, p. 5).

After the succinct definition above, a more elaborate one is necessary. Lauri Honko, in his paper *The Problem of Defining Myth*, published in 1972, gave us an approach to the problem and a detailed definition of myth with the main goal of drawing attention to the complexity of the term (1972, p. 18). He enumerated three factors that are influential in the difficulty for a consensus in defining myth: demythologization; ancient definitions; and modern theories (1972, p. 8).

In demythologization, or the stripping of mythic elements, he considered three main types: 1) the eradication of the word myth but the retention of the story (*terminological demythologization*); 2) the total rejection of the stories (*total and compensatory*); 3) the conception of myths as symbols to be interpreted, and not to be taken literally (*partial and interpretative*) (1972, p. 8-9).

For the ancient definitions, Honko listed ten ways that illustrate the plethora of opinions: 1) *the mythographic interpretation*; 2) *philosophical criticism*; 3) *the pre-scientific interpretation*; 4) *the allegorical explanation based on natural phenomena*; 5) *the allegorical explanation based on spiritual qualities*; 6) *the etymological interpretation*; 7) *the historical (comparative and derivative) interpretation*; 8) *the Euhemeristic interpretation*; 9) *the ‘sociological’ interpretation or the deceit of priests*; 10) *the psychological interpretation* (1972, p. 10-12).

Because the concept of myth is in continuous revision by modern scholars, with overlapping theories and approaches from different angles, Honko compiled twelve methodologies to the problem of defining the term: 1) explain enigmatic phenomena (*myth as source of cognitive categories*); 2) artistic medium (*myth as form of symbolic expression*); 3) the human collective unconscious (*myth as projection of the subconscious*); 4) facing the problems of society, culture and nature (*myth as world-view and as an integrating factor in man’s adaptation to life*); 5) morality and behavior (*myth as charter of behavior*); 6) religious values and rituals (*myth as legitimation of social institutions*); 7) social relevance of myths inside a culture (*myth as a marker of social relevance*); 8) a reflection of



a culture's qualities (*myth as a mirror of culture, social structure, etc.*) 9) manipulation of historical facts (*myth as a result of historical situations*); 10) communication by different media (*myth as religious communication*); 11) narrative nature (*myth as religious genre*); 12) methods of research for language, content, and structure of myths (*myth as medium for structure*) (1972, p. 12-14).

But the author didn't just enumerate the different opinions, points of view, and problems in defining myth, both in ancient and modern times. He presented a personal theory he considered to be not too broad and not too narrow; the definition is descriptive and concise, and it was built on four criteria (form, content, function, and context). For Lauri Honko, myth is a story or a religious account that explains the origin of the world or presents the deeds of important role models providing patterns of behavior, values, and morality. The actions or behaviors are to be replicated by ritual ceremonies that defend the world order and preserve the values of a society. Honko also presented the common idea of myths as fictional stories and its relation to non-religious areas such as politics and economy (1972, p. 15-16).

## **Speculative Fiction, Box Office, and Superheroes**

The definition of *genre* and the definition of the genres themselves is a controversial issue because there is no consensus on a system of shared elements for the diversity of story patterns that have been created for thousands of years (MCKEE, 1997, p. 79). The genres evolve to encompass the stories that are told. Jacques Derrida has hypothesized that “[e]very text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging” (65). The genres are fluid but their conventions and limitations can galvanize inspired storytellers who can avoid clichés and use the limitations to their advantage: it's called the Principle of Creative Limitation (MCKEE, 1997, p. 91). The genre system is not necessarily a bad thing when properly used.

The speculative fiction mega-genre embraces the genres of fantasy, horror, and science fiction, and all the subgenres and hybridizations the mentioned three can offer. The author Robert Heinlein coined speculative

fiction in 1948 (SHIMKUS, 2012, p. 26) to refer to a subset of science fiction that was more social and people-oriented, in detriment of the gadget-oriented stories (HEINLEIN, 1991, p. 5). The Speculative Literature Foundation, launched in 2004, defined speculative fiction as a “catch-all term” that includes folk and fairy tales, fantasy, horror, magical realism, modern myth-making, science fiction, slipstream, etc. (SHIMKUS, 2012, p. 25). The evolution of the term is evident but that is not, by any means, a negative thing; it’s part of the natural process of genre evolution.

For Orson Scott Card the speculative genres of fantasy and science fiction are the closest ones to the archetypes and myths that people crave for (1990, p. 16) and, in the author’s opinion, writing fantasy is no less rigorous than science fiction and the latter has no less mythic traces than the first (1990, p. 21). Myths and legends endure time and have been frequently retold due to their ability to be reshaped; nowadays a new phenomenon has arisen and some myths are retold in futuristic contexts and settings with the goal of telling stories that resonate with the contemporary public (STEINKE, 2017, p. 19-20). Nick Redfern studied genre trends in the United States of America box office between 1991 and 2010 – the top fifty grossing films for each year – and concluded that the genres of fantasy and science fiction are monopolizing the market (2012, p. 1). The study has some controversial issues, including his genre classification and the decline in genre variety. The fact is that fantasy and science fiction are permeable to many other genres; therefore the thematic narrowing he advocated is not so evident.

The hegemony of the speculative fiction genre with its mythical elements is undeniable but these new myths are, in fact, the old myths made new by being tailored to a modern sensibility. John Boorman, director of the fantasy classic film *Excalibur* said it best:

I have a theory about a good story. We know it already, we’ve heard it a thousand times, but it holds us, we listen, we want to know what happens next. Why? I think we’re hearing echoes of some deep pattern of early happenings in the human race that is now being repeated. Listen carefully to the echoes of myth. It has much more to tell us than the petty lies and insignificant truths of recorded history. (qtd. in Umland and Umland, 1996, p. 142)

Campbell’s monomyth gives us the insight that we keep telling the

same stories over and over again. The theory, based in Jung's archetypes and collective unconscious, is a basic structure that developed the formula of rites of passage – separation, initiation, return – and used it to describe and understand myths about heroes (RAI, 2016, p. 39) and other stories.

The notion of basic plots in drama and literature goes back at least to [Georges] Polti (1916), who outlined 36 “dramatic situations.” Polti indicated that his list was based on one from Goethe, who in turn credited Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806). Booker (2006) held that these can be accommodated within his seven basic plots. (PHILLIPS, 2012, p. 154)

Jonathan Phillips came up with a slightly different number of plots to be used in scientific research. He recognizes that his list may be incomplete but he identified eight standard plots for the storytelling exercise of reporting and promoting scientific ideas. The eight basic plots are designed for scientists to improve their published work by using storytelling (2012, p. 153, 159-160), therefore, storytelling and mythical thinking are present in all human activities, even in the formal scientific explanation of new discoveries. The people who can harness its power will succeed in transmitting their ideas in a better way.

Table 1 aims to demonstrate the hegemony of the speculative fiction cinematic storytelling by showing the top one hundred grossing films of all time (ALL TIME BOX OFFICE MOJO). Two things are immediately evident: the fantasy and science fiction films produced in the U.S.A. dominate the market, and the superhero movies occupy a substantial proportion of the list. The grey-numbered cells are the films considered to be speculative fiction in this paper. The numbers are staggering. Over ninety percent of the movies are speculative fiction and the few that are not, some have fantasy or sci-fi elements. The darker cells are the superhero movies; they make twenty-seven percent of the list.

Liam Burke (qtd. in LABARRE, 2016) said that the current golden age of superhero movies is not to be explained by one single factor, be it political criticism, conglomerate strategies of franchising and merchandising, the new generation of directors interested in these narratives, and the increasing quality and decreasing costs in digital effects (2) that make possible to project into the silver screen the stories that have been confined to the printed page. One factor that is not being taken into count is

the modern Man's craving for new myths, new mythic stories that are appropriate to our time and age, stories that present the proper role models to our modern mentality, and explore our fears and desires for the future.

The superhero narratives tend to convey strong role models with stout morals that will risk life and limb to save others – the paragon of altruism (e.g. Captain America). There is also the concept of the anti-hero, the cynical person with a heart of gold (e.g. Deadpool). Even well-written antagonists, who tend to be less flat and pure evil, are loved in modern stories (they are the heroes of their own stories, it's often said). Their internal conflict is presented in a more humane and realistic way in contemporary speculative fiction (e.g. Thanos). Thanos' morality in *Avengers: Infinity War* is questionable, to say the least – mass genocide is never the answer – but his mission to solve the over-population and finite resources problem is a real problem in the real world, one of several that must be addressed. The speculative fiction stories allow people to think about these problems in an operative way through the “what if?” premise.

Table 1: All Time Box Office: Worldwide Grosses (accessed on 9 January 2019)

<b>1</b>	Avatar	<b>26</b>	Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest	<b>51</b>	Shrek 2	<b>76</b>	Coco
<b>2</b>	Titanic	<b>27</b>	Rogue One: A Star Wars Story	<b>52</b>	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	<b>77</b>	Shrek the Third
<b>3</b>	Star Wars: The Force Awakens	<b>28</b>	Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides	<b>53</b>	Spider-Man 3	<b>78</b>	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban
<b>4</b>	Avengers: Infinity War	<b>29</b>	Despicable Me 3	<b>54</b>	Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	<b>79</b>	Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales
<b>5</b>	Jurassic World	<b>30</b>	Jurassic Park	<b>55</b>	Spectre	<b>80</b>	E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial
<b>6</b>	The Avengers	<b>31</b>	Finding Dory	<b>56</b>	Spider-Man: Homecoming	<b>81</b>	Mission: Impossible - Fallout

7	Furious 7	32	Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace	57	Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	82	Fast & Furious 6
8	Avengers: Age of Ultron	33	Alice in Wonderland	58	Ice Age: Continental Drift	83	Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull
9	Black Panther	34	Zootopia	59	The Secret Life of Pets	84	Spider-Man 2
10	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2	35	The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey	60	Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice	85	Deadpool
11	Star Wars: The Last Jedi	36	The Dark Knight	61	The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	86	Star Wars
12	Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom	37	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	62	Wolf Warrior 2	87	Guardians of the Galaxy
13	Frozen	38	Despicable Me 2	63	The Hunger Games: Catching Fire	88	2012
14	Beauty and the Beast	39	The Lion King	64	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2	89	Maleficent
15	Incredibles 2	40	The Jungle Book	65	Inside Out	90	The Da Vinci Code
16	The Fate of the Furious	41	Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	66	Venon	91	The Amazing Spider-Man
17	Iron Man 3	42	Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle	67	Thor: Ragnarok	92	The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1
18	Minions	43	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1	68	Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith	93	Shrek Forever After

19	Captain America: Civil War	44	The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug	69	Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	94	X-Men: Days of Future Past
20	Transformers: Dark of the Moon	45	The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies	70	The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2	95	Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted
21	The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	46	Aquaman	71	Inception	96	Suicide Squad
22	Skyfall	47	Finding Nemo	72	Wonder Woman	97	The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
23	Transformers: Age of Extinction	48	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	73	Spider-Man	98	Monsters University
24	The Dark Knight Rises	49	Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	74	Independence Day	99	Bohemian Rhapsody
25	Toy Story 3	50	The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	75	Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them	100	Deadpool 2

Umberto Eco said that the superhero stories are static, immobile, maintaining the illusion of an ever-continuing present. This maintenance of the superhero immortality, breaking the natural flow of time from one story to another, is necessary from the mythopoeic and commercial point of view (1972, p. 19). Eco points out that the people's hunger for redundancy and repetition is very much present in popular narratives (1972, p. 21). People look for familiar stories and favorite characters; it comforts them. The staticity of the stories arises as the result of denying the superheroes a normal life: to marry, have children, and die. Nowadays, this problem is being addressed more often: superheroes are having big narrative arches; there is a new wave of artists with new ideas; the big companies (DC and Marvel) created alternate realities and timelines for

well-known characters, which the public enjoys and increases the revenue. The examples are many but only ten will be mentioned here to illustrate the idea: V for Vendetta (1982-89); Watchmen (1986-87); The Dark Knight Returns (1986); Kingdom Come (1996); Loki (2004); The Umbrella Academy (2007-08); Wolverine: Old Man Logan (2008-09); Jupiter's Legacy (2013-); Starlight (2014); The Vision (2015-).

There are various reasons to explain the phenomenon of less staticity in contemporary superhero stories. This paper will present five reasons: 1) the maturation of the medium through its artists/publishers and the area of Comics Studies (e.g. Will Eisner and Scott McCloud); 2) the public's necessity to consume "complete" and more mature stories; 3) the introduction of the graphic novel as the new quality paradigm in graphic literature – stories in book format with a beginning, middle, and end; 4) the well-planned story arches from the big companies and their multiverses that permit artists to work on several timelines and alternate realities; 5) the publication of narratives on the Internet – digital comics and web-comics created outside publisher's rules, where the authors have more creative liberty.

In all genres, but more often in speculative fiction, one can find the symbolic images and narrative abbreviations of archetypes. Archetypes are present in all stories, but the speculative fiction genre has a propensity to myth and dream-like narratives that make them fertile ground for these universal symbols. Christopher Vogler pondered on several archetypes that have been adapted from myths, fairy tales and dreams into cinema. These archetypes are recurring character types such as the questing hero, the herald, the wise old man/woman (the mentor), the threshold guardians, the shapeshifter, the shadowy antagonist, the trickster, and the allies (2007, p. 23, 26). Vogler also presented the possibility of these archetypal patterns working in a non-static way; the archetypes as functions permit the flexible and temporary attribution of a specific archetype to a character; one character can be several archetypes, transitioning from one to another as if changing masks. The archetypes as characteristics of the protagonist give the hero the possibility to alter archetypal masks giving him, or her, more depth (2007, p. 24-25).

Carl Jung coined the concept of archetypes and gave these mythological patterns signification (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 2001, p. 429). These images, or symbols, are narrative abbreviations in a story or situation. Jung

considered that the first archetype, “discovered” by Freud, was the one that characterizes Oedipus. The Oedipal incest complex and many others help explain how the human mind works (MORFORD and LENARDON, 1977, p. 7-9). Myth and archetypes are inextricably connected because of their universal qualities.

Michael Faber and John Mayer (qtd. in KIDD, 2016, p. 26) attributed certain characteristics to the modern archetypes: they are characters in a story; they are represented as mental models; they provoke emotional responses; they work at an unconscious level; and they are memorable and easy to learn: the reason why they endure time.

Stereotypes, on the other hand, “(...) are very culture specific. In many cultures, certain groups are seen as possessing specific, often negative, characteristics. Individuals within those groups are treated as if these negative stereotypes are true, which is seldom the case”. Stereotypes are natural phenomena but, unlike archetypes, they can be a problem to the contemporary multi-cultural societies when they are overused or used unethically (KIDD, 2016, p. 26-28).

The new cinematic myths can be used to break old notions of gender and race: in *Black Panther* (2018), we have a black superhero, protected by female warriors, brother to a bright young woman – the top scientist in Wakanda, the most advanced country in the world, governed by Africans. This movie, positioned in ninth place in the list of the top grossing films worldwide, was a public and critics success (the first superhero movie nominated for best picture at the Oscars); the powerful and technological African nation image the movie conveyed is having its beneficial repercussions in black communities all over the world. The way Wakanda is presented is appropriate for the contemporary public: a magnificent and positive amalgamation of the old and the new. Movies like *Black Panther* and *Wonder Woman* (2017) are paramount because they offer diversity and originality back to the world and they break negative stereotypes in popular culture.

## **Are the New Myths an American Thing?**

In Table 1 all films are American productions, or co-productions, for the exception of *Wolf Warrior 2* (2016), which is the number one



top-grossing Chinese film of all time. It could be argued that the speculative fiction genre and superhero films are an American trend that is monopolizing cinematic culture all over the world. The lack of production of these genre films in other countries is conveyed by Table 2, which presents the top-grossing foreign language films in the world box office, since 1980 (FOREIGN LANGUAGE).

According to Table 2, only fourteen films of the top 100 are considered speculative fiction (grey-numbered cells) on this paper. The superhero movies fall from twenty-seven percent, in the previous table, to one percent in Table 2. Reading both tables it's arguable that the speculative fiction genre hegemony is a world phenomenon with its epicenter in the U.S.A.

**Table 2: Box Office Mojo: Foreign Language (accessed on 9 January 2019)**

<b>1</b>	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	<b>26</b>	Brotherhood of the Wolf	<b>51</b>	Amour	<b>76</b>	Amores Perros
<b>2</b>	Life is Beautiful	<b>27</b>	Spirited Away	<b>52</b>	The Closet (Le Placard)	<b>77</b>	Bread and Tulips
<b>3</b>	Hero	<b>28</b>	House of Flying Daggers	<b>53</b>	The Grandmaster	<b>78</b>	Chennai Express
<b>4</b>	Instructions Not Included	<b>29</b>	P.K.	<b>54</b>	Curse of the Golden Flower	<b>79</b>	Farewell My Concubine
<b>5</b>	Pan's Labyrinth	<b>30</b>	La Vie en Rose	<b>55</b>	3 Idiots	<b>80</b>	Bad Education
<b>6</b>	Amélie	<b>31</b>	The Intouchables	<b>56</b>	Maria Full of Grace	<b>81</b>	The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest
<b>7</b>	Jet Li's Fearless	<b>32</b>	The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	<b>57</b>	A Very Long Engagement	<b>82</b>	Biutiful
<b>8</b>	Il Postino	<b>33</b>	Shall We Dance?	<b>58</b>	The Secret in Their Eyes	<b>83</b>	La Femme Nikita
<b>9</b>	Like Water for Chocolate	<b>34</b>	Talk to Her	<b>59</b>	Cantinflas	<b>84</b>	Your Name.

10	La Cage aux Folles	35	Un Gallo con Muchos Huevos	60	Sultan	85	Broken Embraces
11	Baahubali 2: The Conclusion	36	My Life as a Dog		Nowhere in Africa	86	I am Love
12	Kung Fu Hustle	37	All About My Mother	62	Tell No One	87	Jean de Florette
13	The Motorcycle Diaries	38	Dhoom 3		Coco Before Chanel	88	Lust, Caution
14	Iron Monkey	39	Sanju	64	Cyrano de Bergerac	89	Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior
15	Monsoon Wedding	40	Sarah's Key	65	Kolya	90	Italian for Beginners
16	Y Tu Mama Tambien		The Girl Who Played with Fire	66	El Crimen del Padre Amaro	91	Au Revoir, Les Enfants
17	Volver	42	City of God	67	Mongol	92	Mediterraneo
18	Under the Same Moon	43	Eat Drink Man Woman	68	Indochine	93	Babette's Feast
19	Cinema Paradiso	44	Run Lola Run	69	Central Station	94	Black Book
20	Dangai	45	Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown	70	Europa, Europa	95	Ae Dil Hai Mushkil
21	The Protector	46	The Orphanage	71	Tiger Zinda Hai	96	The Lunchbox
22	Padmaavat	47	A Separation	72	Water	97	Antonia's Line
23	No Manches Frida	48	La Cage aux Folles 2	73	Downfall	98	Ya Veremos
24	Das Boot	49	The Wedding Banquet	74	The Counterfeiters	99	Mostly Martha
25	The Lives of Others	50	Fanny and Alexander	75	Belle Epoque	100	2.0

Livio Bioglio and Ruggero Pensa understood the limitations of evaluating a film's success by the box office revenues and critics' reviews. For

them, the most interesting alternative technique is related to the number of citations a movie receives from others produced *a posteriori* – what they called the *network of citations* (2018, p.2). Through complex algorithms and other techniques, they researched almost fifty thousand films in the Internet Movie Database and created a list with the twenty most influential films (Table 3). Twelve titles are considered speculative fiction in this paper: a noticeable number that allows the assumption that it's not just the top-grossing films that show the importance of the speculative fiction genre.

**Table 3: Most Influential Films**

<b>1</b>	The Wizard of Oz	<b>6</b>	Metropolis	<b>11</b>	Casablanca	<b>16</b>	The Searchers
<b>2</b>	Star Wars	<b>7</b>	Citizen Kane	<b>12</b>	Dracula	<b>17</b>	Cabiria
<b>3</b>	Psycho	<b>8</b>	The Birth of a Nation	<b>13</b>	The Godfather	<b>18</b>	Dr. Strange- love or: How I Learned to Stop Wor- rying and Love the Bomb
<b>4</b>	King Kong	<b>9</b>	Frankenstein	<b>14</b>	Jaws	<b>19</b>	Gone With the Wind
<b>5</b>	2001: A S p a c e Odyssey	<b>10</b>	Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	<b>15</b>	Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens	<b>20</b>	Battleship Potemkin

## Conclusions

Many myths are lost or have lost their ability to resonate with the modern public. But the cinematic speculative fiction genre, through the creation and adaptation of myths and mythical stories, is bringing back the appropriate narratives filled with magic, wonder, role models, and the morals and tools we need for this age and time. The decline of myth and mythical thought seems to be receding because of the entertainment business and film production. To measure the human craving for mythical stories the box office revenues offer insight about the worldwide

moviegoers' choices (Table 1). The list of the most influential films (Table 3) confirms the desire to see these types of stories in a medium – cinema – that was officially born in 1895.

Myth and mythical thought were once helpful to explain the unexplainable, such as the strange natural phenomena our ancestors couldn't comprehend. Later, the myth was useful in explaining the way our mind works and how dreams affect us as human beings. The world is getting more and more complex, and people are dependent on scientific knowledge and gadgets they don't fully understand. Mythical thought and scientific thought have similar characteristics and, despite the inherent differences, they can be woven together for a better and healthier perception of the world. The complexity and intricacy of the modern world are, sometimes, unexplainable and inscrutable to most people as well as the future of our world. The speculative fiction genre can treat complex subjects in an approachable way; therefore the new myths help us understand whom we are and where we can go from here. Myth and mythical thought are necessary to better deal with the complexity of our modern world and the future of our species.

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