The Power of the Face: The Affective Mechanism of Spielberg's Face

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Abstract: *The close-up of the face in Spielberg's films becomes the director's unique authorial signature, which has a strong cinematic impact, so why do Spielberg's faces stimulate an affective experience in the audience? The affective mechanism of Spielberg's face is divided into three levels: stimulation of affective experience, role identity, and ethical responsibility, from mild concern to the viewer's empathy for the face of the other, which eventually becomes the basis for moral perception, in addition to the fact that the face of the other reverses the viewing pattern of the subject-object relationship.*

Keywords: *spielberg; face; affective mechanism; empathy; ethical responsibility*

1. Introduction

Steven Spielberg has been called "the most profitable director in Hollywood" and his films are widely loved by audiences, but critics often use the word "manipulative" to describe his working style. In her review of Empire of the Sun, Pauline Kael of The New Yorker noted that it was both an ambitious work and an unconscious manipulation[1].So what is so manipulative about Spielberg's films? If there is one visual image that defines Spielberg's films, it must be the face, which becomes the emotional marker in his films. In Spielberg's films, there are three main types of face: first, the face of surprise, where the character's face reacts with surprise to events in the outside world, mouth slightly open, eyes wide, staring at the scene in front of him; second, the face of anticipation, longing, and fear, when the character is first confronted with an unknown alien creature or sees a scene that interests him; and finally, the face of vulnerability, when the character is abandoned or caught up in the trauma of war memories. Finally, there is the face of vulnerability when the character is abandoned, when he is traumatized by the memories of war, and when he confesses from the heart. We often see him using reaction shots to show the facial expressions of his characters, and he tends to use close-ups of the faces to amplify the micro-movements of the actors' facial expressions, allowing the audience to better capture the emotional changes within the character.

Levinas believes that the face is the primary way in which we psychologically connect with others. When viewers look at a series of photographs, they focus primarily on the images with faces, and although exterior shots and full-body photographs are more complex and colourful, our gaze tends to linger on the face, so that the face of the other may be a priori attractive[2]. The face as a tool of self-expression, we can convey personal emotions through micro-expressions, such as: frowning, twitching of the corners of the mouth amplitude, eye movements, etc. "What is there, above all, is the immediacy of the face itself, its direct exposure, unguarded. The skin of the face is the most naked, the most impoverished.[3]" The face is the most naked part of our body, the face is an honest outpouring of emotion. As the camera gets progressively closer to it, the face has difficulty lying to others, the details of the face are magnified, we can control our expressions to a certain extent, but there is always a part of the area that we cannot control, it is a subconscious dimension that our free will cannot control. Likewise the face is more capable of stimulating an affective experience in the viewer. Louis Giannetti (1928) points out that "when we see a close-up of a character's face, for example, we feel in a sense that we are in an intimate relationship with that character.[1]" The human face, through the camera in a film creates an intimate relationship between the character and the viewer watching them[1]. So in Spielberg's films, the use of close-ups of faces in key episodes connects the audience to the psychology of the character, and in this respect Spielberg claims to be a master of audience manipulation.

2. Affective experience stimulation

2.1. Close-ups and the expression of emotion

Long close-ups of faces, accompanied by slow motion, are often the emotional markers of a film. The opening sequence of Saving Private Ryan, in which an elderly Ryan arrives at a cemetery to pay his respects to his comrades, is a frontal panoramic shot, with Ryan at the center of the composition, surrounded by his family, and the camera slowly moves from a medium shot to a large close-up of the eyes that lasts 24 seconds（Fig.1）. The close-up cuts in so that the viewer loses the temporal coordinates: "Faced with an isolated face, we do not perceive space. Our perception of space is removed.[4]" When the camera is in medium shot, we can still see the caring relatives surrounding Ryan, but when the camera is pushed to close-up, we no longer perceive his surroundings. The close-up of the face not only cuts off the representation of space, it also breaks up time. The movie has its own narrative logic, and the close-up of the face is clearly not used for narrative purposes, the audience can only focus on the character's face, the audience's attention is constantly moving between the mouth, nose, frown and eyes, so the close-up of the face suspends narrative time. If we think of narrative as rational, then facial close-ups are emotional.

Unlike the previous rapid-fire presentation of the face, here the viewer is given enough time to look, because we need more time to take in more detail when we look at the object up close. Perception is often accompanied by movement, but "our bodies are to some extent able to choose how they physically respond to what they receive," [5]so there is a gap between perception and movement, and "affective movement is what fills the gap"[6].The push-track lens here leaves us with a gap of choice that does not require an immediate response from our body, where the affective movement is generated.

The close-ups show the invisible inner emotional activity as visible micro movements of facial expressions. We can see Ryan slowly looking up, looking straight ahead, silently sighing deeply, his brow furrowed and his eyes flooded with tears. When the camera advances to a close-up, the movement of the corners of Ryan's mouth, the twitching of his nose and the slight shaking of his whole body, here the audience can feel his inner sadness and stoicism, and through his eyes it seems to bring us to the trauma of memories. The close-ups zoom in on the details of the face, allowing the viewer to focus on the micro-expressive movements of the face, and there is a certain warmth in this gaze that Balazs calls "the naturalism of love".[7] Bergson's definition of eroticism: "a system of micro-motions on a stationaryized neural disk."[8] The face is precisely a stationary neural panel that carries the micro-motions of the sensory organs, so the face is a natural place for the display of eroticism, so it is no wonder that Deleuze equates the face, the close-up, and eroticism.
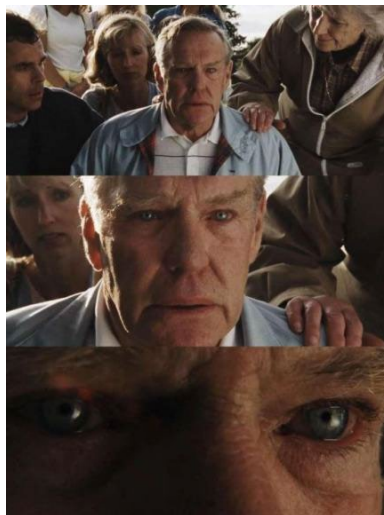

Figure 1: Saving Private Ryan Ryan paying his respects at the cemetery

3. Role identification

Identification with a character largely influences the audience's affective experience. For example, the audience says: "I really identified with that character" "This movie was bad, there was no character I could identify with" or "I felt very sad about what happened to her because I identified strongly with

her" [9].

Under the influence of mirror neurons, viewers often spontaneously imitate and synchronize the facial expressions of others. A similar emotional experience can be seen in Jurassic Park, where Dr. Then the next shot shows us what the dinosaurs look like, and the audience is very surprised to see that the resurrected dinosaurs are so large and beyond our imagination that they even live in herds, and the audience and the Doctor's The camera ensures that the audience reacts emotionally by highlighting or focusing on actions, events, and character traits that meet certain emotional criteria, i.e., Dr. Sattler's astonishment. For example, Dr. Sattler's surprised expression at the dinosaurs models for us that when we actually see the dinosaur images, we are influenced by such preconceptions, and we naturally synchronize our reactions to the Doctor's expressions. Psychologists who have studied emotional contagion have focused on subjects' facial reactions and have found that subjects' emotional experiences are often influenced by changes in the target's face and eventually converge on their own emotions. Similar affective strategies are employed in films such as Close Encounters of the Third Kind and E.T., which subconsciously influence our facial expressions and achieve physiological character identification by showing characters' facial reactions when confronted with unfamiliar creatures or episodic events.

Emotional identification requires the involvement of the audience's imagination, which in turn leads to empathy. First of all, we need to put ourselves in the characters' shoes, which means that we need to engage our imagination. In terms of film language, the alternating use of subjective and objective shots allows the viewer to truly see the other. In the opening scene of Saving Private Ryan, after the soldiers land on Omaha Beach, they engage the German troops and the American troops suffer heavy casualties. The scene first shows Captain Miller climbing up the beach from the water, and the camera pans from a distance to advance to a close-up of Miller, who can be seen frowning and staring, his eyes alertly fixed on the situation happening on the battlefield. Then there is a subjective shot of the captain, we see a soldier through the captain's point of view, huddled trying to dodge the bullets as much as possible, with a vulnerable and helpless expression or even desperate, we can also see a soldier with a blown off arm, bewildered back and forth looking around for his lost arm, when the soldier finally found his arm, he first quickly tried to pick it up, but felt very bloody Horror, after a short pause, he decided to pick up his arm. The use of the subjective camera allows the audience to experience what the character sees and how it feels to see it; it allows the viewing subject to truly see the other. At the end of the film, there is another set of alternating subjective and objective shots of Miller after being bombed with explosives, and here we more clearly experience the feeling of Miller's visual blur. From these images the viewer experiences the cruelty of war, and the fragility and insignificance of man in front of it. We imagine that when we ourselves are standing on the battlefield, we may be the cowering soldier or the soldier looking for his own arm that has been blown off, and the painful vulnerability of others reminds us that we may suffer similarly, making us aware of the fragility of life on the battlefield.[10] The audience begins to sympathize or empathize with them because "man has an innate reluctance to see his own kind suffer". [10]Scherer refers to this experience as emotional involvement, one of the forms of the phenomenon of sympathy.

4. Ethical responsibilities

4.1. Empathy and moral perception

Empathy facilitates our capacity for moral perception, and we can extend the range of specific reactions and responses that filmgoers have to film characters from concern and empathy for them to include a sense of responsibility for them. The face of the little robot boy David in Artificial Intelligence has a unique emotional effect on the audience. David is abandoned in the woods by Monica after falling out of favour, and is later captured in a machine slaughterhouse, where humans are trying to maintain their superiority so they have to destroy the robots, and the audience in attendance takes pleasure in killing them. David, at the centre of the stage with his eyes tightly shut in fear, pleads to the spectators in the audience for help, "Don't kill me, I'm not a little puppet, I'm David." The audience went from watching to remaining calm as a woman stood up and questioned, we could see her face was frowning and her eyes seemed to have tears in them, her demeanour reminded us that she might be a mother, David's innocent and helpless face inspired her maternal love to protect her child. Immediately afterwards, more and more people stood up and threw objects in their hands at the presenter and condemned, "He's just a child, let him go." Faced with David's vulnerable and helpless face, it awakens a sense of ethical responsibility in the audience, who cannot bear to see David

brutalised, an emotional experience that precedes rational thought, interspersed with a sense of guilt in the face of the suffering of others, where the subject's pleasure is based on the suffering of the Other, where the subject's moral convictions are interrogated as to whether its existence is robbing the Other of its resources. Levinas takes the sense of unease as proto-consciousness, a sense of unease that questions its right to exist in its own right, that our existence is not deserved [11].When the subject comes face to face with the screen other, the face speaks of the subject's violence against him, even if the subject does not actually commit the crime. The hedonism of the audience in the slaughterhouse comes at the cost of depriving the robot of its existence, and the audience is plunged into a sense of unease at the sight of David's face, an unease for others, a fear of their suffering, of their death. "The face itself directly enacts the moral law" [12],it directly dismantles the power of the subject and prevents the host from entertaining David's sadism. The face is not only a gaze, but also a speech. Its first words are "You shall not kill.", and speech implies that there should be a response[13]. The face transcends the subject-object relationship into an ethical one.

4.2. Ethical emotions of the audience

The face not only opens up an ethical relationship between screen characters, but it also inspires an ethical emotion between the audience and the screen characters. The cinema audience is often perceived as passive, we are in a passive position to receive the messages conveyed by the screen. Francesco Casetti says:"Cinema is a machine that encourages indifference, ready to absolve people of their responsibilities.[14]" David and Ryan's faces exert a regal influence as the viewer shifts from passivity to active ethical exploration. Once David arrives at the virtual home the aliens have made for him, the use of close-ups of the face brings the audience face to face with David, the azure eyes impossible to ignore, the excitement the anticipation, the eagerness to see his mother. As he talks to the blue fairy, the camera keeps moving closer to David's face as the forward and backward shots switch, and the audience sees the movement of enlarged facial expressions, the tears filling his eyes, the tear stains on his cheeks. When we recall the yearning in David's eyes as he listens to Monica's bedtime story, that innocent face inspires the urge to protect the weak. It is as if the aliens say to David: "We just want you to be happy, David, you've never been happy in your life." The director uses the aliens to fulfil the wishes of the audience in front of the screen; we all want to find the blue fairy for David, to make him a real child, to give him the favour of his mother, whose happiness is important to us. The emphasis in the Bible is on care and duty to the weak, and it is the weakness of others that puts the responsibility on my shoulders and makes the subject feel indebted to the Other. When I saw the swimming pool scene, Martin and David fell into the pool and the adults rushed to get Martin to the shore, while David was left in the water with an innocent and confused look on his face, as if he did not yet know that he was about to be abandoned by his parents. Even in the face of abandonment, he waits for Monica at the bottom of the sea for 2000 years. Levinas's ethical ideas inspire us to consider whether humans have a responsibility to such a robot, programmed to possess love. David's love is endless and enduring, but what about human love for robots?

5. Conclusion

The Spielbergesque face prompts the spectator subject and the other to transcend the subject-object mode of viewing and form an ethical relationship. On the basis of affective stimulation and character identification, the viewer develops a sense of ethical responsibility towards the face of the screen Other. Influenced by psychoanalytic theory, Laura Mulvey uses Lacan's theory of the gaze to assert that the viewer sees the screen character as an object, that looking and being looked at form a subject-object dichotomy, and that the subject dominates. The vulnerable and helpless face reverses the subject-object relationship; the face of the Other is an expression of the trauma of being in a dangerous world, placing the subject on the shoulders of responsibility towards the other, as in Schindler's List, where Schindler gazes at the little girl in red in the film as the girl wanders bewilderedly through the streets, the only splash of red in the black and white film, indirectly prompting Schindler's later Schindler's efforts to save the Jews were indirectly prompted by the amount of money he spared. Levinas's ethics "inspires us to see the image on the screen differently ...... no longer as an instrument of exploitation ...... no longer to reduce the other to a projection of the self; to envisage an ethical optics (optics)."[15]

The study of affect/emotion is fraught with dilemmas and paradoxes, emotions are like a chaotic mass that we struggle to sort out with rigorous logical thinking. "Emotion is the proliferating ground for the gestation of complex claims, for the processiveness of states that are in the process of being born, for the generation of sudden changes. So affective movement points to a state of being

generated." [16]By addressing the three levels of affective stimulation, character identity and ethical responsibility, which of course do not necessarily follow a strictly linear logic, this paper shows the flow of affect, from a "naturalism of love" to empathy to ethical responsibility, answering the question of why Spielberg's films are so manipulative. We often speak of emotion in opposition to reason, but in fact Spinoza did not oppose them either; he considered reason and sensibility to be in a unified relationship. This is also the case in the study of emotion in film, where emotion is based on cognition. The focus of this paper is on the emotionality of face close-ups, but we cannot ignore the padding of the film narrative, which can be used as an emotional sting if we consider the film narrative to be interesting. The audience's emotional experience is complex and variable, and it is difficult to capture the true emotion of the moment.

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