**The Jungian Thing: Duality in *Full Metal Jacket***

**A Discussion**

**Ichorwhip:** The Jungian thing is the distinction between the personal unconscious and the Collective Unconscious. The personal unconscious is composed of an individual's repressed thoughts or feelings. The Collective Unconscious is composed of primordial images found in all of humanity: Jung labelled them archetypes. A cornerstone of his therapeutic approach to psychology was the recognition of the way an individual's personal unconscious integrates, or conflicts with the Collective Unconscious.

In this light, how does Joker's sick joke pan out? If he writes "Born to Kill" on his helmet, it would seem to be a manifestation of the Collective Unconscious, for as Kubrick points out again and again in his films, we have a primordial urge to kill each other. Joker's peace button on his body armor is a symbol of his personal unconscious. "Where'd you get it?" "I don't remember sir." Has Joker repressed the origin of the peace symbol?

**T.D. Juede:** I believe Private Joker was making a statement about how he acknowledges his fate... or that there is no such thing as a mistake.

**David Kirkpatrick:** Private Joker fancies himself an individual... a writer's conceit. Pun on "private joke". But as a journalist for Stars and Stripes he must recite the party line.

**Gordon Dahlquist:** To push the duality stuff a little farther, it should very much be remembered that when Joker actually speaks this little gem:

1) he's talking to a shit-for-brains pogue colonel who knows f@%!-all about combat and real life in country.

2) Joker himself is a wise-ass reporter who - when we really get down to it - also knows f@%!-all about combat and real life in country.

3) Joker's WHOLE EXISTENCE, from the beginning of the film to the point where he kills the sniper, is all about denying, abstracting, ironizing, distancing the duality within him.

**Mark Ervin:** I think this is a crucial point. Jungian duality is merely another phrase where Joker can demonstrate his aloof superiority: unaware of how his own personality exemplifies the concept. His beating Pyle harder with the soap than anyone else, and then holding his ears to stifle the screams, is a perfect example.

**Ichorwhip:** Joker seems to have an acute sense of the conflict within himself: "I wanted to meet interesting and stimulating people of an ancient culture... and kill them.... I wanted to be the first kid on my block to get a confirmed kill." Joker reconciles conflicting components of his unconscious experience and achieves a sort of individuation and wholeness of self, albeit in a rather bizarre and ironic manner.

**Gordon Dahlquist:** when he's mouthing off about being "the first kid on my block to get a confirmed kill" he's not really embracing anything other than a posture that he hopes will protect him from any deeper risk and investment. Which is to say, his strategy for saving himself is consistently to deny that he exists.

I don't think Joker is accepting of his own duality at all, until the end. It's the killing of the sniper that finally allows him to embrace it, and that embrace is certainly also a gesture of self-destruction. While the comment about the Jungian thing is certainly funny and does reference a central theme of the film, it's also very much spoken within context, and by an unreliable narrator, which are part of the film's own duality of presentation: of the supposedly objective, with the desperately performed.

**Mark Ervin:** That's well put. What makes Full Metal Jacket a devastating experience for me, is the gravity of the self-realization when Joker kills the sniper. His drive to revenge Cowboy and at the same time his delivery of cruel mercy to a female child sniper rips his self-denial to shreds. It's clear that Joker recognizes himself in the pathetic duality of the sniper, and that the agony of firing that shot is because it's an act of suicide as well as aggression (as with Pyle's last act).

**Gordon Dahlquist:** The gun happens to be aiming in a different direction, which is perhaps an all-important political reading of the film, but a trivial psychological reading.

**Boaz:** "We had to destroy the village in order to save it." Remember that famous quote from the Viet Nam War?

**Gordon Dahlquist:** this is a complicated point Mark, but as you say, crucial: the connection of Joker's big tranformative gesture with Pyle's is what makes sense of the film as a whole. We pay attention to Joker for a reason, despite his wilfully shallow behavior he is consistently perceptive, improvisational and smart.

**Mark Ervin:** And he has a certain courage to be truthful to a fault. On several occasions his admissions get him into trouble, but while he can be truthful about himself to others, he can't be true to himself--until the killing of the sniper....

**Gordon Dahlquist:** A perfect example of this is where Joker's courage in standing up to Hartman (re: the Virgin Mary) is rewarded with the responsibility for getting Pyle into shape, that he can't ultimately live up to, because it would amount to a personal investment. We see that it's Joker's own guilt in failing Pyle that leads him to beat him all the harder. This also brings us back to the duality moment with the colonel. Almost all of what the antagonist figures to Joker (Hartman, Lockhart, Animal Mother, etc.) say about him in their criticisms is true.

**Ichorwhip:** The whole film reeks of duality, especially during the boot camp sequence.

"Sound off like you've got a pair!"

"Only steers and queers come from Texas..."

"One for the commandant. One for the Corps."

"This is my rifle. This is my gun."

And then there is the duality of "Left Right Left Right Left Right" ad infinitum. It's clear Pyle doesn't know his left from his right. Joker shows him how to lace his boots, "right one over the left, left one over the right..." Also Pyle has to be shown, one leg at a time, how to get over the obstacle. This is a crucial symbolic event in the film. It looks like Pyle might make it after all. He may achieve individuation similar to his doppelganger Animal Mother. "Congratulations Leonard, you did it." If only he hadn't succumbed to the allure of a jelly donut.

**Peter Tonguette:** One of the more interesting theories about "Full Metal Jacket's" unconventional narrative structure was proposed by critic Bill Krohn, who wrote, "...the little world of the training camp is portrayed as a brain made up of human cells thinking and feeling as one, until its functioning is wrecked from within, when a single cell, Pyle, begins ruthlessly carrying out the directives of the death instinct that programs the organ as a whole." In many ways, Pyle is on his way to becoming an ideal Marine - a strong rifleman with a hard heart - But he self-destructs when confronted with Joker's humanity.

**Mark Ervin:** I would argue it is Pyle's humanity at odds with the platoon not the death instinct. His humanity makes a final return in the scene in the bathroom, the conflict causing the murder of Hartman and his suicide. Joker thinks his intellect; his cynicism; his satirical attitude alone is enough to keep Hartman's training at arm's length. Joker rides herd on his shadow side, while Pyle flips like a light switch. After Pyle gets revenge on Hartman, he points the gun at Joker, who begs for mercy. Pyle grants it, then kills himself. If Joker could have helped him through that episode without Hartman finding out, one might assume that Pyle would have become a marine, very much like Animal Mother.

I see a deliberately chosen resemblance between Pyle and Animal Mother: black hair, large stature, constantly half-open eyes, and the same false grin. The main difference is Pyle's juvenile baby fat. I don't know which actor Kubrick chose first, but the similarities are striking.

**Peter Tonguette:** After Pyle's suicide, the film shifts to Viet Nam and abandons many of the threads begun in the first act. Animal Mother emerges as the Marine Pyle might have turned into, although significantly he lacks Pyle's humanity, having evidently overcome whatever weaknesses he may have faced in basic training ("You did it, Leonard.") Animal Mother has literally "become death," ("I AM BECOME DEATH") the full realization of the Marine undoubtedly Hartman was trying to mold out of Pyle.

**Mark Ervin:** I had never thought of the quote just that way, but I think you may be right that this is part of the reason Kubrick put this phrase on his helmet. This makes the resemblance between Animal Mother and Pyle all the more poignant.

**Sask696:** What is the relevance of Joker killing the sniper? Is it that he finally acts upon the "Born to Kill" capacity in him?

**Ichorwhip:** I've always taken it that Animal Mother had at first mistaken Joker when he says, "we can't just leave her here," as if he thinks Joker wants to take her with them. When the sniper starts begging them to shoot her, Animal Mother picks up on what Joker is getting at, he says: "If you want to waste her, go on, waste her." Joker does so, his moment of truth is consummated. I view Joker's wasting of the sniper to be humane. It's his crucial moment, and the reconciliation of his duality's is at stake, also vengeance for Cowboy's death is fresh in the wind. But the moment at hand is a moral one, to put the mortally wounded sniper to death so that she will not suffer.

**Gordon Dahlquist:** And it's telling that the actions of this "best and brightest" representative are to degrade himself, to talk the talk, to hide for as long as he possibly can. And when Joker gets to the - essentially - same point that Pyle does, it matters that much more to him to avoid it. Quite simply, the point resonates with Joker because he is in fact thoughtful, whereas the transition for someone like Animal Mother was probably a little ... uh ... easier. It's this connection that allows us to really read the ending, and the hands off quality with which Kubrick presents it. There's no question that Joker is free, that he has reconciled himself with his situation, that actually killing himself is just a truthful, sensible gesture, given the situation. I think the film succeeds where many similar films don't, because it presents this truthfulness without judgement or condescension, or an externally imposed morality that a movie like "Platoon" feels compelled to fall back on.

Also interesting to consider that a filmed-but-cut scene showed Joker shooting two ARVN soldiers in a helicopter: in that version of the film, we would have seen Joker kill by the time we get to the final scene with the sniper. Obviously removing the earlier killings, places the final one into higher contrast.

**Mark Ervin:** The crux of the film, and why I see it as a masterpiece, is that in the act of killing the sniper, Joker, who is largely a pretence, finally finds himself and ties together his experiences: his attempt to laugh things off; his somewhat forced and excessive friendship with Cowboy; his shepherding and protecting of Pyle and Rafterman; his pretence of being a killer and a Jungian-- are all ultimately a war face which he loses when he kills the sniper.

**David Culpepper:**And the sniper is a woman! Throughout the film, women are objects of pleasure - and nothing else, in the finest traditions of the male hero cult projection. Joker plays this out in the aforementioned facades, he attempts to make the traditional John Wayne myth role his own, through his maverick sarcasm. It's quite a jolt to our intrepid Marine, when he is confronted by a culture where young women become skilled "marksman," killers in a desperate grasp for self- determination. That wasn't in the movies!

Another angle is that of the Archetypal. Joker (not unlike Dr. Bill in Eyes Wide Shut), lives in the Persona; behind a mask. Jung decried this Western narcissism repeatedly, because to him it illustrated the shallow banality of the ego. The Shadow is quite active throughout the film, Joker keeps this darker reality of humanity at bay with the mask of his Persona. But the Shadow finds its song in the beating of Pyle; Pyle's suicide; the attack on the base in the Tet Offensive; the lime-covered bodies in the pit; the death of Cowboy; and finally in the confrontation with the young woman. The feminine principle, embodied by the sniper, interplay with the Shadow. Joker has no real experience of women, his only ones are those of subjugation, "female" being reduced to a mere "sign" not only socially but psychologically. The climactic encounter can be read as a conflict between the ego and the anima, the ego (Joker) has no choice but to kill the anima (the sniper). His psyche is caught in a dilemma with no resolution. The question is, where will he go from here?

**Peter Tonguette:**The larger point here hits at the core of how I view the film, and why I consider it to be the finest exploration of war ever put on film. Kurt Vonnegut has often written that, had he been born in Germany as opposed to Indiana, he probably would have become a Nazi. This is a pretty radical statement, it hints at the darkness within all human beings. And yet I think it's true. To overcome the darkness within all of us we must first recognise that darkness. I feel this is the point Joker has reached at the end of the film.

**David Culpepper:**I get a rather fatalistic feel from the end of Full Metal Jacket. I don't see how the darkness can ever be entirely overcome.

**Sask696:** Another thing that's puzzled me is the reference to the Mickey Mouse song at the end. The placement of Mickey and Minnie dolls on the window sill behind Joker in the news barracks, perhaps foreshadows the end of the film? Does this somehow fit into the Jungian thing?

**Ichorwhip:** I'd felt that the cheap and phoney connotation of Mickey Mouse served the film well. We think of things that are Mickey Mouse as being lousy and crummy.

**Rick Nelson:** I always figured that the Mickey Mouse theme song was the troops' expression of their triumphant Americanism. Having survived their part of the Tet Offensive, they release all their pent-up adrenaline by proclaiming their status as Jolly Green Giants, walking the earth singing the most American thing they could think of, the Mickey Mouse song. Nicely surreal that.

**Tom Haynes:** I don't take away a sense of the soldiers swaggering with US power at the end of Full Metal Jacket. Just the opposite. Mickey Mouse is referenced at least three times in the film, each time ironically. The first is when Hartman goes into the head to see what Pyle is screaming about: "What is this Mickey Mouse shit?" The second is in the Stars and Stripes office, where a Mickey Mouse doll is visible. The entire sequence is devoted to showing that the Stars and Stripes paper is a joke, and that everyone in the room understands that it is. Hence the banner, "first to go, last to know".

The singing of the Mickey Mouse song seems to me a kind of realization, by Joker at least, of what is important in his life. For all his earlier bluster and jokes, he knows now that the war isn't what's important. He's grown up.

**Gordon Dahlquist:** I would disagree. Yes, he has a clarity about what is important, yes one could say he's grown up, but I would say that this clarity and growth has everything to do with the war. That in fact, the war has become everything. I don't think the Mickey Mouse song is particularly ironic. One of the ironies is the exact lack of irony in which it's sung. In the audience, we smile stiffly at the distance between Hue city and Annette Funicello (it's a joke but not a very good one) ... but perhaps we smile even more stiffly, because the men singing it have managed to find a clarity, where no distance between Hue city and Annette Funicello exists at all. There's an element to the final scene that's wide open in a way the rest of the film isn't, and much of this relates to Joker's statement about being unafraid: for the first time in the film, I would suggest.

**Mark Ervin:** One has the sense that Joker has started the singing of the song himself; Mickey Mouse is identified with him throughout. It is his ability to embrace incongruity that separates him, by degrees at least, from the fates of Pyle and Animal Mother. The final image of hell suggests that, even for Joker, it no resolution, and no easier an endpoint.

**Ichorwhip:** It seems like the denouement of Full Metal Jacket is foreshadowed by Hartman: "If your killer instincts are not clean and strong, you will hesitate at the moment of truth. You will not kill. You will become dead marines. And then you will be in a world of shit.

**T.D. Juede:** The United States has the most sophisticated and powerful military forces in the world, not to mention the biggest entertainment icons. What America does best is entertainment and armed forces.

**David Kirkpatrick:** While John Wayne made some World War II films mythologizing the American war hero, Disney also made propaganda cartoons demonizing Germans and Japanese. And these figures stand against the context of John Wayne's association with Westerns and Disney's association with its Main Street USA theme park.

**Gordon Dahlquist:** You start thinking about a larger socio-economic picture; about how the military functions..... Full Metal Jacket is an inordinately layered piece of work.

**Mark Ervin:** I think so, and it's sad that so many people see this film as inferior to his earlier films.

**Gordon Dahlquist:** I believe Geoffrey Alexander used to say it was his favorite, and I can see why. It's sort of impossible for me to choose between Kubrick's Films, but I do reject that Full Metal Jacket is a lesser film in any way. It's one of those films that takes the measure of its audience, not the other way around.