Psychoanalysis film theory - Animated Films

Umesh D. Wagh

Author Note:
Composed under guidance of Prof. Nina Sabnani, IDC, IIT Bombay.
Abstract

Films are always been analysed in different aspects and lots of film theories have been put in order to analyse the films in a specific way. Psychoanalysis film theory deals with the analysis of any film in a completely different manner keeping in mind various psychological aspects of viewers as well as filmmakers mind.

This paper mainly focuses on psychoanalysis of animated films. After an introduction to various concepts in psychoanalysis theory put by Austrian physician Sigmund Freud, two animated films having completely different genres, have been analysed keeping these concepts in mind. The paper also gives an idea about how these two films succeeded to reach to viewers mind and also how viewers experience while watching the films.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, film theory, unconscious, Oedipus complex, Defence mechanism, Id, ego, superego, dreams, personality structures, Frozen, Paprika, unconscious love, alter ego.
Psychoanalysis and film theory

Psychoanalysis is certainly a psychological and psychotherapeutic theory and all other connected concepts. An Austrian Physicist, Sigmund Freud created this theory and it is further stemmed up by Josef Breuer and others. So, Sigmund Freud is called father of Psychoanalysis. In his theory he explained many concepts dealing with human psychology.

Now, the question is how this theory is related to the films. Psychoanalytic film theory which is nothing but the application of psychoanalysis concepts on films. So the idea is how the experience of watching films is so nice and how some movies become so successful and some don’t. Here comes the part of psychology of the audience and psychology of the filmmaker who tries to connect to the psychology of the audience. If we carefully analyse any film we can see how these concepts really are part of the film and hence film looks so real!

Let’s see some of the concepts in Freud’s psychoanalysis theory briefly, which will be useful while actually analysing the films.

1. **Unconscious**

   Unconscious is a part of mind where we keep our repressed desires, fears, memories, fantasies, without knowing it consciously. Almost 70% of our mind consists of these unconscious things.

As shown in fig.1 which is iceberg model of personality structure, we can see that most of the part which is below the water is unconscious. And also that it’s hidden below the conscious.
2. **Id, ego and superego:**
   Iceberg model also shows three very important concepts of our psychology: id, ego and superego.
   Id operates based on pleasure principle and it generally deals with basic drives.
   Superego operates based on perfection principle which kind of deals with our thoughts about our social status. And ego is actually balancing the former two. It operates based on reality principle.
   For example,

   ![Id, superego and ego](image)

   **Fig. 2 Example of Id, superego and ego**

3. **Sexuality:**
   Sexuality deals with the sexual or physical desires we have, they may be conscious or unconscious. Each person has his/her own space which is generally hidden in his/her unconscious.
   The sexual instinct is represented by a force called ‘libido’.

4. **Oedipus complex and Electra complex:**
   During some years of childhood, especially at phallic phase and genitals phase of development, it happens that the child feels this unconscious attraction towards his/her opposite gender parent. That is, for boys, they are attracted to their mother, which is called as Oedipus complex and in case of girls, they are attracted to their father, which is called as Electra complex.

5. **Defence mechanism:**
   These are nothing but the techniques implemented by the ego in order to control instincts and ward off anxieties. There are different ways of defence mechanisms including ambivalence, repression, avoidance, suppression, denial, rationalization, fixation, regression, identification, projection etc.

6. **Dreams**
   Dreams are generally the result of the combination of our conscious as well as unconscious thoughts. They actually show and make us almost feel the wish fulfilment or fears or fantasies.

7. **Aggression and guilt:**
   Aggression is an instinctual action controlled by mainly id and it disrupts superego. And then the powerful force that is brought into action by ego is guilt.
All of these concepts are part of our real life and films are nothing but the implementation of different incidents or imaginations which either can happen in real life or can be imagined in real life. Though, for some films, the world shown in the film and the story of the film is not at all part of the real world, but after all it’s an imagination, a creation by a human being and he/she is real. So even if it’s a fantasy film or fiction film, as it is created by someone’s imagination, it is connecting to the audience, as all psychological concepts like above are part of it.

Psychoanalysis of two animated films:

The two films which are analysed below are feature length animated films. The first film is an example of Disney classic which is – “Frozen” and the second one is a Japanese film – “Paprika”. Both of them are analysed keeping all the psychoanalysis concepts in mind.

1. “Frozen” (Disney classics – 2013)

This is an example of Disney classic film, directed by Chris Bunk and Jennifer Lee. It is completely a fantasy film.

Basic storyline:

It’s a story of a princess, Elsa, who has got power with which she can freeze anything. Accidentally, in her childhood she freezes her younger sister, which affects her so badly that she feels guilty throughout her life. And when she is now the queen, she has to face the people where she can’t control her power and after an accident she just runs away. Her younger sister, Anna, who is really connected to her sister, goes behind her to bring her back. And then story revolves around how negative characters in the film try to acquire the kingdom and how the love between these two sisters wins at the end.

Analysis of personality structure of main three characters:

The main three characters, Elsa, Anna and Kristoff (the guy who helps Anna in her mission), represent different levels of personality structure, which makes the story more interesting and believable.

Elsa, the snow-queen, after the accident in her childhood, becomes so guilty and conscious that even after becoming queen she is afraid to come in front of people. She represses her id and her superego, which is her social consciousness, overpowers id and ego. Opposite to Elsa, Anna is at id level of personality, in which she wants to follow her mind and set her basic desires free, rather than thinking too much about the consequences.
And lastly, Kristoff, who represents kind of balanced ego and using his balanced ego he is able to help Anna in her mission.

**Detailed analysis of main character Elsa:**
The story is based mainly around Elsa and her extraordinary power of freezing anything. Her emotions and her journey throughout the film are so interesting and real that it makes audience to empathize with her.

Elsa in her childhood accidently freezes her younger sister Anna. The king and queen i.e. her parents are advised to keep Elsa away from Anna. This incident affects Elsa so badly that she starts feeling so guilty throughout her life. And after that her power becomes enemy for her. The power is actually so beautiful but this incident affects on Elsa’s unconscious too and that effect can’t be erased easily.

**Changes in Elsa’s personality and her defence mechanism throughout the film:**
After the accident in her childhood, she becomes so guilty and conscious that she chooses to live in a closed room. Even after becoming queen she is afraid to come in front of people. Her superego, which is her social consciousness, overpowers id and ego. In adulthood, when she has to take the responsibility, but she is so conscious that she is just unable to control her power and again an accident happens due to which her superego just bursts and she runs away. Now, she wants to do is only follow her id and for that she chooses to live alone, very far from the kingdom and people.

Towards the end of the movie, after her struggle between superego and id, she manages to balance and her ego gives the strength to fight with negativity. At the end her balanced ego and positive feelings of love, unconsciously makes her successful in overcoming the negative effect of accident in childhood.
Background theme of love, Anna’s wish to live in freedom, search for pure love:

There is this background theme of unconscious and unconditional love in this film. Towards the end of the film, only solution to Anna’s illness is unconditional and pure love. All expectations go to the love between Kristoff’s love towards Anna. But at the end he couldn’t meet Anna and before him meeting her she gets frozen. Then Elsa hugs Anna and the unconscious, unconditional love between these two sisters heals everything. It brings Anna back. And main thing is it also heals Elsa’s negativity towards her power. This background theme of love, Anna’s positive personality, her wishes to live life freely, search for pure love and happy ending, all these things make audience completely fall in the film and make the film so interesting, beautiful and hence successful.


This is completely different level story than Frozen or any other classic stories. The film is a Japanese Sci-Fi animation directed by Satoshi Kon. It’s a very nice Sci-fi animation dealing with the concept of dreams and reality. Throughout the film, there is a lot of switching between dream world and real world and towards the end it’s the merging of the two worlds.

Basic Storyline:

The film revolves around the idea of consciously entering into the dream world. A team of scientists designed a machine using which anyone can consciously enter any other’s dream. The villain character, being selfish, steals this machine and uses it illegally to enter people’s dreams and destroy the real world. The main character Dr. Chiba, using her alter ego – Paprika – defeats the villain and saves the real world and resolves all the threats created by villain. All the sequences in the movie enter into one another so smoothly and the suspense and unfolding of the story makes the experience of watching ‘Paprika’ just awesome!

Analysis of Main character – ‘Paprika’ (Dr. Chiba):
The main character of the film is Dr. Chiba, a psychiatric researcher. She is a serious and rigid kind of personality for most of the part of the film. The film doesn’t actually show the background of this character, but it seems that she doesn’t want to be like that but something very different, like Paprika – who is nothing but the alter ego of Dr. Chiba.
Paprika is vibrant, carefree personality. Dr. Chiba shows superego personality where Paprika is more towards id, fulfilling her dreams and doing whatever she wants. It seems that Dr. Chiba thinks that if she lives in her alter ego in real life, she might not look serious and also it seems impossible to live like paprika. So it also looks like this is part of her defence mechanisms to hide her feelings from the world.

**Analysis of other characters:**

**Detective Konakava:**
By profession he is a detective, in relation with Paprika, he is actually a patient of Dr. Chiba. Konakava is suffering of certain find of fear and he is going through a hard period where he is very affected by a dream where he kills a person. Towards the end of the film, his past is unfolded. Actually during young ages of his life, when he was 17 years old, he was interested in film making. But unfortunately he had got a big failure in that career. It affected him so badly that unconsciously it remained in his life forever. And whenever he sees no. 17, or someone tries to speak about films to him, he becomes very panic and tries to avoid the topic every time.

**Dr. Tokita:**
Actually he is a very genius man. He has created the DC mini- machine used to enter into the dreams. But his personality is more like a kid. He is not socially mature. The character is like a kid trapped inside the body of a genius.

**Chairman (The villain):**
This character also shows a psychologically ill personality. He is a handicapped person and it seems that it bothers him so much that he wants to live in his fantasy world where he is normal. He steals the DC mini, and uses it illegally to enter into people’s dreams. As using DC mini he can actually enter unconsciously into the dreams, he can control the complete world and then he tries to bring the dream world and the real world together.
**Journey of Paprika’s (Dr. Chiba) personality throughout the film:**
There is entry of Paprika at the starting part of the film and during the title sequence Paprika’s id personality as well as her vibrant and free character has been introduced through a sequence of shots, where whole world is in her control. Then at the end of the title sequence she turns into Dr. Chiba who is a superego personality.
In order to fight with negative characters, Dr. Chiba again becomes Paprika. Paprika is shown very intelligent and having great presence of mind. Towards the end of the film, Paprika realises that she has to become light if she wants to fight with dark villain and to fight with unconscious dream world, she has to use consciousness in real world and then she defeats the villain. She seems very balanced, ego personality at the end of the film.

**Dream World, Switching between conscious and unconscious:**
There is this very smooth and convincing switching between the dream world and the real world. The idea of entering consciously into the unconscious world of dreams has been put very effectively. The scenes where there is complete chaos in the dream world looks very convincing and has made brilliantly.

**Internet and dreams analogy:**
While counselling a patient, Dr Chiba (Paprika), gives him a link on the internet, where she has created a different world. She tells him that the Internet world and the dream world are very much similar. These are the areas to set our minds absolutely free. Like in the dream world, our conscious self is inactive, so we don’t care about our identity or social status, about our superego. Similarly, while surfing on the Internet, we are semi anonymous and hence we can set our unconscious desires free.

Overall, this film also takes audience to a completely different world and makes the experience of watching this film so great!
Conclusion:
After analysing both the films keeping in mind the concepts of psychoanalysis, we can certainly say that, these factors really matter a lot for any film. While watching the film audience actually connect themselves to the characters and incidences shown in the film.

Frozen is a completely fantasy based film, still the emotions, the personalities of the characters are so connecting and convincing that audience just jumps into this fantasy world created by the filmmaker and this is the part where we can say that film got succeeded.

And the second film that is Paprika, which is also far away from reality, still the way this idea of entering into dream, has been put, is just amazing. Any film’s success depends on how the filmmaker has put his world of imagination in front of different kinds of audience, different kinds of personalities. So while making any film these concepts of Psychoanalysis should be kept in mind.

It doesn’t stop there. When the film is screened in front of audience, each one starts creating the combination of their own world and filmmaker’s world, which is result of all past experiences as well as unconscious desires hidden under audience’s mind.

All the concepts of psychoanalysis are part of our real life and films are nothing but the implementation of different incidents or imaginations which either can happen in real life or can be imagined in real life. Though, for some films, the world shown in the film and the story of the film is not at all part of the real world, but after all it’s an imagination, a creation by a human being and he/she is real.

References:

[10] http://www.apsa.org/content/about-psychoanalysis