



THE UNCONSCIOUS WITHIN: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF SHINJI MIKAMI'S 'THE EVIL WITHIN'

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Abstract

The human mind is an unknown playground for researchers. Among its various components, the subconscious is the darkest one. The conscious mind is shaped by social norms and regulations, where the unconscious remains primitive. Often it shows signs of violence- irrational and illogical. From Freud to Jung, everybody has argued that the subconscious, along with its violence and primitivism, is more real than the external reality. Whatever is repressed and hidden can be found in the unconscious. Now, researchers are trying to find ways to understand the activity of the subconscious. Psychoanalysis, along with quantum physics, is focusing on some practical methods based on the theories of psychology. Virtual gaming is becoming a very important medium day by day in this context. The simulations can easily portray the cases which are confined within theories. That is why game studies or ludology, a part of cultural studies, is being given importance by scholars and researchers. In my paper, I aim to analyze Shinji Mikami's 'The Evil Within' to unwrap the hidden meanings and symbols of human psychology. This paper focuses on the characters and their backgrounds to connect them to the plot of the game. My emphasis is on the psychological connotations found in the game and the theories supporting them.

Keywords: Psychology, Unconscious, Violence, Collective Consciousness, Game Studies.

Introduction

What is unconscious? Recent studies and theories have forwarded various perspectives on the unconscious or the subconscious part of the mind. According to cognitive psychology, the processing of subconscious information has been compared with the idea of subliminal processing of information which brings forth the question,

"How good is the mind at extracting meaning from stimuli of which one is not consciously aware?" (Greenwald, Klingner & Schun, 27)

On the other hand, social psychology has promoted the fact that the subconscious is the part of the brain whose processing is not accessible to an individual (Nisbett & Wilson, p.247). Now, in most cases of psychoanalysis, the researchers and scholars are using both of the ideological divisions to understand and exploit the functions of human psychology. The primary concept of psychoanalysis was the work of Sigmund Freud. In his books, *The Ego and the Id* (1923), *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1917), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), etc., Freud has given the world a whole new

frontier to dwell on and to search and explore. Psychoanalysis and the concept of the subconscious are not only limited to the medical field only but also it is an integral part of every field of human society- from art and literature to industry. Since the birth of psychoanalysis, the concept has shown a strong connection to literature and art- it can be called a mutual fascination. In this respect, we are indebted to, not only Freud but also Jacques Lacan and Carl Jung for their understanding of the human mind and the unconscious. In the 21st century, psychoanalytical studies and themes have taken their places in movies and also in virtual gaming. As science is advancing, so the fields of psychoanalysis are expanding. Game studies or ludology is a new field of cultural studies. The field is developing itself day by day. The gaming industry is exploring the unknown field of mind in their own ways reflecting the various shades of human psychology through their characters and virtual worlds. A virtual game can be defined as "a game which we play thanks to an audiovisual apparatus and which can be based on a story" (Kirriemuir, 4). Now a day, the researches on video games and virtual simulations have increased (Kirriemuir, 2). Though the majority of the studies deal with the negative aspect, few pieces of research attempt to uncover the hidden potential of gaming and simulation. To remove this stigma, many game developers have started to use more in-depth themes, literary concepts, storylines, and characters in their creations. Some video games are so vivid that they can be the subjects of intensive study and research. In my paper, I am going to analyze a psychological horror game 'The Evil Within' by Bethesda Softworks to express the issue of the subconscious and discuss how it can be irrational, absurd, and violent.

Freud and Subconscious

According to Sigmund Freud, human psychology is divided into three layers- the ego, the super-ego, and the id (Freud, 44). The ego is our consciousness, the super-ego is the social construction and the id is the repressed and hidden thoughts of the human psyche. Now, the id is connected to the subconscious or unconscious and is the main field of psychological researches. It is the instinctive and primitive part of human psychology

including sexual 'Eros' and the aggressive 'Thanatos' (Freud, 67). It is the part of the mind that contains violent and sexual drives, hidden memories, and repressed desires. The unconscious is very much impulsive, irrational, fantastical, and illogical. It is the darkest part of human psychology.

Freud's model of 'subconscious' is, still, dominating us and is shaping our concept of 'id'. It is very much detailed and specific than the current social and cognitive psychological studies and researches. In the 1800s, the term 'subconscious' was used to denote the behaviors of the hypnotized persons where they had no idea of their actions and their consequences (Goldsmith, 51). Charles Darwin, in his *On the Origin of Species* (1859), highlighted the term to denote the concept of 'unconscious selection' of nature. Freud himself promoted his concept of the subconscious as something which was not caused by a rational mind. He used the term 'Freudian slip' to clarify the irrational to some extent. In his *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), he gave numerous examples to establish his concept that the actions of the subconscious are unintentional.

Here comes a question- how can a person processes these unintentional, irrational actions? During Freud's time, the answer was not there because the technology was not that advanced. But now, science has given ways to understand the functions of the repressed mind. And the question is not 'how' but 'to what extent' people can actually report their unconscious activities.

The 'STEM' and Collective Unconscious

Game developer Shinji Mikami is a pioneer in creating psychological horror masterpieces like 'Resident Evil'. As a creator of the virtual world, he has a sharp idea about creating an atmosphere of utter horror and suspense that can play tricks on the minds of the players. His 'The Evil Within' takes the whole concept to a new level as we, the players, get trapped in a psychological limbo while experiencing the virtual world full of violence and threats that can only represent processes of our dark subconscious.

The story begins as three detectives from the fictional Krimson City Police Department, Sebastian

Castellanos, Joseph Oda, and Julie Kidman, are called to investigate a scene of mass murder and genocide at Beacon Mental Hospital. Upon arriving on the scene of the crime the detectives were horrified to see the brutality of the situation. It was soon revealed that there were two survivors- Dr. Marcelo Jimenez and his patient Leslie Withers. Sebastian and his colleagues found themselves trapped in an impossible world full of murderous hordes of monstrous people and horrific creatures. The time-space momentum was shattered and the perception of reality was tested. The story revolves around a science fiction machine called 'STEM' which is a gateway to the world of 'collective consciousness'. The 'collective consciousness' became 'collective unconsciousness' when Sebastian and other detectives faced 'Ruvik', a primal subconscious of a dead scientist named Ruben Victoriano. He was the person who invented 'STEM'.

The 'STEM' is a machine that can create a simulation world where the consciousness of several people can be connected. To be clear, it is a psychological virtual world. People's brains are attached to the machine and they can live in a world of shared memories. The term 'collective consciousness' denotes the strong feeling of a shared experience of togetherness in a unified or single field of the human psyche (Midgley, 103). Some examples of collective consciousness have been experienced in the spiritual traditions of Hindu folk mythology as well as among African non-literate tribes (Combs & Krippner, 2). Researcher B. Keeney, who has experienced the cultural and spiritual ideologies of the Bushmen of Africa, has stated:

"The Ju/' hoansi Bushman n/om-kxaosi (shamans) of Namibia and Botswana are quite familiar with 'collective consciousness' and one could say that experimental unions of relationship are the heart and soul of their healing work. [In the strongest of such experiences] One's consciousness will seem to slide or slip into another domain of being where one merges with the knowing of previous ancestors. In this domain of collective consciousness, sometimes called a 'classroom' by the Bushmen, you received knowledge. It is visionary and is directly absorbed- like being downloaded. Here songs, dances, information about plants, bead

work, and all kinds of matters are passed on." (Keeney, 37)

In the works of literature, the theme of collective consciousness can be found in the writing of the Romantics, especially in William Wordsworth. Wordsworth continually showed that nature is the collective consciousness of humankind. Thus, nature is connected to human emotions and nature works as a muse for every person in his/her respective field. 'The still sad song of humanity' that echoes through nature, in reality, is the shared memories of human plight (Wordsworth, 260). It is more notable in the works of W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Yeats, in his *The Second Coming*, talked about 'spiritus mundi'. The concept of 'spiritus mundi' is nothing but a collective hive of human thoughts and emotions. It is the ultimate source, much like a hard drive, that controls the flow of thoughts and ideas of every single individual:

"When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi

Troubled my sight..." (Yeats, 10)

The idea of 'collective unconsciousness' is of Carl Jung, rather than of Freud. According to Jung, the collective unconscious is actually a layer of the unconscious mind that connects us to the behaviors and histories of all mankind. The whole concept was a product of Jung's dream where he saw himself in a house containing two floors and a basement. The upper floor was well organized and decorated presenting the conscious personality. The ground floor was dark and medieval in nature representing the individual unconsciousness. The basement, on the other hand, was primitive in nature with ancient skulls and signs of primeval cultures, thus symbolizing the collective unconscious (Jung, 103). The concept can find its comparison with 'computer database' or 'cloud storage'.

Now scientists cannot claim to know that something like 'STEM' or a process to connect human brains together like a neuronal network is possible from current technological standing. Numbers of experimental terms like 'telepathy', 'psychokinesis', 'precognition', and 'clairvoyance' are there that attempt to render this psychological process. Some fields of quantum physics also try to

give some scientific light on the concept (Laszlo, 56). Bohm's 'holographic theory' (1980), Roll's 'psi field theory' (1965), Murphy's 'interpersonal field theory' (1945) and Laszlo's theory of 'cosmic plenum' (1995) have tried to give some explanation to unearth the complex idea of 'collective unconscious'.

The Evil Within

In the game, 'The Evil Within', the primary antagonist Ruben Victoriano or Ruvik is the direct representation of the untamed human subconscious. Ruben was a child prodigy with mental instability. Though he was young, he made huge advancements in the field of psychology and psychotherapy. He was the mastermind behind the creation of the 'STEM' system. Though Ruben kept himself detached from society, he had a strong relationship with his sister, Laura. A fire incident that killed Laura changed Ruben's life and his attitude towards life forever. He killed his parents to inherit the vast fortune of his family only to immerse himself in the research of 'STEM'. His intension was to create a virtual world, fuelled by his memory and unconscious, and live with his sister or his memories of his sister peacefully. Learning about the huge potential of the 'STEM' system, a shady organization called 'MOBIUS' tried to take control of the 'STEM' from Ruben killing him physically but letting his brain trapped in the 'STEM'.

Thus the 'STEM' world became the playground of the angry subconscious of Ruben giving the world an illogical, irrational, and horrific structure. Feeling betrayed Ruben's dark consciousness came to the forefront affecting the other experimental patients connected to the 'STEM' turning them into nightmarish zombie-like creatures who could not resist the temptation and freedom of unchained primitive unchained subconscious.

According to Freud, traumatic memories in the life of an individual can make an everlasting effect. Because of psycho-analytical counseling, those memories can be repressed, but they are stored in the unconscious. But, sometimes they break the borderline between conscious and subconscious and surface themselves in a more violent form. Freud experienced that many soldiers

who fought in the First World War faced such conditions. The brutal experience of war scorched their minds to such an extent that even medical science was unable to treat them properly. Their horrific experiences were chained in their subconscious temporarily, but even a simple stimulus was enough to trigger them bringing the traumatic memories out. It made them act violently, thus making them unable to enjoy a normal life. According to Freud, this violence is the inherent trait of every individual. It only needs a stimulus to get activated. The social norms or superego is the only thing guarding that violence:

"Civilization...obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city." (Freud, 124)

Not only the death drive acts as a source of violent reaction against the projected aggression, but also version of the 'inner space' that is created to repel the violence and hostility of the external world. (Frosh, 17)

Thus the 'STEM' world was modified and gradually changed on the whims of Ruben's wild desires. In this context, it is very interesting to note the change in the name of Ruben to Ruvik. So, Ruvik can be thought of as the violent subconscious of Ruben. Though Ruben was introvert, unstable and criminal-minded, it does not justify Ruvik's insane outburst of nightmarish thoughts. One of such creation of Ruben's mind was the degenerated monstrous form of his own sister, Laura. It was a creature which was the product of the memory of Laura's tragic death by fire and Ruben's own vengeance. The barn-house fire incident that heavily injured his sister and eventually killed her, left a deep wound in Ruben's subconscious. That grief and rage came to life in the form of twisted 'Laura-creature'. The fire remained the only weakness of the creature as the fire was the main reason for Laura's death. The creature's constant screaming could only portray Ruben's traumatic memory of Laura when she was screaming while burning. 'The Keeper' was another creature created by Ruben's primal subconscious memory. The creature had a

safe in the place of its head and it is highly symbolic. The keeper represents Ruben's memory of his safe where he kept all his research files and his uncontrolled rage. The 'Safe-head' also symbolizes Ruben's attempt to hide his past and thus crushing everything before him.

If Ruben or Ruvik was the subconscious side in the plot, then five other characters represented the conscious- Detective Castellanos, Joseph, Julie Kidman, Dr. Jimenez, and finally Leslie Withers. Though mentally unstable, Leslie was the most important piece of the puzzle called 'STEM'. He was a patient of Beacon Hospital under the care of Dr. Jimenez. Upon witnessing the murder of his family in his childhood, something broke within him, and from that point of time he was living in a constant disillusion that his family was alive and he would soon join them. This peaceful disillusion was the very reason that marked him as the opposite of Ruben. Leslie's calm subconscious contrasted Ruben's violent one. As the protagonist, Detective Castellanos remained the primary threat to Ruben. He was the only sane person, along with Detective Kidman, who remained unaffected by the force of Ruben's subconscious till the end. According to Freud, the subconscious mind remains inaccessible to us. But sometimes, under the influence of some stimulus, it surfaces itself and that is when irrationality takes place. It is known as 'Freudian slip'. It is also called 'parapraxis' (Freud, 204). Ruben's subconscious mind, here in the narrative, was the stimulus that caused the 'Freudian slip' for the other characters and patients connected to the 'STEM'. That is why we see the 'zombie' like people attacking Sebastian and other 'unchanged' characters. Detective Joseph Oda was the only character who was partially influenced by Ruben's mental force. He 'turned' several times only to manage back to self-control. He even confessed to Sebastian that perhaps he didn't want to fight the effect of Ruben's influence- he wanted to 'turn'. Joseph clarified that it felt like a pure 'instinct'. Now, the subconscious is the raw and primitive instinct and truer than the conscious mind as Freud stated in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899):

"Properly speaking, the unconscious is the real psyche; its inner nature is just as

unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly reported to us through the data of consciousness as is the external world through the indications of our sensory organs." (Freud, 198)

Dr. Marcelo Jimenez was an instrumental character in the plot. He was the one to reveal the intentions of Ruben in front of everyone and was responsible for Ruben's supposed death. He found out the influence of Ruben on the 'STEM' system when he noticed that the persons working with 'STEM' began entering into a coma. The doctor was eventually killed by Ruvik/ Ruben. But, how and why Sebastian was able to survive the 'turn'? The answer we can find in Sebastian's own psychological condition. Before engaging the Beacon Hospital case, Sebastian faced a personal tragedy- the death of his wife and daughter. It devastated him. He lost track of himself and gave in to alcohol. His conscious mind was blurred and his subconscious was on the verge of breaking loose. The only thing that saved him was his bottle of alcohol. It was symbolic in the sense that it reminded him of his tragedy saving him from the disillusioned and escapist mentality. It can be said that the plot represents Ruben's uncontrolled rage fighting against Sebastian's psychological attempt to restore his own self back to sanity surviving the horrors of the 'STEM'.

Julie Kidman was a double agent in the plot. She was a detective as well as a secret agent of 'MOBIUS' who attempted to capture Leslie to control 'STEM'. I have already stated that Leslie's subconscious was more peaceful than Ruben's. That was why 'MOBIUS' was eager to replace Ruben's influence on 'STEM'. The organization's sole aim was to create a new world within 'STEM' for them to rule. The goal of 'MOBIUS' was of any typical power-hungry state structure. French philosopher Louis Althusser in his essay, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus* (1969-70), has stated that it is a method used by the state, instead of violence, to control the people by means of idea, e.g. educational institutes, churches or religion, media centers and other sources of entertainment (Althusser, 15). The key to domination lies in the control of the mind. If the people are brainwashed, they will follow the power hierarchy without any question and with complete

subjugation. Through 'STEM', 'MOBIUS' wanted to control the subconscious of the individual thus oppressing them psychologically. Althusser was right to point out,

"Ideology has very little to do with 'consciousness'...It is profoundly 'unconscious'." (Althusser, 10)

So, the power lies in the imaginary, not the reality,

"...What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations which they live." (Althusser, 32)

Conclusion

When James Joyce, in *Ulysses*, has stated 'Shut your eyes and see' (Joyce, 65), he wanted to mean that it is the inner world that holds the reality. The subconscious may be brutal and primitive, but it is unpolluted and unexploited by the social norms. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Marlow's journey into the deep of the jungle of Congo is symbolic and it represents Marlow's psychological journey into his 'id'. Upon entering the 'id' or the real jungle he understood the brutality and violence of colonialism. So, the violence of the jungle is the truth, not the painted reality of the European cities. The jungle itself symbolizes the human subconscious. At the beginning of the story, Marlow's own prophetic narration horrifies the reader about his upcoming encounter with the darkness of unconscious as Sebastian was horrified seeing Beacon Hospital from distance:

"But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles further. For a moment I stood appalled, as though by a warning." (Conrad, 13)

The subconscious is still a mystery to science. We are just scratching the surface level of it. Several

fields of science and social science are trying to unveil the truth about 'unconscious'. Virtual gaming and game studies or ludology are gradually becoming a powerful medium to explore the depth of the human mind. Games like 'The Evil Within' are prime examples of it.

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