

CS200 RESEARCH PAPER

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FILM – THE DREAM FACTORY

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Introduction

Rara Of The Universe can be interpreted as a tale on this generation, who are now in their late teens and early 20s, and their quest for the right path, who to be and how to be. It tells the story of four young men who share a similar passion for music, but have different life experiences and see their decisions and paths influenced by the same unconscious forces. Born and raised in Mozambique, now living in Los Angeles, United States of America, author and director of the film, 22-year-old Glenn Espinosa, dwells on this idea of the unconscious, embodied in the film by women in traditional African costumes that may be understood as a play on African spirituality. These women, the unconsciousness of the main characters, drive them to make the right decisions and follow their ideal path and separate themselves from what is distracting them. With very few dialogues and monologues, the director meticulously employed different signs throughout the film to situate every character and elaborately consummate the narrative. Sounds, colors, shapes, movements and camera angles all play an important part in the viewers understanding of the message being conveyed in the film.

Cinema, and therefore films, whether they are based on real-life stories or not, are an incremental part of an individual's reality and context, and according to Professor of Cinema Studies Barbara Creed, share a relation of co-influence with psychoanalysis, for they share the same background dating back to the end of the nineteenth century (Creed 1998:1). The film reflects on common dilemmas faced by many such as alcoholism, relationship struggles and procrastination, and this essay aims to critically investigate the relationship between the film and the way these four dilemmas are exposed and portrayed, and psychoanalytic theory.

Psychoanalysis and film

Psychoanalysis through Sigmund Freud

We are different from the other living creatures because of our ability to think beyond mere animal drives and instincts and make decisions on our own. This also places us humans as the most dominant species on earth. The way we studied and interpreted the human mental and human behavior suffered a dramatic and radical transformation from the dying years of the nineteenth century, which led to an also radical change in the way we humans understood ourselves (Lapsley & Stey 2012:1). Sigmund Freud played a very important part of this change of perception. Freud discovered that the human mind was a multidimensional body that was “only partially accessible to consciousness and then only through indirect means such as dreams or neurotic symptoms”, and called it the unconscious, that “is a repository of repressed desires, feelings, memories, and instinctual drives, many of which, according to Freud, have to do with sexuality and violence” (Rivkin & Ryan 2004:389). Freud brought up the idea of the human mind being divided into three concepts: the id, the ego and the superego. The id represents human’s basic instincts that are motivated by the body’s desire to seek pleasure, the ego that “as a result of the direct influence of the external world” is what regulates the basic instincts of the id, in order to act according to the rules and norms of the real world assuming the role of reasoning, and the superego that is an idealistic version of the ego and “bids the psychic apparatus to pursue idealistic goals and perfection” (Lapsley & Stey 2012:1). Freud saw the id, in the primary process of life, as an irrational characterized by sexual libido, aggression and other instincts. The secondary process, where reason, logic and acts according to social constructs and contracts are where the ego and superego lie (Rivkin & Ryan 2004:391). During the night, when one is asleep, the ego is not able to repress the unconscious and for this reason, Freud argues that it is in the form of dreams, that the unconscious expresses itself, and he explains that “[u]nconscious wishes can find expression in dreams because dreams distort the unconscious material and make it appear different from itself and more acceptable to consciousness” (Rivkin & Ryan 2004:390). Later, Freud realized that the unconscious is not

only what is repressed, but what is repressed is indeed unconscious. This realization came from the fact that if one is conscious, then he must realize his resistances and acts of repression to a certain extent and for this reason, much of the ego must too be unconscious (Lapsey & Stey 2012:4).

The visual plays a very important role in human understanding and performance in the world, and therefore is a very relevant part of psychoanalysis. Scopophilia, as suggested by Freud, is the pleasure in looking and is one of the basic drives with which we are all born with, apart from those who are born unable to see (Rose 2001:100). How visual images affect the spectator of artwork or film is what psychoanalysis is concerned with, interpreting the various signs, instead of being concerned with the producer of these images (Rose 2001:101).

Psychoanalysis and Rara of The Universe

A film can communicate in ways other mediums would perhaps not be as successful or efficient to the audience. The idea is to make the viewer engage with the film in a transcendent level where he is able to see himself in the film and as Rose states in her writing, “[c]inema is an especially powerful visual medium because a film can create a total world for its audience. Films manipulate the visual, the spatial and the temporal” (Rose 2001:101). This is done by “playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world and an object”. Laura Mulvey (cited by Rose 2001:101). The film takes place in six different dimensions of space but is in the first few seconds of Rara Of The Universe, that the viewer almost immediately begins to situate itself in what is perhaps the film’s most important setting. It is the outside and as the film goes on, we are able to learn that it is where the character’s personified unconscious perform (fig.1). The viewer is able to understand that the stories of the four characters are happening at the same time. This is due to the editing made, where the scenes are interspersed or overlapping each other in a sequence without interrupting or breaking the flow of it. It is important here, to allude to what Rose states in her text, “that there is no absolute right or wrong way to interpret a visual image” (Rose 2001:101). We are briefly introduced to the four main characters in their specific settings and as the story

unfolds, we learn more about the relationship between each of their stories. Following the characters, in order of appearance, we are introduced to Jazzz, the only character we are able to know his name, in what appears to be a bedroom where he is concentrated on his computer writing a song (fig2). What happens next, is the introduction of another character that is possibly Jazzz's girlfriend, confronting him. It appears that this is one of the characteristic situations where the young artist is trying to focus on his craft and is then pulled out of it because of random drama or issues without a partner. This could very much be the case of someone who is fixated in the Phallic stage for failing to overcome the Oedipus complex, who is, as a result, unable to maintain romantic relationships growing up. Freud claimed the oedipal situation as being the stage where the boy "develops a libidinal attachment to mother while identifying with father. Eventually, the erotic investment in mother intensifies and father now comes to be seen as an obstacle or as a jealous rival. The boy desires to possess mother but also to displace his rival" (Lapsley & Stey 2012:6). Apparently frustrated, flashes of the women in traditional African costumes (that play the role as signs of the character's unconscious personified) appear. The director here makes use of a subtle lowered pitch echo of the girlfriend's voice, gloomy colors and motion blur to give a sense of surrealism that play an important part in making the viewer see this scene specifically as a dream (fig3). Jazzz now leaves his house and we are on the verge of being properly introduced to main character number two. The transition between Jazzz leaving his house and going outside is met with more images of the unconscious and sounds of drums being played frenetically, almost as if an unconscious agenda was in conflict or fighting to free itself. And this is something that can be seen throughout the entire film. Almost as if the director was telling the viewer that the inside of the house where the unconscious is repressed or in other words, the character being inside, meant that he was acting according to the ego, and on the outside, where the unconscious is being kept (repressed) by the ego, is where he fully connects himself with his true desire and in this case his passion. Even being outside, this is a case where, as explained in Lapsley & Stey, the characters need to be aware of their own resistances to be able to realize the presence of these unconscious forces (Lapsley & Stey 2012:4). And this is what character number two fails to accomplish. He gets a phone call from who appears to be Jazzz, where they both arrange a meeting. During the phone call, he twice senses that there is something odd happening, almost as if it is trying to pull him out of his consciousness, to the point where it distracts him and he

almost gets hit by a car. He looks up to the sky as someone who is trying to see something beyond, confused, and the camera angle employed, a worm's eye view shot immerses the viewer in the scene and makes him also wonder what is going on. Still confused about what is happening, character two finally meets Jazzz and as they are walking, the mood of the film changes to a similar one mentioned earlier, except for, in this case, it is not as dream-like as it is when the unconscious is being portrayed. Jazzz appears to receive a signal and suddenly he stops walking for a couple of seconds, and then walks back, leaving character two with no idea of what is happening (fig.4). We can understand this as him deciding to go back home, to what is, paradoxically when we realize it is where his girlfriend is, his safe space. It is as if the ego, in a fight to block him from being 'in the presence' of his unconscious was calling him back. The tones of the colors here are similar to when character two was almost hit by a car. We can perhaps understand this as the manner the director found to communicate to us that both characters, according to their egos, were not supposed to be outside, but between the two, only Jazzz understood this, perhaps because character two is not conscious of his ego's resistance to the influence of the unconscious. Alluding to Freud saying that the ego, as well as the superego, plays in the socially accepted realm (Rivkin & Ryan 2004:391). In the author's cultural background, that is where the film was also shot, in Mozambique, pursuing a career in music or in arts, in general, is seen as a childish decision and it is almost marginalized. This to further explain that here, the author might be playing on this idea that the ego, that conforms with the norms of society, is reluctant to let the characters chase what can be compared to the "harmful realm of the biological drives" (Rivkin & Ryan 2004:391). Jazzz is not the only one who is comfortable playing with the ego's 'demands'. Character number 3, who is introduced in a kitchen, eating cereal and judging by his singing, appears to be in a joyful state of mind. It is as if he is in his comfort zone, not willing and not feeling as if he had a higher purpose to pursue. In his case, it appears that the unconscious was able to break in the house of ego to pull him out, as it is seen creeping behind him (fig.5). Suddenly the mood changes, the colors become dull and the character is seen now looking directly at the camera as if he had lost all of the enjoyment he had. We can understand this as a way of him communicating with the viewer, expressing his tiredness of having to deal with two forces fighting inside of him, almost as if he had given up. He is then seen outside, rapping with the unconscious right next to him, on the assumption that it is there to make sure the character does not fall back to his comfort

zone. Here again, the director makes use of a blurry effect to take the viewer into the ambiance of a dream (fig.6).

The fourth and final character is if we consider the assumptions made in this paper as being correct, introduced in an ironical setting. He is already set inside of a music studio, a place where we would expect to be where he finds himself in the position to fulfill his desire. We would expect this character to be exempt of any conflict, but judging from his body language and him drinking wine from the bottle, we are quick to understand that there is, in fact, something that is troubling him (fig.7). We understand alcoholism as being a consequence of oral fixation, but the director gives us another clue of what might be the case here. When character 4 drinks his wine, the studio where he is, gets filled with people dancing in a completely different tempo than the song playing, as if it was a disconnected dream, from which we are lead to assume that the people he is 'dreaming of', are not in the same wavelength as he is or in other words, do not belong in his world. This may be an indication that this character, is lonely as he is always in the studio and has the desire to finding people that share the same vision as his. His case here is completely different from the others. Here, the ego does allow him to live his dream, but at the expense of his social life. This is yet another evidence of the presence of contemporary struggles of young people in this film, as this is the case of many who are trying to achieve success in any field of work. The film ends with all four characters meeting outside, in a forest-like scenario, appearing to be confused by what they are seeing in front of them (fig.8). It is the manifestation of all of their unconscious, in what is a play on African spirituality, performing again, in a dream-like aura. It is the consummation that the unconscious was able to overcome the ego and allow the characters to live according to their own desires and not society's norms. This 'victory' is further clarified by the last scene where all four main characters, as well as a few extras, are seen joyfully 'living their dream' of making music (fig.9). Character one without the distractions of his relationship, character two who appears to have finally understood the signs, character three who was able to overcome the comfort zone, and character four who is now able to maintain both a personal and professional life healthy, as he has found people who share the same vision as his.

Conclusion

Psychoanalysis can be used to understand and explain films, artworks, music videos and others, as well as the impact they have on the viewer. The relationship between the characters and the viewer, directed and moderated by the various signs, signifiers and signified employed by the director, the dream, the id, ego and superego as well as the play on African spirituality, make this short film a good example of the changeable character of the human mind.

(Word count: 2696)

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Apendix



Fig 1. Glenn Espinosa, *Rara Of The Universe* [still]. 2019. Single channel HD film. 10 minutes 24 seconds. Copyright Glenn Espinosa, courtesy of Dream Inc, Maputo.

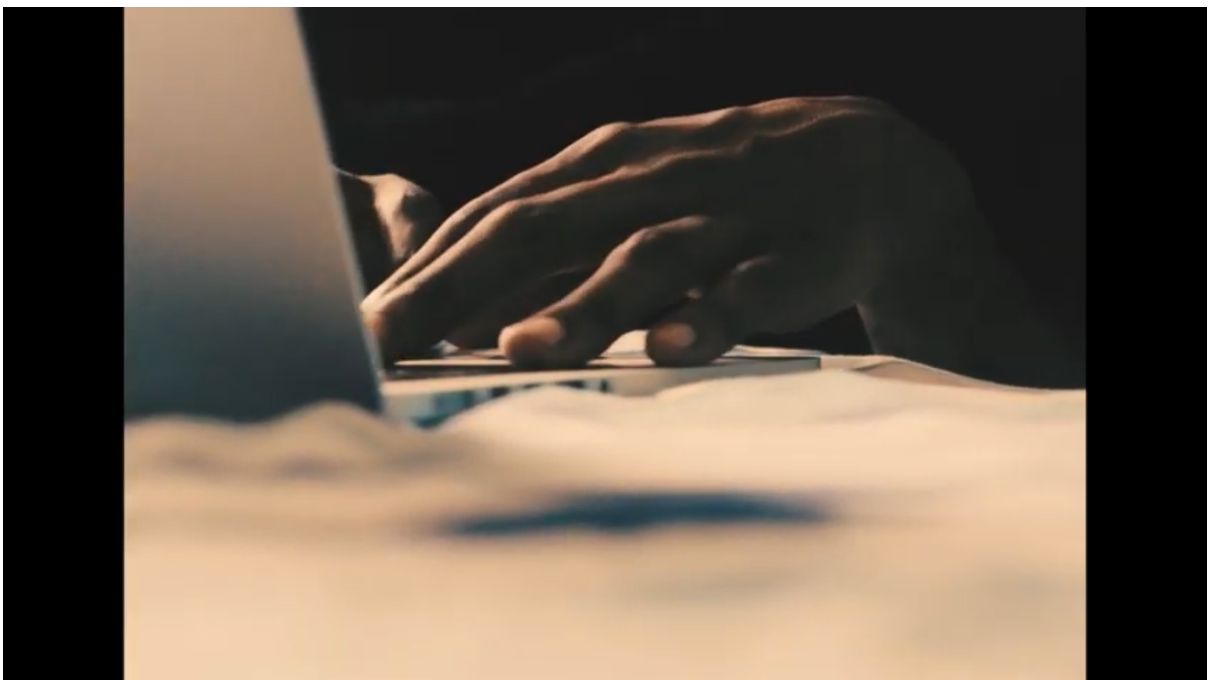


Fig 2. Glenn Espinosa, *Rara Of The Universe* [still]. 2019. Single channel HD film. 10 minutes 24 seconds. Copyright Glenn Espinosa, courtesy of Dream Inc, Maputo.



Fig 3. Glenn Espinosa, *Rara Of The Universe* [still]. 2019. Single channel HD film. 10 minutes 24 seconds. Copyright Glenn Espinosa, courtesy of Dream Inc, Maputo.



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Fig 6. Glenn Espinosa, *Rara Of The Universe* [still]. 2019. Single channel HD film. 10 minutes 24 seconds. Copyright Glenn Espinosa, courtesy of Dream Inc, Maputo.



Fig 7. Glenn Espinosa, *Rara Of The Universe* [still]. 2019. Single channel HD film. 10 minutes 24 seconds. Copyright Glenn Espinosa, courtesy of Dream Inc, Maputo.



Fig 8. Glenn Espinosa, *Rara Of The Universe* [still]. 2019. Single channel HD film. 10 minutes 24 seconds. Copyright Glenn Espinosa, courtesy of Dream Inc, Maputo.



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Are the in-text citations (within the body text) written according to the Harvard referencing method ?			Y	
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Is the document neatly presented?			Y	
Is 1.5 line spacing used, with 11/12pt font ? (including the same font throughout?)			Y	
Are the titles of artworks, books, articles, films, and so on in italics ?			Y	
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