

Editorial

The Cinema and Psychoanalysis. The Dream Machine

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Most investigators are certainly aware that, among other references to its nature and structure, the cinema can be thought of as a “dream machine”. Certainly, the oniric (the meaningful material with which cinema works) brings the universe of films closer to other apparently somewhat distant scientific enterprises with which it shares interests, debate and reflection. This is the case of the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, which cinematographic theory was inexorably to confront in the seventies. Accordingly, observation of the big screen in the search for information relating to the emergence of the material of the unconscious seen in some films, fictitious characters and recurrent archetypes, the latent conflicts underlying the story, formal and thematic constants of different genres and artistic movements or the very strategies used to capture spectators that depend on the context in which the film is delivered, should be of common interest to health professionals of psychological and scholars of the seventh art alike.

Convinced by the foregoing, in the present issue of *Journal of Medicine and Movies* we should like for the first time to offer a review of the encounter between psychoanalytical and cinematographic theory from the point of view of aesthetics, narrative and history. In other words, the links between the activities of the cinema lover, the film maker, and researchers into audiovisual issues. It is thus not surprising that the title of this issue is *The Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, in that same order, thereby emphasising an outlook defined by the pens of invited contributors (all of them involved in cinema critique) over other possible avenues of

enquiry (usual in publishing) that are more related to the work of health professionals and the humanitarian-scientific investigation of health problems.

So, from the many possibilities that one might entertain to address the convergence between both disciplines¹, we have selected four scenarios of interest with a view to offering some kind of cross-section of the legacy of Lacan and his acolytes to reflection on the Seventh Art.

The first focuses precisely on the theoretical transferences that both have exchanged with each other: *Films from the Couch: Film Theory and Psychoanalysis*. This article aims at rescuing the most important research efforts that have contributed to strengthening a common theory between the unconscious and the image. Efforts that are now almost forgotten -but which have had a huge impact on recent studies of audiovisual issues, such as filmology- run through the text to define and clarify psychic processes that any viewer will experience when confronted by a cinematic fiction when the anthropological phenomenon of emotional identification is activated.

Parallel to theoretical concerns, it has seemed appropriate to us to return to the image offered in the cinema of the figure of the psychoanalyst, understanding -despite this- that the big screen is able to forge a stereotype of the therapist of huge importance in the collective imagination of spectators². We have thus chosen for the section on “Medicine in Film Stills” a *biopic* about the father of all

psychoanalytical thought: *Freud* (1962), by John Huston, which is possibly the film that most soundly addresses the founder of the theory of the unconscious.

Starting out with the work of Gharaibeh about the image of psychiatrists in the American cinema³, (in which almost half of the characters interviewed -47.5%- were considered to be incompetent from the professional point of view), *Psychoanalysts through their own traumas* explores the figure of this type of health worker, focusing exhaustively on the treatment given to psychoanalysts in hegemonic fiction: from their first appearance as secondary, rather parodied figures, in the American cinema of the thirties to their ascendance to main characters in the crime films of the forties. Their fall as heroes is seen through interior crises and the absence of some kind of link between their profession and their private lives which, as from Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, is considered to be a constant when attempting to construct the tumultuous character of the psychoanalyst in the cinema.

If, as pointed out by Salín-Pascual⁴, the viewing of a film can provide a therapeutic effect on a patient through a glimpse of the illness befallen that patient, actually making such a film should be able to do the same. This, at least in our opinion, would be what has impelled Woody Allen to make at least one film a year. In *The cinema as therapy: psychoanalysis in the work of Woody Allen*, we analyse the efforts of the New York film-maker as an exemplary case of personal catharsis through the direction of films, considering his film production as an autobiographic representation aimed at releasing the tensions, fears and insecurities of the Jewish comedian through the comedy genre. Undoubtedly, in Woody Allen's films psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts figure as elements that

is as much criticised as they are deemed necessary for palliating the obsessions that plague the urbanites of nihilistic tendencies that inhabit his scenarios.

A final choice in this historical review of the cinema leads us to connect psychoanalysis with the rise of the American *film noir*, in its stage of maturation. In *Psychoanalytical Culture in the American Film Noir*, it is defended that the genetic code of the "series noir" lies in a dual view of life in which, underneath the skin, there can be glimpsed the unconscious of an embittered, sceptical and pessimistic society, portrayed with precision by the genre through its profound look at the turbid mechanisms of the human mind. Issues typical of psychoanalysis, such as the importance of sex during the configuration of personality, are addressed with ease by the genre through the antagonism of the *femme fatale* who detonates the conflicts of their plots. Others, such as the unconscious nature of memories, dreams and nightmares are dealt with in films with historical references, among which -owing to its form and content- *The Woman in the Window* (1945), by Fritz Lang, stands out: a palpable demonstration indeed of images in motion that draws us back to the idea expressed at the start of this editorial: the cinema is a dream machine.

References

- 1.- As a synthesis of the main contributions of psychoanalysis to the cinema, readers are referred to: Kaplan E. *Psicoanálisis & Cinema*. New York: Routledge; 1990.
- 2.- Regarding this, see: Ferrer A, Garcías X, Lerman B, Polo C. *Psiquiatras de celuloide*. Valencia: Generalitat valenciana-Llig; 2006.
- 3.- Gharaibeh, NM. The psychiatrist's image in commercially available American movies. *Acta Psychiatr Scand*. 2005; 111(4): 316-319.
- 4.- Salín-Pascual RJ. *Cineterapia: la psiquiatría y el psiquiatra a través de las películas*. México: Libros para todos; 2005.