

Movie review on requiem for a dream

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This Darren Aronofsky classic has left many a critic dumbfounded, not just after watching the movie for the first time, but even after the second, third or even tenth views of this film. The sheer techniques used in Requiem for a Dream hits the audience with so hard a punch that they are left dazed for a few moments, wondering what had hit them, before finally recovering their composure. Perhaps people would have been less horrified by the vivid imagery of this film had Aronofsky classified it as a “ Horror Film”. But horror films do not make it to the Oscars, do they? In many respects, it would not be too wrong to say that Requiem for a Dream is much more horrifying than any horror film, as it brings to the fore the real monster that is hiding under your bed – that little bag of heroine, or marijuana, or even a few diet pills. The movie starts in a very artsy sort of way with Aronofsky using a split screen to show Harry Goldfarb (Jared Leto) and his mother Sarah Goldfarb (Ellen Burnstyn), as the former steals his mother’s television set to sell it to a pawn broker. Harry uses the money to buy heroine for himself, his best friend Tyrone C. Love (Marlon Wayans), and his girlfriend Marion Silver (Jennifer Connelly). The split screens used by Aronofsky neither diminishes nor enhances the gravity of any scenes in the movie. Each split screen merely serves to tell its own story, a story of the two people that it consist of, or a story of a person and his or her drug or drug induced hallucination. Aronofsky splits the screens in Requiem for a Dream, not to enhance the characters, but merely to show what the characters were doing at that particular point of time. Within his or her own split screen, we find that the characters have been isolated from one another. At first we find the screen has been split between two characters (Harry and Sarah Goldfarb or Harry

and Marion). Later on in the movie we go on to find that Aronofsky has used the split screen quite a few times, as we see Sarah Goldfarb and her new diet breakfast – an egg, half a grapefruit, and a cup of coffee (no sugar); also we find another split screen with Sarah and her diet pills; and yet later on, we find the screen being split between Sarah and her refrigerator.

Another important technique used by Darren Aronofsky in *Requiem for a Dream* was the Snorri-cam. The Snorri-cam is a device that is strapped to the actor's body, and the camera is mounted on top of the device. This is done in such a way that the camera is right in front of the actor's face and catches every minute emotion reflected on his or her face. The Snorri-cam was invented by two Icelandic directors and photographers – Eiour Snorri Eysteinnsson and Einar Snorri Einarsson, better known as the Snorri Bros. (no relations). This particular technique has been around for decades, and has even been used by some other great directors like Sir Alfred Hitchcock, Danny Boyle, etc. Darren Aronofsky uses the Snorri-cam quite extensively in this film. One of the most popular scenes in *Requiem for a Dream*, where Aronofsky brilliantly exploits the Snorri-cam is when Marion is walking down the hallway, away from Arnold (Sean Gullette), her family psychiatrist. Marion had just had sex with Arnold so that she could get money for drugs, which she and Harry would use. What Aronofsky exploits most through the use of the Snorri-cam in this scene is that he perfectly captures the emotions of shame on her face and the emptiness in her eyes. As she walks swiftly down the corridor, we notice not the objects around her, but her face – her empty eyes, her shameful grimace, and a horrid expression which indicates that she would need to puke pretty soon, due the soul-crushing endeavor that she

has just gone through in Arnold's room just prior to that. We also find Aronofsky using the Snorri-cam to capture the fear and regret on Tyrone's face, as he runs down the dark alley way, trying to evade the war of the mafias as well as the police; and also with Sarah, where the Aronofsky succeeds in capturing the pure madness that has gotten into her through her amphetamine psychosis. Significantly, each of these scenes portray it's respective character experiencing a fall – Marion has just sold her body for drugs, and we know that a huge part of her soul has died in Arnold's room; while Tyrone, who had promised his mother that he would always keep off the streets, finds himself in between the cross-fires of two gangs, and the police. The aforementioned “ FALL” is more significant in the case of Sarah, in relation with the use of the Snorri-cam. The scene begins with Sarah getting up from bed. At this point, the camera is at a low angle, capturing Sarah's face from below. As the scene rolls on, we see that the Snorri-cam moves on to a higher angle, capturing the back or her head, signifying that she has fallen beyond the point of return.

Director, Darren Aronofsky has used a rather unique technique to show his audience that the characters in the movie are taking drugs. This particular method is called “ Jump Cutting”. Jump Cutting is basically a slideshow that is normally used during the transition between two scenes. In Requiem for a Dream, jump cutting is used to great effects to show the audience how quickly the characters are injecting drugs into their body, and how easily and quickly they are getting high. It gives us an almost real sensation of injecting heroine. In this movie Aronofsky uses a slide of a few pictures in quick successions to show us the injection of drugs. Some common pictures that

stick to our mind from the several jump cutting scenes are – tying of an arm, a clenched fist, a syringe, and most importantly, the dilating pupil of an eye. An important aspect of Aronofsky's jump cuts in this movie is the zombifying effect the drugs have on Harry, Tyrone and Marion. Two scenes stick out when one thinks of being zombified by drugs. The first one is when Harry is returning from a visit to his mother in a cab. He was so shell-shocked by the isolation and the loneliness that Sarah conveyed to him that he felt like crying copiously. But the use of drugs sedates his mind to an almost zombie-like state. The second instance is also with Harry, while he is waiting for Marion to return from her psychiatrist with some money, which they would use to buy more drugs. While waiting for her, he watches a commercial on television. In this commercial, he starts visualizing Marion fornicating with Arnold. It shows how apprehensive he is of Marion prostituting herself for drugs. But one quick fix solves this momentary problem, as the image of Marion fornicating with another man fades away into the irrelevant commercial.

Other than this, many other cinematographic techniques have been used in the movie to emphasize the grave situation that the respective characters are in. The wide angles are used to show us what the characters do after they get high. This is usually shown in a fast forward motion. The close-ups, as usual are used in intimate and emotional scenes, as well as in the split screens. Aronofsky has often used fade-outs as a transition between two scenes. In most cases these fade-outs signify the fading of the character's souls, which occurs after they have taken drugs. One of the most important fade-outs in the movie is right after the climax, where we are pushed back

and forth from one character's situation to the other. This climax eventually comes to an end as the men watching Marion and her fellow prostitutes writhe against each other in an orgiastic frenzy, yell " Cum! Cum! Cum". The white fade-out here could also signify male orgasm. The top angles are used to convey to the audience how much the characters have descended into their addiction induced abyss.

Any discussion about Requiem for a Dream would be incomplete without discussing the sound track. The sound track by Clint Mansell is one of the most captivating sound tracks any movie has ever had. The theme song itself is so compelling that it sticks to one's head days after he or she has seen the movie. At the end of the movie, where Sarah is being force fed; Tyrone is working hard in jail; Marion is having a lesbian orgy in front of a room full of men, for drugs; and Harry is being towed to a hospital to have his heroine-infected arm amputated; the background music is almost similar to that of Sir Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho.

Requiem for a Dream by no means offers any form of a " Requiem" for these four zombified souls. It conveys the brutally true message of how addicts end up. Aronofsky not only deals with the ' junkies' that are hooked on drugs, but also the socially acceptable junkies, in the form of Sarah who is obsessed with television. It is not rightly said that Requiem for a Dream is more horrifying than any horror movie, as it deals with the true horrors of our society – not drugs, but addiction. Like the heroine, that Harry, Marion and Tyrone uses, Requiem for a Dream gets under the skin of its audience and causes vibrant nightmares.