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# **Faces Places: Cognition, Culture, and the Human Face in Narrative Cinema**

by David W R Brown

A thesis submitted to the University of Kent in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies

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## Abstract

Perhaps no other art form relies upon the expressive and communicative potential of the human face quite as much as narrative cinema. It comes as no surprise then that the face – especially as it appears in the close-up – has been a subject of fascination for film theory for over a century now. The past thirty years have seen the face once again return to the fore in theorising about film. In particular, the human face has occupied a special place of interest for the field of cognitive film theory. Cognitive film theory has examined various aspects of the face in recent years: how viewers come to recognise emotions from facial expressions, how cinema can aesthetically ‘sculpt’ ordinary forms of human expression, and how cinema may elicit empathetic responses through representations of the face are but a few of the topics that have been addressed.

Despite the long history of scholarship on the face in film and the recent work within cognitive film theory, there remain numerous unexplored avenues of research. For example, one of the biggest controversies in the scientific study of facial expression is the matter of universality and cultural difference. Are the faces people make the same the world over? Are people equally adept at recognising facial expressions of individuals from cultures beyond their own? And from where do cultural differences in facial expression arise? Although these questions pertain to scientific research on facial expression in everyday life, I argue that the answers to such questions are nonetheless highly significant for our understanding of cinema. This thesis thus responds to two central questions that have hitherto not been addressed in detail in film theory: how do cultural differences shape the representation of faces in narrative cinema? And do film viewers across different cultures recognise and understand faces and facial expressions in substantially different ways?

To respond to these questions, this thesis makes the case that we should adopt a ‘cognitive cultural’ approach. Carl Plantinga has recently proposed that such an approach can account for the mixture of dispositions at work in the viewer’s experience of faces in film, since the cognitive cultural approach is explicitly interested in both the universal and the culturally specific. As Lisa Zunshine puts it, the goal of the cognitive cultural project is to make sense of the ever-changing relationship between two highly complex and historically situated systems: cultural artefacts and the human mind. This thesis takes Plantinga’s proposal further and aims to show the benefits of adopting a cognitive cultural approach to faces in film. To this end, the first half of the thesis examines the dominant views of facial expression within psychology, explores the implications of cultural differences for understanding film viewership, and presents a general account of how faces and facial expression are represented in film. The second half builds upon this theoretical groundwork and works through three different case studies that demonstrate what is gained from a cognitive cultural approach to faces in film. Ultimately, this thesis advocates for a middle way through the unproductive dichotomies between nature and nurture, universality and cultural difference, and (perhaps above all) cognitivist studies and cultural studies.

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## Introduction

### Facing Film

In Hiroshi Teshigahara's *The Face of Another* (1966), Okuyama's (Tatsuya Nakadai) face has become disfigured in an industrial accident.<sup>1</sup> He is forced to wear bandages over his entire face to conceal his burns (fig. 1). In one of the first scenes in the film, Okuyama laments his fate to his wife:

The face is just a few dozen square inches above the neck, covered with a layer of dough. Isn't that right? I wanted to think so. I told myself a million times it was only a layer of skin, a surface. But now I'm not so sure. The face is the door to the soul. When the face is closed off, so too is the soul. Nobody is allowed inside. The soul is left to rot, reduced to ruins. It becomes the soul of a monster, rotten to the core. I feel as if I've been buried alive.

Okuyama's monologue expresses a sentiment that is prolific not only in art, but in cultural thinking the world over: the human face is, somehow, special. As we see here, the 'specialness' of the human face is often expressed through a number of common platitudes: the face is the door (or window) to the soul;

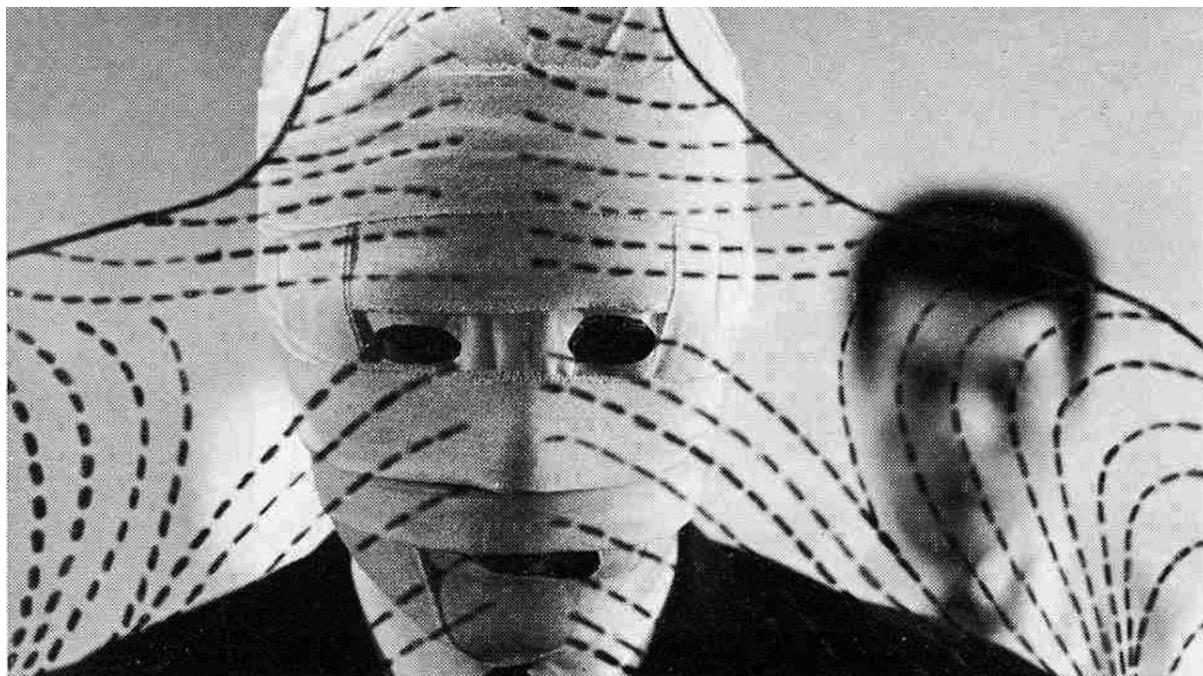


Fig. 1: Mr Okuyama (Tatsuya Nakadai) in Hiroshi Teshigahara's *The Face of Another* (1966).

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<sup>1</sup> Western name order conventions are followed throughout for East Asian names: given name, followed by family name (e.g., Hiroshi Teshigahara, instead of Teshigahara Hiroshi).

faces are not mere surfaces or ‘layers of dough’ but connect others with our interiority and our very essence; our faces betray our true feelings and portray our inner emotional lives; and, ultimately, without a face we are not human. In reality though, these sorts of platitudes may, at best, mislead us about the nature of faces and facial expression. The extent to which our faces betray us or whether we can reliably access someone’s interiority through their face and facial expression is far from certain. In our everyday lives, faces are not necessarily revelatory but are instead, perhaps, mere surfaces that serve strategic and social ends. In other words, the human face, though undoubtedly central to our social existence, may not be quite as *special* as we like to think.

This may seem like a pessimistic note on which to start for a thesis about the representation of faces in narrative cinema. However, we need not be so downbeat, because in cinema we can be confident that the human face *is* special. Indeed, narrative cinema typically relies on thinking that all these lofty beliefs about the human face are true; ordinarily, we assume that characters’ faces and facial expressions in cinema are revelatory, telling us about their personality and giving us accurate and direct access to their true feelings and interiority. Likewise, just as Okuyama is concerned about, narrative films over the past century have reinforced the notion that there is something deeply troubling about facelessness and disfigured faces. In cinema, faces are historically and conventionally one of the – if not *the* – principal means through which we access character. If we hold that character is of utmost centrality and saliency to film, then it follows that the human face does have a special status in narrative cinema.<sup>2</sup> In fact, I would go as far as claiming that narrative cinema relies upon the expressive and communicative potential of the human face in motion to a greater extent than any other form of art. The highly privileged status of the close-up of the face in both film theory and cinema itself provides perhaps all the evidence needed for such a strong claim. As identified by numerous film theorists, close-ups are one of the unique pleasures of cinema, providing us unfettered access to observe closely and (in some cases) to feel the faces of others expressing and emoting. The experience of the close-up thus goes well beyond what we would normally experience either in our ordinary lives or, indeed, in other art forms.

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1, ‘The Saliency of Character’, in Smith’s *Engaging Characters* for support of this claim.

If the human face is somehow significant in narrative cinema, then numerous questions follow: what are faces called upon to *do* in narrative films? What can faces embedded within cinematic narratives mean? How do we understand, recognise, and respond to representations of the face? What relation, if any, does the representation of faces in cinema have with our experience and understanding of faces in reality? Before we can even begin to answer these questions though, we must also consider *how* we might answer them. As Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener ask, ‘what exactly are the implications of the spectator looking into the eyes of a face that is larger-than-life? Should it be interpreted in terms of phenomenology, psychoanalysis or neuroscience?’ (55) These sorts of questions have been the subject of film theory for over a century now. In fact, theoretical interest in cinematic representations of the face is almost as old as the medium itself. In the 1910s and 1920s, early film theorists such as Hugo Münsterberg and Béla Balázs identified the centrality and idealised possibilities of the face as represented in the medium of film. Both Münsterberg and Balázs exalt the close-up of the face as one of cinema’s greatest gifts and one of the key aspects that differentiates it from other art forms.

In *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), one of the first serious pieces of film theory, Münsterberg argues that the close-up distinguishes film from staged theatre through its capacity to focus our *attention*. Münsterberg claims that attention is the most important function of our minds for creating meaning in the world around us. The close-up, then, ‘*has objectified in our world of perception our mental act of attention and by it has furnished art with a means which far transcends the power of any theater stage*’ (emphasis original 87). Through its ability to direct our attention, close-ups are one of several ways in which, Münsterberg argues, cinema mimics the workings of the human mind, and thus ‘The photoplay obeys the laws of the mind rather than those of the outer world’ (91).<sup>3</sup> Leaving aside the role that the close-up plays in Münsterberg’s ‘cinema as mind’ argument, his discussion of how the close-up may intensify emotions represented through the human face is particularly rich:

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<sup>3</sup> See Carroll’s ‘Film/Mind Analogies: The Case of Hugo Munsterberg’ (1988) for a critique of Munsterberg’s cinema as mind thesis.

... gestures, actions, and facial play are so interwoven with the physical process of an intense emotion that every shade can find its characteristic delivery. The face alone with its tensions around the mouth, with its play of the eye, with its cast of the forehead, and even with the motions of the nostrils and the setting of the jaw, may bring numberless shades into the feeling tone. Here again the close-up can strongly heighten the impression. It is at the climax of emotion on the stage that the theatergoer likes to use his opera glass in order not to overlook the subtle excitement of the lips and the passion of the eyeballs and the ghastly pupil and the quivering cheeks. The enlargement by the close-up on the screen brings this emotional action of the face to sharpest relief. (99)

There are several points to draw from this. First, Münsterberg affirms a theoretical position that emotions are expressed physically through bodily gesture and facial expression; emotions have a ‘characteristic delivery’ and internal states are intimately tied to perceptible physical processes. The relationship between expression and emotion is a central point of contention in discussions of facial expression that we will return to many times throughout the thesis. Second, Münsterberg notes how films exhort us to focus our attention and to make inferences from minor movements of the face, be it flaring nostrils or quivering cheeks. This is to say that, perhaps unlike in life, it is typical for characters’ facial movements in fictional narratives to mean something. In addition, the focus of attention through the close-up is precisely what ‘heighten[s] the impression’ of the ‘emotional action’ of the human face. As Münsterberg explains elsewhere, ‘Our ideas and feelings and impulses group themselves around the attended object’ (86). Third, there is the notion that emotional climaxes are an important part of filmgoers (and theatergoers) engagement with both fiction and narrative art more generally. Unlike the theatre though, where the engaged audience member must use her opera glass to access the actor’s face in the climax of emotion, the close-up in narrative cinema is a central way in which fictional events are, to borrow Noël Carroll’s phrasing, ‘emotionally predigested’ by filmmakers (*Engaging the Moving Image* 68).

Münsterberg is among the first to make a compelling case for considering the close-up as one of the most powerful weapons in cinema’s arsenal for focusing our attention and intensifying emotional

responses. Despite writing over a century ago when the medium was in its infancy, Münsterberg's claims remain worth taking seriously now. As Allan Langdale notes, 'Münsterberg's ideas warrant serious attention not only from a historical perspective but from contemporary film theorists who are interested in the psychology of the cinematic spectator' (9). Although this has begun to change in recent years, history has not been particularly kind to Münsterberg's reputation and recognition as a film theorist. By contrast, Balázs has enjoyed a move to the front row of discussions of both the close-up and the face in recent years thanks to the influence of Gilles Deleuze in contemporary film theory.<sup>4</sup>

We will return to Deleuze in a moment but let us first consider some of Balázs's claims about the face and the close-up. In *Visible Man* (1924), Balázs argues that modernity and the concomitant rise of print culture means that we have lost touch with our ability to express our inner selves with our faces. As he proclaims, 'The discovery of printing has gradually rendered the human face illegible' (*Béla Balázs Early Film Theory* 9). For Balázs, although language can express some part of our inner selves, it is incapable of expressing the same dimensions of the inner as the face and body. Silent cinema thus emerges as an art form that is 'giving culture a new turn towards the visual and the human being a new face' (*BBEFT* 9). Balázs's theory of film emphasises ways in which cinema can bring about new perceptual and cognitive abilities in human beings. As Malcolm Turvey argues, Balázs attached great significance to the *revelatory* capacity of cinema ('Balázs' 78). One of the most potent ways in which cinema is revelatory is through the close-up, the technique that Balázs champions above all else:

In the silent film facial expression, isolated from its surroundings, seemed to penetrate to a strange new dimension of the soul. It revealed to us a new world – a world of micro-physiognomy which could not otherwise be seen with the naked eye or in everyday life. (*Theory of the Film* 65)

So, for Balázs, cinema does not offer only a reproduction of reality, but instead has the capacity to reveal truths about reality that the 'naked human eye' is otherwise unable to perceive.

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<sup>4</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener note that 'Ever since Gilles Deleuze assigned a pioneering role to Balázs in his books on cinema, a lively discussion about the face and the close-up has been ensuing' (61).

This quotation leads us to another key part of Balázs's theory: an idiosyncratic conception of physiognomy lies at the heart of Balázs's understanding of film. Typically, physiognomy refers to the pseudoscience of determining a person's character or personality from their outer appearance (and the face in particular). Balázs takes the term to mean this and a great deal more. In places, Balázs's physiognomy focuses on how the sustained attention of the close-up enables us to read faces in a way that differs from ordinary perception: 'In close-ups every wrinkle becomes a crucial element of character and every twitch of a muscle testifies to a pathos that signals great inner events' (*BBEFT* 37). Balázs also refers to 'microphysiognomy' which is about reading the 'face beneath the play of expressions' (*BBEFT* 103). Microphysiognomy might therefore attend to the 'face' of individual facial features; as he writes, 'nostrils, ear lobes and neck all have their own face' (*BBEFT* 102). A close-up of a chin, for example, might reveal it as 'weak and cowardly' (*BBEFT* 103). As we see here, physiognomy and microphysiognomy go far beyond just reading the human face itself. For Balázs, physiognomy is also about reading the 'face of things'. It represents a means of reading films as a whole, including the 'faces' of both human and non-human objects. His physiognomy is not merely about deriving knowledge and meaning either; as Erica Carter describes, physiognomy is Balázs's 'refined poetics of film reception' and is better thought of as a 'mode of aesthetic' (xxvi).

We would need many more pages to unpack fully Balázs's conception of physiognomy, so we will move onto Balázs's conviction in the universality of facial expressions. Faces and facial expressions are key to the global, utopian vision of cinema that Balázs defends. For Balázs, facial expressions represent 'the first international language' and thus 'the art of film seems to hold out the promise of redemption from the curse of Babel' (*BBEFT* 14). This internationalism of cinema is fundamentally rooted in the economics of film production which determine that films must be designed to be intelligible to as many people as possible. As Balázs puts it, 'the actors' facial expressions must be comprehensible to the entire world' (*BBEFT* 14). Nonetheless, there is ambiguity throughout Balázs's characterisation of the universal 'language' of faces and facial expression; in places, he proposes faces are capable of expressing something that is otherwise abstract and inexpressible (that is,

the human spirit), whereas elsewhere he emphasises ‘how much more concrete and unambiguous is physiognomy than concepts, which are always abstract and general’ (*BBEFT* 33).

Balázs’s internationalism in his early theory is also mired in what can only be described as a racial supremacist position that extols the virtues of ‘*the unique, shared psyche of the white man*’ (*BBEFT* 14, emphasis original). We must also accept that, in part, the physiognomy to which Balázs appeals is widely discredited (and rightly so) and is historically driven by racialist, classist, eugenicist, and sexist systems of thought. What are we to do with Balázs’s universalism and account of physiognomy in light of this?<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Doane’s ‘Facing a Universal Language’ reflects a position within film studies that links arguments for universality of facial expression as inherently linked to colonialism and a call-back to physiognomy, phrenology, and a positivist scientism. However, although it is clear enough that Balázs’s universalism in his earlier theory is bound up with white racial supremacy, endorsing universalism or internationalism by no means entails a commitment to cultural (or racial) supremacy. In the thesis, we will examine some of the claims to universality in facial expression, but it ought to be stressed that a commitment to such a position does not by necessity require endorsing colonialism, physiognomy, phrenology, and so forth. Furthermore, though there is little question that physiognomy is a baseless pseudoscience, there remains a notable body of psychological literature that tells us that humans do still make judgements and inferences from others’ outer appearances and, consequently, act on the basis of these judgements. In reality, judgements from faces are more often than not misleading, but narrative cinema encourages viewers to make such ‘physiognomic’ judgements about characters, and then normally proceeds to confirm them. We will come to this matter and the concomitant issues with this in chapters three and six.

As has been mentioned, the resurgence of interest in Balázs and the face in film theory can at least partly be linked with the current fashionableness of Deleuze’s writings on cinema. In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (1983), Deleuze postulates four types of ‘movement-image’: perception-images,

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Heins (2016) attempts to rescue Balázs’s writings from its alignment with racialist discourses and ‘right-wing physiognomics’ by situating his physiognomic theory on the utopian left and making the case that the ‘white psyche’ carries Marxist-materialist inflections.

affection-images, action-images, and mental-images. The human face and the close-up in film are inextricably bound together in the affection-image. Deleuze sets it out plainly that ‘The affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face’ (87). For Deleuze, this holds true even when the image is not literally of a face and not technically a close-up. Even construed in the most charitable fashion, Deleuze’s discussion of the face and the affection-image is incoherent. One could accept the definition of the affection-image as equal or synonymous to the close-up, and the close-up as equal to the face, but any kind of coherence to this definition falls apart if affection-images may also not literally be of a face and may also not be close-ups. Does this mean that virtually any image could qualify as an affection-image? The answer to this question is likely ‘Yes’, given that the affection-image ‘is both a type of image and a component of all images’ (87). As a result, it becomes unclear how valuable this term is if it can be applied indiscriminately to almost any image. This said, it would be fair to say that Deleuze is not especially interested in the human face itself, but rather some concept of ‘faceicity [visagéité]’ of which the human face forms but one part (97). In other words, objects besides the human face may be ‘faceified’, an echo of Balázs’s physiognomy which attends to the ‘faces’ of all things.

In any case, we need not linger on unpacking the claims of Deleuze here beyond remarking on his influence on bringing discussions of Balázs and the face (both the actual human face and the more abstract faceicity) back into film theory. Deleuze’s writing on cinema in the 1980s ushered in a renewed interest in the face; the past thirty years have seen several monographs on the represented face in not only film but also media more widely. To name but a few prominent examples: Jacques Aumont’s *Du visage au cinéma* (1992), Christa Blümlinger and Karl Sierek’s *Das Gesicht im Zeitalter des bewegten Bildes* (2000), Paul Coates’ *Screening the Face* (2012), and Noa Steimatsky’s *The Face on Film* (2017). These monographs each take a different approach and focus on different cases, but one may identify a common stance towards the subject matter across these works. For these authors, the represented face is understood as an entity or object that is largely unmoored from any ordinary experience of faces. Instead, the face is often cast as inscrutable, enigmatic, elusive, dialectical, masking, contradictory, ambiguous, opaque, or illegible. For instance, Aumont writes that the face in silent cinema ‘took numerous forms, and it is perhaps difficult to isolate it in its pure state, except for specific, fleeting

moments. But this state of purity, eternally elusive in cinema, is almost ideally found in the thinking engendered by film, and is very often combined with a reflection on the face in film' ('The Face in Close-Up' 129).<sup>6</sup> By way of another example, Richard Rushton claims in his review of Coates' *Screening the Face* that the face is 'the modernist object par excellence' which is beyond objectification and beyond all meaning (530). Rushton concludes his review of Coates' book by characterising it as a work that 'offers a diverse and wonderful range of reflections which both puzzle and confuse. The face's enigma remains, as elusive and impenetrable as ever. Perhaps that is just as it should be' (533). Rushton takes the position that the face probably *ought* to be cast as enigmatic, elusive, and impenetrable. This appears to be a position that is shared by a few of those who have written on the face in film and media studies. But why, exactly, should the face be considered as inevitably and intrinsically enigmatic, elusive, and impenetrable?

Steimatsky's *The Face on Film* seems to offer some sort of an answer to this question. Steimatsky opens her account with a repudiation of approaches that attempt to understand how faces might *work* within film narratives:

When we note the iconic and expressive powers of the close-up, when we study the reaction shot and the shot-reverse shot among the basic articulations of film language, the human face is front and center. But just then it might risk dissolving in the service of narrative action and communication, to be locked into some psychological reduction, or else to be altogether abstracted in the optical-psychic geometry of the gaze (1)

It remains unclear from this passage alone why understanding the face's role in narrative action (through 'psychological reduction' or otherwise) is such a risk. We may glean some justification further into the book:

More than the sum of its expressions, the face communicates only up to a point: often it is more, or else less, than legible. Complex or muted, it confounds the cognitive range of analysis. As a

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<sup>6</sup> This is from an English translation of a chapter of Aumont's *Du visage au cinema*, reprinted in *The Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History* (2003).

strong image, it retains a margin of illegibility that interferes with physiognomic, narrative, or otherwise discursive codes. (13)

For Steimatsky, it appears that the face's complexity and illegibility preclude it from certain forms of analysis. The inherent illegibility of the human face will therefore always 'interfere' with any sort of reading. We can see that this resonates with Rushton's acceptance that perhaps the face should just be left as an elusive and impenetrable enigma. It is true that many (but not all) of the film examples analysed across these monographs I have listed are cases of postclassical or modernist filmmaking (unsurprisingly, Bergman's *Persona* (1966) comes up an awful lot). Such films are undoubtedly interested in frustrating film's typical usage of the represented face in relation to 'narrative action and communication'. Aumont, Steimatsky, and Rushton are also right to say that the human face and its representation in film can at times be complex, ambiguous, and elusive. But this still seems like scant justification for approaching this entire topic in a way that only exacerbates this complexity or ambiguity. Or, at the very least, this does not seem like a good enough reason to suggest that faces and their representation actually *deny* a disambiguating form of analysis. In general, much of the existing scholarship in film studies does not offer a compelling case for why the face, as a thing that is sometimes represented in complex and ambiguous ways in cinema, should be treated in a way that further mystifies it. It seems, then, that if we do not wish to engage in the mystification of the face on film that we must look for answers beyond these monographs and their approaches.

#### **CHARACTER ENGAGEMENT, EMOTION, AND EMPATHY: THE FACE IN COGNITIVE FILM THEORY**

Much of the recent scholarship that we have looked at so far has demonstrated little interest in answering the question of how exactly faces *work* in narrative cinema.<sup>7</sup> In order to answer this sort of question, we will be better served by a turn towards cognitive film theory.<sup>8</sup> Over the past thirty or so years,

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, the contributions of cognitive film theory to studies of the face in film are minimised to a footnote in Steimatsky's aforementioned monograph.

<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, I follow the characterisation of cognitive theory put forward by Nannicelli and Taberham in their introduction to the edited collection *Cognitive Media Theory* (2014). I will say a little bit more about the matter of defining cognitive film and media theory in chapter two.

cognitive film theory has addressed topics ranging from character engagement, sympathy, empathy, perception, emotion, and narrative comprehension; the human face and its representation remains within the orbit of almost all these lines of inquiry. Generally speaking, scholarship that is connected with cognitive film theory has afforded an important role to the human face. First and foremost, the human face is seen as vital to both our affective experience and our understanding of narrative films. In *Embodied Visions* (2009), Torben Grodal declares that ‘The face is the most important cue for understanding intentions and emotions of other minds, and the emotions resonate in the viewers via innate resonance systems’ (EV 198). For Grodal, *simulation* is central to our understanding of other’s minds; ‘to understand is to simulate’ as he puts it (EV 197). In a broad sense, simulation refers to a way in which we come to understand other people: we attempt to figure out what others are thinking and feeling by *simulating* their mental states.<sup>9</sup> Grodal’s account of film viewing therefore stresses that viewers’ understanding of characters’ minds is driven by mental simulation prompted by the representation of faces and facial expressions.

We may find similarly strong claims from a number of scholars. For instance, Murray Smith’s naturalised aesthetics of film in *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* (2017) confers an important role to emotion and its expression through the human face. Smith claims that,

*film depends for its existence to a greater extent than any preceding art on the interplay among emotions as these are expressed in the human face and voice (as well as in posture and gesture)*

Take a look at any mainstream feature film – and a great many other films as well – and it will be obvious that the visual landscape of these films is dominated by shots in which facial expression is legible (whether in close-ups or longer framings), while their corresponding soundtracks resonate with the cadences and intonation of emotionally expressive human voices. (FATC 130, emphasis original).

Smith is right to highlight that the face is not the only way in which emotion might be made perceivable: the body (in the form of posture and gesture) and the voice are also both central means through which

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<sup>9</sup> See Coplan for a lucid definition of simulation (‘Empathy and Character Engagement’ 103-104).

we understand human emotion and expression, both in life and in cinema. I will circle back to address this matter momentarily. Smith's account of character engagement in *Engaging Characters* (1995) similarly emphasises the role that the face plays in *affective mimicry* which, in turn, constitutes part of how we might come to empathise with characters. Affective mimicry is characterised by Smith as an involuntary and autonomic reaction which does not rely on any willed act of imagining or simulation but, instead, upon both perception and reflexive simulation of someone else's facial and bodily expressions of emotion (EC 98-99). For example, if you see another person smiling (and therefore, you presume, happy) then you might reflexively mimic this smile. Affective mimicry in the typical case is an important way in which we are able to grasp the 'broad emotion-type' of persons and characters through non-cognitive means (101). Central to Smith's characterisation, affective mimicry does not rely upon the narrative context in which a facial expression is embedded, but the information provided by affective mimicry must still be integrated with the viewer's knowledge of the narrative context. We will discuss this further in chapter six, but the nature of affective mimicry (i.e. the fact that it is non-cognitive and does not depend on narrative context) means that it may 'cut against the grain' of a film and our engagement with its characters.

Carl Plantinga takes the propensity for humans to 'catch' emotions through contagion or mimicry somewhat further than Smith, situating the represented face in film in a more prominent position in relation to empathy. Plantinga proposes that many narrative films stage what he terms a 'scene of empathy'. The scene of empathy is a moment in which the narrative pace is slowed, and the internal emotional experience of a character becomes the central focus of our attention. These scenes are typically constituted by sustained close-ups of the human face. As such, they ordinarily go beyond conveying information of a character's emotional state and instead encourage spectator empathy. Plantinga's account rests atop an understanding that empathy (at least in part) involves unconscious, involuntary, low-level affective responses and our predisposition to 'catch' the emotions of others through emotional contagion and facial feedback. Of course, merely seeing facial expressions of emotion is unlikely to be sufficient for full-blown emotional contagion. Plantinga therefore proposes a series of criteria that filmmakers usually employ to maximise the probability that the represented face

will elicit an empathetic response: attention, duration, allegiance, narrative context, and affective congruence. The scene of empathy offers a useful conceptualisation for a particular type of scene which is remarkably common in (particularly mainstream) narrative cinema. Furthermore, it provides a stronger sense of the ways in which films elicit affective and empathetic responses through the representation of the human face.

Amy Coplan follows a similar line of investigation by examining the role that emotional contagion plays in our affective engagement with narrative fiction film. In particular, Coplan homes in on how viewer responses rooted in emotional contagion differ from those based on more sophisticated emotional processes. Coplan diverges from Plantinga by arguing that we should not conflate emotional contagion with empathy. This conflation, in turn, leads to confusion regarding the nature of emotional contagion responses and to miss the uniqueness of such responses. Coplan instead argues that emotional contagion and empathy are closely related albeit distinct processes. It would be rare to experience emotional contagion alone without some kind of empathy or sympathy also occurring but, nevertheless, empathy, sympathy, and emotional contagion remain distinctive processes, each elicited through different triggers and impact upon our experience in different ways (32). For Coplan, emotional contagion is a significantly less sophisticated process than empathy as it is largely involuntary and is based on automatic processes that are activated by direct perception. It thus does not involve the imagination, thoughts, beliefs, or judgements. The upshot of this, Coplan argues, is that philosophical work on viewer emotions overemphasises the value of our emotional responses to fiction films. As she explains, ‘while it is true that many emotional reactions to narrative films help to foster understanding, some of them do not. Emotional contagion is better understood as solely experiential than as instructive in any way’ (35). Coplan thus argues against the strong claims of a position like Grodal’s in which understanding *is* simulation.

### **FACES PLACES, OR WHY A COGNITIVE CULTURAL APPROACH?**

This short survey is by no means comprehensive of the role that the face has played within cognitivist and analytic approaches to film. Grodal, Smith, Plantinga, and Coplan all make compelling cases for understanding how representations of the face in narrative cinema often go beyond communication of

information and instead engender empathetic responses that provide shape and colour to our affective engagement with narrative cinema. It should be apparent from this short overview that the human face and facial expression have been central concerns of not only cognitive film theory, but also film theory at large. Furthermore, as the writings of Münsterberg and Balázs show us, theoretical attention towards the represented face in film is virtually as old as narrative cinema itself.

One might have the impression then that the face on film is a sufficiently well-trodden area of research. This would be mistaken. Cognitive film theory has undoubtedly done an admirable job in exploring the ways in which the human face in film works in relation to emotion, affect, empathy, and sympathy, but there are significant swathes of territory that remain largely unexplored here. Despite the key role that the face has played in cognitive film theory, there are relatively few sustained explorations that focus principally on the face and its representation in film. What we do have is a patchwork of excellent articles and chapters as well as monographs where discussion of faces and facial expression forms part of a wider whole. But if we are to believe early film theorists as well as the likes of Grodal, Smith, Plantinga, and Coplan that the human face really does have a significant role in narrative cinema, then there is an important place for more comprehensive and detailed accounts of the face in film. We should still heed Joseph D Anderson and Barbara Fisher Anderson's warning against the assumption that our understanding of faces and facial expression in film is complete:

we may take for granted both the information presented in facial expression and our capacity to grasp its meaning, but we should not; there are great mysteries here: the recognition of faces, the facial expression of emotion, and the exploitation of these capacities by filmmakers ... (105)

Anderson and Anderson are right to identify that there remain mysteries lurking; there is much more to say about how we recognise facial expressions and how we come to grasp meaning from them.

Nonetheless, perhaps the biggest 'mystery' in the scientific study of facial expression is the matter of universality and cultural difference. On the one hand, proponents of universality argue that humans are hardwired with a set of 'basic emotions' each of which have a unique, pancultural facial expression. That is, providing that there are no 'display rules' acting upon them, a person experiencing sadness will naturally express the specific expression associated with sadness, regardless of their

culture, environment, and upbringing. Likewise, individuals across the globe are equally capable of *recognising* that person's expression of sadness. Against this, opposition to the universality thesis runs a wide gamut. There are some moderate sceptics who are merely doubtful of the strong claims of universality. These sceptics suggest that cultural upbringing will bring about misrecognition between different cultures and produce differences in how people across the globe display facial expressions. Then there are some who disavow there is *any* significant relationship between internal experience and our faces. In other words, our faces do not express our emotions. Instead, faces are tools that primarily serve social motives and facial expressions are entirely a matter of cultural learning.

For the study of facial expression, universality was a dominant position from the early 1970s until the 1990s. In recent years though, the scientific consensus has begun to gradually shift. Critics of universality are making compelling cases for the ways in which the production and recognition of facial expressions differ across the globe. Now, the universalists are ceding ground to their critics (Keltner et al., 'Debate'). Despite the fact that the matter of universality in the scientific study of facial expression is an ongoing controversy and an open question, you would be hard-pressed to believe this from reading much of the scholarship on facial expression in film. By this I mean that much cognitivist research on film generally endorses a universalist account of facial expression and emotion, particularly as it manifests in the 'neurocultural' view of facial expression and basic emotion theory (we will get to these in time). In my overview of the face in cognitive film theory, I did not mention the research of Ed S Tan in this area. Tan's 'Three Views of Facial Expression and Its Understanding in the Cinema' deserves a special mention here as one of very few works within the field that considers the implications of endorsing different theoretical views of facial expression.<sup>10</sup> There are good reasons why a universalist understanding of facial expression came to the fore in cognitive film theory which will be explored in greater detail in chapter two. Nonetheless, it remains the case that one of the largely unexplored areas in our understanding of faces in cinema is a full-bodied consideration of the complex ways in which

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<sup>10</sup> Smith does refer to Alan Fridlund, a notable critic of Paul Ekman and the neurocultural view, in his discussion of facial expression in *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* (142). However, Smith does not offer an especially detailed account of why we should reject Fridlund's claims about facial expression. We will look at Fridlund's behavioural ecology view of expression in chapter one.

culture and nature interact. In particular, we ought to acknowledge that the universalist model of emotion and expression is a particularly Western one (Crivelli and Fridlund 164). If we wish to take seriously the role that culture may play, then we must discard certain presuppositions and intuitions about what we think facial expressions are and what we think they mean.

There are two noteworthy gaps in the scholarship then: first, there are no sustained treatments of the face in cinema within the tradition of cognitive film theory; and, second, there are relatively few accounts which satisfactorily address the role that culture plays in the representation and recognition of facial expression in narrative cinema. In order to address these gaps, I argue in this thesis that a *cognitive cultural* approach is the best means to theorise the representation of faces and facial expression in narrative films. This is an expansion of the claims of Plantinga, who has recently advocated for such an approach. In ‘Facing Others: Close-ups of Faces in Narrative Film and in *The Silence of the Lambs*’ (2014), Plantinga argues that adopting a cognitive cultural approach can enrich the study of the close-up and facial expression in film. Moreover, there is a noteworthy gap in the scholarship for studies of this nature: ‘Not many scholars have attempted to examine the relationship between human cognition, affect, and embodied spectatorship, on the one hand, and the cultural and historical contexts in which media artifacts are produced and consumed, on the other’ (‘Facing Others’ 294). As Plantinga notes, our response to faces and close-ups in cinema involves a mixture of skills and dispositions, some of which are universal and some which arise from culture or cultural learning; ‘Only a cognitive cultural approach has the capacity to account for this mixture of dispositions at work in the viewer’s experience of the facial close-up, since it is interested in both the universal and the culturally specific’ (‘Facing Others’ 295).

How exactly might we characterise this cognitive cultural approach? Lisa Zunshine proposes two central features that unify cognitive cultural studies. First, a destabilisation of the nature-nurture dichotomy. Second, an emphasis on the ‘fuzziness of boundaries’ which ‘stems directly from the goal of the cognitive cultural project, which is to understand the evolving relationship between two immensely complex, historically situated systems – the human mind and cultural artifacts’ (3). As I see it, the most important part of Zunshine’s characterisation of the cognitive cultural approach is the stress on *fuzziness* and *complexity*. This thesis will emphasise how artistic conventions, the history of

representation, basic cognition, and cultural differences often intersect in messy and complex ways when it comes to film. As we will see, this is made especially evident through looking at how faces and facial expression are represented in narrative cinema. Of course, cognitive cultural studies can by no means lay exclusive claim to the ambition of destabilising the nature-nurture dichotomy or understanding the human mind in relation to culture; there are many who are interested in similar goals without needing to identify their work as belonging to the cognitive cultural approach. For instance, both Grodal and Smith have advocated for a ‘biocultural’ approach to film which similarly rejects the dichotomy between biology and culture.<sup>11</sup> However, it would seem that, at least in the case of the biocultural view, that such views still tend towards endorsing universalist positions. We will look at this matter in closer detail in chapter two.

As the title suggests, this thesis asks what bearing place and culture have on how humans as fiction filmmakers make choices in representing faces in films and how humans as film viewers recognise, understand, and come to believe things from these representations.<sup>12</sup> I am proposing that a cognitive cultural approach is the best means of approaching these questions about faces in film. There is another compelling reason why we should adopt such an approach. As will be elaborated on in chapter two, cognitive film theory remains an established, albeit minority, research programme. One of the key bones of contention between cognitive film theory and the mainstream of film theory is the question of *difference*. When cognitive film theory emerged in the 1980s, it would be fair to say that its adherents tended towards appealing to universalistic explanations of viewer behaviour. In large part, this was a strategy to distance this scholarship from the dominant culturalist approaches to film. Understandably, this move attracted criticism from the mainstream of film studies who, as Plantinga puts it, ‘seem to think that cognitivists whose work doesn’t directly touch on these issues [of gender and racial equality, of multiculturalism, and of the promotion of equality and tolerance for ethnic and sexual minorities] are

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<sup>11</sup> See Grodal’s *Embodied Visions* and Smith’s *Film, Art Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, both of which afford a prominent position to a biocultural perspective.

<sup>12</sup> Apologies to the reader anticipating any in-depth discussion of Agnès Varda or her film (co-directed with JR) *Visages Villages (Faces Places)* (2017). The title was, nevertheless, chosen to pay homage to Varda, who died during the writing of this thesis.

somehow ideologically suspect' ('Cognitive Film Theory' 29). For cognitive film theory, a move away from cultural concerns made sense at the time. Now, however, film studies is somewhat more pluralistic than it was and cognitive film theory is better established, so it is a good time for more scholarship that *explicitly* addresses questions of culture and difference from a cognitivist perspective.

No doubt, this trend has already begun; in recent years, cognitivist scholarship has increasingly placed culture front and centre.<sup>13</sup> Equally, there are cognitivist scholars whose work has always stressed the importance of culture. Like this scholarship, the account that I put forward here offers a middle-ground position somewhere between universalism and culturalism. As Daniel Barratt suggests, we might think of this as the third stage in a cycle that is common in academic disagreement:

As in many academic debates, the pattern seems to be that a first generation of researchers stresses one position (for example, the socially constructed nature of film viewing) and then a second generation makes its mark by stressing the opposite (for example, the universal nature of film viewing). Finally, a third generation comes along, acting as a kind of moderator and peacemaker, and argues that the truth lies somewhere between the two. ('Geography' 78)

Consider this thesis as belonging to the third generation of scholarship that Barratt describes then. Of course, by advocating for this position I am not suggesting that cognitivist approaches ought to do away entirely with universalism or an understanding of cross-cultural regularities. Such explanations can – and should – still play a role within cognitivism, but plurality is rarely a bad thing when it comes to these matters; cognitivism is a sufficiently broad church to be able to accommodate different approaches and different methods. Certainly, there are some questions where the bracketing of culture is wholly appropriate, but I do not believe facial expression is one of them.

There is another theoretical oversight that I hope to address in this thesis. We have seen that, at least within cognitivist scholarship, the face in film has often been examined in relation to discussions about *empathy*. To be sure, empathy is a particularly rich and complex part of our mental life in general and of our engagement with moving image narratives in particular. It is therefore unsurprising that it

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<sup>13</sup> I will provide an overview of this in chapter two.

has attracted a great deal of theoretical discussion. However, I believe that in some ways the focus on empathy has distracted from perhaps more mundane, but no less important, questions. By this I mean that there is still a great deal to be said about *recognition* of faces and facial expression, in particular when it comes to ways in which recognition might differ across cultures. Both Smith and Tan have offered valuable explorations of how we come to recognise and believe things from representations of facial expressions in film, but there is still much more to be said. Given the complexity of empathy and the fact that it has already been the subject of much scholarship, I generally eschew any in-depth discussion of it here. Instead, I will be focusing chiefly on two lines of inquiry: first, how cultural difference and cultural context bear upon how faces are represented in cinema and, second, how cultural difference and cultural context bear upon how viewers recognise and come to believe things from these representations. The claims that I put forward relating to these two lines of inquiry could, in turn, construct some of the foundation for an understanding of empathy, but it remains the case that empathy is not a primary concern of this thesis.

There are two further reasons why this is a topic worth pursuing which relate to the particular historical moment in which we find ourselves. First, the face has arguably become the main expressive channel in contemporary moving image narratives. In recent years, mass-audience blockbuster films have moved more and more towards the style that David Bordwell calls ‘intensified continuity’. This, he suggests, is Hollywood’s ‘traditional continuity amped up, raised to a higher pitch of emphasis’ (‘Intensified Continuity’ 16). Intensified continuity is typified by more rapid editing and more close framing and, as a result, intensified continuity privileges the face and especially the mouth and eyes. As Bordwell notes, ‘actors are principally faces’ in intensified continuity (‘Intensified Continuity’ 20). This is not to say that faces are only worth discussing in relation to close-ups. There is no doubt that the close-up has played an important role in both narrative cinema itself and film theory, but we risk neglecting the other important roles that faces and expressions play if we concern ourselves solely with the close-up. The case studies in the second half of the thesis will aim to show that there is value in thinking beyond just close-ups of facial expressions of emotion.

The second reason is that cinema is becoming more and more transnational. Of course, it virtually goes without saying that film has always been an international medium and art form. Nonetheless, it is becoming increasingly common for film industries across the world to design films to be products in a competitive global marketplace. For example, Bollywood has historically been content to cater to its very large domestic audience. But even this is beginning to change in recent years. In 2017, Nitesh Tiwari's *Dangal* became one of the highest grossing films of all time in China. The runaway success of *Dangal* crystallised the growing success of Bollywood in China over the past fifteen years. Now, Bollywood filmmakers are increasingly targeting the lucrative Chinese market.<sup>14</sup> Hollywood, though always a global powerhouse, has also continued its efforts apace in recent years to appeal to a global audience. In particular, we can see big-budget blockbuster and franchise filmmaking explicitly targeting South American and Chinese audiences.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps more strikingly, the 92nd Academy Awards saw Bong Joon-Ho's *Parasite* (2019) win not only Best International Feature Film, but also Best Picture at the Academy Awards. A South Korean, subtitled film from a director who emerged out of the film festival circuit is now being embraced by the Hollywood establishment. Whether Hollywood and the Academy's endorsement of non-Western filmmaking continues is another matter. At the very least, *Parasite*'s Best Picture win is indicative of the current status of the film festival circuit. As we see with a filmmaker like Joon-Ho, film festivals have turned national cinema and more culturally idiosyncratic filmmaking into big, global business. Finally, alongside these macro-level industry trends, we also must recognise that we are now living fully in the age of the internet (and of digital piracy), meaning that it is easier than ever for viewers to access films from other cultures. The upshot of all this is that cinemagoers and viewers are a culturally diverse bunch and it is becoming more and more commonplace to watch films from other cultures. An understanding of cultural difference is thus at least as important as it ever was.

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<sup>14</sup> See Patrick Brzeski's 'How Bollywood Became a Force in China' in the *Hollywood Reporter* for a brief overview of this.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Katey Rich writes in a *Vanity Fair* article that 'The future of American blockbusters has long been in China'.

## ON THE FACE OF THINGS

Before we look closer at the structure of the thesis, there are a few necessary clarifications and caveats to go through. The first question to ask is if we are talking about expression in film, then why look at the face alone? Though this thesis is focusing on the representation of faces and facial expression, it would be wholly inaccurate to say that the face is the sole way in which humans communicate or express themselves, either in film or in everyday existence. In both cinema and in life, humans express themselves through a plethora of different ways. If the face is one of the primary sites for human self-expression, emotional and otherwise, then the voice and the rest of the body are surely on similar footing. For the sake of simplicity, let us call these ‘expressive channels’. In everyday social interactions we are ordinarily not limited to information from just *one* of these human bodily expressive channels.<sup>16</sup> The study of film, however, lends itself well to studying these expressive channels in isolation given that this is precisely what cinema and filmmaking enables. That is, unlike in our day-to-day lives, film can filter human expressive channels in a way that is rare in reality; we hear disembodied voice-overs narrating stories, we see the face isolated from its surroundings in close-ups, and in silent cinema we must attend principally to the body and the face. However, whereas in life it is uncommon to be limited to just one expressive channel, this is a norm of narrative filmmaking; as we saw through Münsterberg and Balázs, the face isolated in close-up came to occupy a privileged position within narrative cinema. What I am claiming here then is that, despite the importance of both body gesture and the voice in cinema, faces remain the most salient and privileged aspect of human bodily expression that is represented in film. In stating this, I do not wish to preclude the individual agency of filmmakers in eschewing the use of the face. However, such examples I think support my claim. Idiosyncratic cases – like the films of Robert Bresson, say, which gives much more emphasis to hands and body gestures – are exceptional and noteworthy precisely *because* of the fact that they shun the conventional privileging of the human face in film. I accept that it also may seem unnatural to bifurcate the body and face as separate expressive channels (what are faces if not part of our bodies?). Although it is reasonably

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<sup>16</sup> Phone calls are perhaps the most common everyday situation of being limited to just one of these channels.

uncommon that they are separated in life, it is far more typical in film (and art more generally) for the face and body to come apart. As will be discussed later, film is obviously not limited to just the expressive capabilities of the human body either. Throughout the thesis, we will turn to focus on film techniques which may modulate and shape our perception, recognition, and understanding of filmic faces: lighting, music, cinematography, and so forth all contour our ability to understand and recognise the represented face.

My subtitle indicates that this thesis is focused on ‘narrative cinema’. It should be evident enough which sort of works I have in mind when I use this term and I believe that most of the examples that I discuss are unambiguous cases. A word or two should clarify what I take this to encompass though. I follow David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s fairly permissive definition of narrative form as ‘A type of filmic organization in which the parts relate to one another through a series of causally related events taking place in time and space’ (493). The majority of the examples I consider in this thesis will be comfortably accommodated by this definition of narrative, but what about ‘cinema’?<sup>17</sup> As chapter four will make apparent, I take animated films to come under the umbrella of narrative cinema. Animated films have become a prominent part of contemporary cinema and are generally treated by cinemagoers as comparable to live action. The average viewer on a trip to the cinema will not deem an animated film to be significantly different to a live action film; in both cases, she would plausibly state that she saw a film at the cinema. As Frank Boardman puts it in his account of film ontology, ‘animations and live actions occupy the same place in the cultural landscape. They are shown in the same theaters, on the same televisions and via the same websites. They’re reviewed and discussed in the same sections of newspapers’ (7). If anything, largely thanks to Disney, in the West ‘animation’ is often (somewhat erroneously) referred to as a genre of film with relatively stable characteristics. Moreover, the centrality of computer-generated imagery (CGI) in contemporary cinema means that we are seeing a dissolution of clearly demarcated boundaries between animation and live action. The recent remake of *The Lion King* (1994) drew particular attention to this fact. Despite being comprised almost

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<sup>17</sup> The terms ‘cinema’ and ‘film’ are used interchangeably and synonymously throughout.

entirely of (photorealistic) CGI, *The Lion King* (2019) was marketed as a ‘live action’ version of the hand-drawn 1994 animation. At least for our concerns here, when it comes to representing faces and facial expression, animated films often proceed from similar principles as live-action films. In any case, outside of justifying the inclusion of animated films, I see no need to propose necessary or sufficient conditions to define cinema here.

A follow-up question to this is: why such a broad focus? That is, ‘narrative cinema’ refers to such a wide category that it renders it difficult to say anything sufficiently specific about how ‘cinema’ represents faces and facial expression. There is another challenge here which would be to say that we cannot treat mainstream, mass-audience entertainment fiction films in the same way as art cinema or modernist films when it comes to representing the face. I will touch upon these questions in slightly more detail later in the thesis, but for now I will say that the sorts of processes I focus on here are ‘basic’ enough that they are important to *all* narrative films; on some level, viewers must be able to read and to understand things from faces regardless of a film’s style, mode, genre, or tradition to which it belongs. The breadth of the focus here is also a by-product of adopting a cognitive cultural approach. If we wish to say anything meaningful about difference, then it necessitates that we cast our net far and wide. Consequently, we will look at filmmaking from a range of traditions and genres from North America, South Korea, Russia, Japan, Britain, Germany, and beyond. The cases we will look at span classical style and mass-audience cinema to art films, as well as both live-action and animated filmmaking.

A reader may nonetheless identify a certain tendency in the examples that are drawn upon. Namely, the way in which I approach the question of cultural difference is often, but not always, along quite broad lines of ‘the West’ versus ‘the East’. In particular, many of the examples representing ‘the East’ are from Japanese cinema whilst the West is generally represented by US filmmaking. Indeed, many of the examples I draw upon of non-Western filmmaking are already known and celebrated in the West (Kurosawa and Ozu’s films, for instance). In doing this, I do not intend to replicate cultural stereotypes about Japanese cinema as some sort of distant form which replicates ‘Japaneseness’. Nor am I suggesting Japan is totally emblematic of all East Asian cultures. In the same way, the United States is by no means wholly representative of the entire ‘West’. There are, however, two practical

reasons to cast the analysis in this way. The first is that, given that I will be drawing on psychological literature, there is significantly more research on both North Americans and on Japanese people. Comparative studies and cross-cultural psychology often compare North American participants with Japanese participants. Thus, there is simply more empirical scholarship to build upon. This holds true for film studies too; Japanese cinema is perhaps the best-known and most researched of East Asian cinemas in Anglophone film studies. Bordwell, for instance, has written widely on the history of style in Japanese cinema, not to mention his comprehensive work on Ozu's oeuvre. Again, this simply provides more stable footing upon which to make claims about stylistic and formal tendencies of the filmmaking of particular nations.

With these clarifications on the table, we can now look at the way ahead. The thesis is divided into two parts, each consisting of three chapters. The first three chapters offer a theoretical overview of the science of facial expression, an account of cultural difference, and a conceptual sketch of how film represents human expressions and how such representations are typically understood. More specifically, chapter one considers the great debate in the scientific study of facial expression. Painted in broad brushstrokes, there are two dominant – and opposing – camps in the contemporary understanding of facial expression. To borrow psychologist Nicole Chovil's categorisation, we may refer to these two approaches as the Emotional Expression Approach and the Social Communicative Approach ('Facing others', 321). On the one hand, the Emotional Expression Approach focuses on individual and psychological processes, where facial displays are regarded as 'readouts' of underlying emotions. This approach is notably supported by, to name just a few, Paul Ekman, Wallace V Friesen, and Dacher Keltner. The Social Communicative Approach, on the other hand, focuses on social interaction. Facial displays are regarded as communicative acts that provide information to another party and are not *necessarily* linked to emotions. This is notably supported by Alan Fridlund and José Miguel Fernández-Dols. Chapter one discusses the two most dominant views of facial expression in evolutionary psychology: the neurocultural view (belonging to the Emotional Expression Approach) and the behavioural ecology view (belonging to the Social Communication Approach). I propose here that these two seemingly polarised views are by no means entirely at odds with each and that we can combine the

best insights of these two views. Philosopher Mitchell Green shows one way in which this is possible; Green's 'strategic readout view' of facial expression combines the basic tenets of both the neurocultural view and the behavioural ecology view. This chapter will look at Green's view of expression, as well as his conceptualisation of 'conventionalised' and 'idiosyncratic' expression.

Chapter two builds upon the first chapter by more closely examining the matter of universality and cultural difference in relation to facial expression, cognition, and film spectatorship. In particular, we will consider what *cultural psychology* has to say about matters of cultural difference. As a theoretical approach, cultural psychology has received relatively little attention in cognitive film theory. This chapter offers a summary of some of cultural psychology's core tenets and asks what the implications for our understanding of cinema might be if we take seriously the claims that there are noteworthy (and not merely superficial) cultural differences in cognition, perception, and emotion. In this chapter, we will also drill deeper into what psychologists have recently argued about cultural difference in relation to facial expression. Over the past thirty years, psychologists have been mounting more and more assaults on the universality thesis of facial expression. These critiques rely on empirical studies which find that there are differences in how cultures recognise and understand faces and facial expressions. We will look at some of this evidence and consider what options we might have if we accept that cultural differences in facial expression are significant and not just superficial variations.

Chapter three has two main strands. First, I propose some general principles of how we might understand the representation of faces and facial expression in film. The main claim advanced here is that cinema tends towards a *romantic* view of expression. Put another way, I argue that facial expression in film can broadly be understood in terms of a 'naïve' psychological model which relies upon folk ideas about facial expressions and what we can understand from them. To support this claim, I draw upon work within psychology which is critical of the folk theory within the neurocultural view of facial expression. The second strand in this chapter explores the variety of factors that influence and impact upon the representation of faces in narrative films. This part will introduce a number of ideas which will be taken up in greater detail in the second half of the thesis. When it comes to representing the human face, it must be stressed that faces in film are just that: representations. As such, our perception

of them is mediated through a variety of film techniques; editing, lighting, cinematography, and music all shape our perception and understanding of faces and facial expression within a narrative. Furthermore, we have a background awareness that facial expressions within film narratives have been *selected* to communicate certain things.

The second half of the thesis is comprised of three case studies on facial representations in film (face studies, if you will). These chapters will expand upon the theory in the first half of the thesis and look in greater detail at how the face functions in relation to particular aspects, and traditions, of narrative cinema. Chapter four considers how animated narrative films represent facial expression, with a specific focus on Japanese animation or anime. Reconstructing some of Scott McCloud's work on comics, I propose that we can understand facial representations in animation (and to a lesser extent in live action) to be predicated on a combination of amplification *plus* simplification. When it comes to representing faces in animation, amplification and simplification may lead to positive effects on both recognition of emotion as well as perceived intensity. We will first consider the caricature effect and the peak shift effect as possible evidence for this claim. After this, we will turn to look closer at anime. I argue that anime demonstrates that cultural context shapes precisely what is *selected* to be amplified and simplified in animation, and this, in turn, has a number of aesthetic effects.

Chapter five makes a case for going beyond the traditional focus on facial expressions of emotion and analyses the functions and effects of nonverbal cues and gestures. A key part of how humans express themselves and communicate is through nonverbal movements and actions. As Adam Kendon, one of the foremost researchers of gesture, writes, 'Willingly or not, humans, when in co-presence, continuously inform one another their intentions, interests, feelings and ideas by means of visible bodily action' (1). The face is one of the central means through which this communication takes place in everyday conversations and, to borrow Bordwell's phrasing, narrative cinema 'piggybacks' on our understanding of these everyday social interactions ('Who Blinked' 335). An examination of how this behaviour is represented in film gives us an insight into how moving image narratives transform ordinary human behaviour into representations that bring about understanding of characters and social contexts. This chapter specifically looks at films structured as 'investigative narratives'. I define this

very generally as films in which the principal narrative driving force is an investigation carried out by one or more protagonists of a crime or transgression. Films that take investigations as the principle driving force of the narrative often embroil viewers in a ludic game of assessing whether characters are lying or not. Conventionally, these films feature high-stakes social interactions between characters (such as interviews and interrogations) in which viewers are encouraged to scrutinise characters' facial and bodily expressions. Furthermore, it is equally common for these films to be located within a specific place in the real-world. They therefore may try to represent the sorts of expressive behaviour we, often stereotypically, might expect from the inhabitants and various social groups of such places. This chapter will first address how we should conceptualise nonverbal cues and gestures, before moving ahead to a close analysis of the Coen brothers' *Fargo* (1996).

Finally, chapter six considers 'faces of antipathy'. Cognitive film theory has chiefly focused on facial representations in relation to prosocial viewer responses such as sympathy and empathy. This chapter expands upon Plantinga's recent work on 'faces of opposition' and considers the facial representations of antagonistic or oppositional characters in narrative films. This chapter also builds upon Margrethe Bruun Vaage's work on antiheroes in American television. Vaage makes a compelling case that our evaluation of characters is largely rooted in quick-and-dirty and pre-reflective moral judgements that are more akin to intuitions and emotions as opposed to deliberate or reflective judgements. I propose in this chapter that a significant part of how viewers form these quick-and-dirty judgements is through making inferences merely from how a character looks. That is, film exploits our propensity to make snap 'physiognomic' assessments. Whereas in life these inferences are normally inaccurate and can lead us astray, narrative films ordinarily encourage us to make these sorts of inferences. These quick-and-dirty inferences are shaped by a combination of cultural stereotypes as well as more basic cognition. This chapter will thus consider the nature of the inferences and judgements we make from the visual image of characters' faces and how this is shaped by the formal features of film. I will also discuss in this chapter how faces of antipathy might interfere with empathetic responses. The majority of the discussion of character engagement theorises how we may *feel-with* or *feel-for*

characters. We will also think here about how representations of the face work when we are *feeling-against* characters.

What has motivated the selection of these cases? There are two important factors. The first is that these three chapters all address topics that have been underserved by extant scholarship in film. Chapter four considers facial representations in animation and, more specifically, anime. Granted, animation has become a more popular subject in film studies at large, but it remains neglected by cognitive studies and philosophy of film; Dan Torre notes that cognitive film theory has ‘tended to focus almost entirely on live action’ (105) whilst David Davies remarks that, ‘Until very recently, little if any serious philosophical attention has been paid to animated cinema’ (173). With regards to anime, anglophone discussions of anime have typically approached it as a cultural phenomenon and proposed socioeconomic and cultural explanations for why it has become popular beyond the borders of Japan. Comparatively little has been said about the ways in which the visual design and stylistic conventions of anime work in relation to visual appeal and emotional responses. With regards to chapters five and six, I have already noted that much of the discussion of the represented face in film has focused on facial expressions of emotion by more or less likeable or sympathetic characters. Chapters five and six, focusing on nonverbal expressions and antipathy respectively, contend that this is not painting the entire picture.

The second factor motivating the selection of these case studies is that they will show what can be gained from adopting a cognitive cultural approach. These three chapters work as both stand-alone case studies but, considered together, are intended to make a positive case for the cognitive cultural approach which I am advocating for here. In chapter four, anime offers a rich and compelling case study of how cultural differences shape the visual design and representation of faces. As Plantinga notes, the difficulty of extricating culture from nature in relation to representations of the face is especially apparent in the case of facial caricature and animation (‘Facing Others’ 294-295). In chapter five, nonverbal cues and gestures (related as they are to language) are highly culturally variable and thus can help us look closely at how filmmakers select, simplify, and amplify specific aspects of culturally variable behaviour. In chapter six, soliciting antipathy through the represented faces relies not merely

on basic cognition, but also on a range of cultural shorthands and stereotypes. Ultimately, these case studies will show that navigating a middle way between nature and nurture, universality and cultural difference is the most productive and fruitful way of approaching the representation of faces and facial expression in narrative cinema.

## **Part One**

### **Theorising Facial Expression in Film**

Part one is comprised of three chapters. Chapter one looks at two leading theories of facial expression from evolutionary psychology: the neurocultural view and the behavioural ecology view. Alongside this, we will also consider Mitchell Green's philosophical account of human self-expression. Chapter two considers the implications of cultural differences for an understanding of film viewership and facial expression. In particular, we will look at the field of cultural psychology and various criticisms of the universality thesis of facial expression. Chapter three will propose some general principles that underpin the representation of facial expression in narrative films and consider what factors shape the representation of facial expression in narrative cinema. The first three chapters, which comprise part one of the thesis, will lay the foundations for the three case studies that constitute part two of the thesis. Many of the threads introduced in these first three chapters will be returned to in the case studies of the second half.

## Chapter 1

### Views on Expression

As humans, we are capable of expressing ourselves in a number of ways in our everyday lives. Everything from body language, gesture, words, facial expression, posture to tone of voice manifest some aspect of our point of view. We are also capable of far more remarkable and complicated acts of self-expression. Through art and artistic representations, we can express ourselves in even more complex, abstract, and nuanced ways. Sculpture or song, painting or poem, art is predicated in part on the expression of experiences, attitudes, emotions, and ideas. Perhaps to a greater extent than any other art form, cinema relies upon the expressive potential of the human face. In representing the human face and expressive behaviour, it would be wrong to say that filmmaking literally reproduces reality, but the conventions and stylistic features of representing human expression in film are, by necessity, constructed out of pre-existing regularities of human thought, feeling, and action in reality. These pre-existing regularities are integral to the experience of film in two notable ways: first, in shaping how filmmakers create, select, and choose to represent the expressive behaviour of fictional characters and, second, in shaping how viewers are likely to perceive and interpret these expressive acts. If we are to understand how facial expression works in film, then, we must have some sort of grasp of these pre-existing regularities and arrive at an understanding of how expression works in our ordinary lives.

In these first three chapters we will build up a general understanding of faces and facial expression, how they are represented in narrative cinema, and how we understand these representations. More specifically, these chapters will address the following questions: What are facial expressions? What do they – or what do they not – tell us? How do films select and represent expressive behaviour? What bearing does place and culture have on the recognition and understanding of expression? How might this impact the representation of faces in film? Before we turn to address these questions though, there are a few methodological matters that need addressing. This thesis works on an assumption that both the representation and recognition of expressive behaviour in narrative films have a significant and non-arbitrary relationship with how human expression and facial display functions in reality. How we conceptualise facial expression in ordinary experience, therefore, is of some importance. This aligns me

with the general bent of cognitivism towards a realist position in which perception and recognition of the cinematic image works much the same as our perception and recognition of objects in the real world.<sup>18</sup> Generally speaking, cognitive film theorists subscribe to the position that we can extend or extrapolate scientific findings about emotion and expression to our understanding of film viewership.<sup>19</sup> Though I also subscribe to such a position, I accept that this is an assumption that for many requires further justification.

### **WHAT HAS SCIENCE EVER DONE FOR US?**

A notable proportion of this thesis is given over to considering what disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience claim about how the human face and facial expression work in our day-to-day lives. This is predicated on an assumption that is generally shared within cognitive film theory that certain insights and evidence derived from scientific research can be extended or extrapolated towards an understanding of film viewership. Within film theory, adopting such a position is (at least historically) not without controversy; one is likely to encounter at worst a hostile response and otherwise a dismissive or indifferent response to ascribing any sort of role to scientific methods, knowledge, or evidence in the pursuit of understanding aspects of film and film viewership.<sup>20</sup> For instance, D N Rodowick's essay 'An Elegy for Theory' expresses the concern that a commitment to analytic or cognitivist film theory entails 'a de facto epistemological dismissal of the humanities' (98). For Rodowick, the criteria of empirical research and scientific methods are ultimately 'irrelevant for cultural investigation' (99). Or, consider Robert Stam's claim that,

Cognitivism shows a touching faith in reason (after Auschwitz) and science (after Hiroshima).

It keeps its faith with science, even though "science" had not so recently "proved" black,

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<sup>18</sup> This does not preclude perceptual and cognitive faculties being pushed and developed in novel ways by cinema. For example, see Smith's 'Empathy, Expansionism, and the Extended Mind' and Paul Taberham's *Lessons in Perception: The Avant-Garde Filmmaker as Practical Psychologist* (2011).

<sup>19</sup> For example, Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film* (1996), Grodal's *Embodied Visions* (2009), Plantinga's *Moving Viewers* (2009) and Smith's *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* (2017).

<sup>20</sup> See Nannicelli and Taberham's introduction to *Cognitive Media Theory* (2014) for a more developed response to objections to cognitive film theory's 'scientism'.

Jewish, and Native American inferiority. The question, of course, is to what end is science being used, and who gets to decide. (240-241)

I will not offer (as others have)<sup>21</sup> a response to Rodowick or Stam's specific concerns here, but I draw on them to establish that a hostile attitude towards the role of science regularly finds itself in the mainstream of film studies and film theory. Stam's quotation is from an introductory textbook to film theory which, although now twenty years old, remains on many introductory modules for film theory at UK universities.<sup>22</sup> For many undergraduates of film studies, it would be an early encounter with the notion that science may play some sort of role in theorising about film (and art more broadly). Likewise, Rodowick's essay was awarded the Society for Cinema and Media Studies' Katherine Singer Kovacs Award for Outstanding Essay, suggesting that his concerns are shared by several others, or at least an influential few, within the mainstream of film studies.

Stam and Rodowick represent perhaps the most unsympathetic camp in film theory towards ascribing some sort of role to science, but a more moderate scepticism within film theory towards the role of science is also commonplace. This sort of position might argue that invoking scientific insights to understand film viewership is either reductionist, trivial, or just a particularly uninteresting way of 'explaining' complex cultural artefacts. We encountered this sort of stance in the introduction where we looked at some existing scholarship on the face in film. The represented face is held up by scholars such as Rushton, Coates, and Steimatsky as an object of study that should remain enigmatic, elusive, and impenetrable. It therefore lies beyond the realm where science can usefully address its representation in film. It is unclear what might be done to assuage the concerns of the hostile position of Stam and Rodowick. In response to the more moderate sceptics though, it ought to be stressed that claiming that scientific knowledge might illuminate some aspects of film viewership does not entail believing that our experience of film can wholly be 'reduced' or explained entirely by recourse to

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<sup>21</sup> Carl Plantinga ('Cognitive Film Theory' 28-30) and Mario Sluga (18-31) both engage with Stam's summary and critique of cognitivism and analytic philosophy (235-247).

<sup>22</sup> Sluga notes from his own survey of UK universities that Stam's *Film Theory* is the most cited of all the film theory textbooks (18).

scientific disciplines or evidence. Those who integrate scientific research into their analysis of film make no claim that we may find all the answers we need within, say, evolutionary psychology. Likewise, appealing to science should by no means be seen as an appeal to authority in order to ‘prove’ something. Even the most robust scientific evidence and theory is provisional, fallible, and subject to revision. Any claims we make about film are also speculative and subject to revision, just as any scientific claims are.

We may also find scepticism about the role of science from those who are likely to be more sympathetic to cognitive film theory; several cognitivist or analytically-inclined scholars remain doubtful over what role science should play in theorising about film and which sort of science should be appealed to. Consider Malcolm Turvey’s critique of evolutionary film theory. As the name suggests, evolutionary film theory synthesizes research from evolutionary psychology and neuroscience with film theory. Turvey notes, ‘I am sure that evolutionary psychology, like psychology in general, has much to teach those of us who study the arts. Nevertheless, I am skeptical that it can become the major explanatory paradigm in the humanities or in cinema studies’ (‘Evolutionary’ 48-49). Turvey argues that, although evolutionary film theory should be lauded for foregrounding universal and innate dimensions of art-making and consumption, humanistic explanations will always (and ought always) remain central to the study of film and other arts. Turvey is somewhat uncharitable to claim that those who subscribe to evolutionary film theory actually believe that evolutionary accounts should be *the* major explanatory paradigm (as opposed to just one explanatory paradigm). More recently, Turvey has developed a position he refers to as ‘serious pessimism’ about the possible contributions of neuroscience to the study of film and art (‘Mirror Neurons’ 24-26). I do not think we need to be quite as pessimistic as Turvey, but we should heed his scepticism for it urges us, as film theorists, to take a more critical stance to the scientific paradigms and theories which we appeal to.

Even if we accept that science can play some sort of role in theorising about film, then a question that follows is a question already raised by Turvey: what *sort* of science should be appealed to. This, again, is not without controversy. For instance, neuroaesthetics (in some ways a blood relative of evolutionary film theory) is premised on the belief that an understanding of brain processes and

structures can shed light on our experience of art. Neuroaesthetics has faced sustained waves of criticism, not least from scholars who generally endorse cognitivist or analytic approaches to art.<sup>23</sup> Even within cognitivist or analytic approaches then, there is little consensus about the sort of role that science ought to play. Indeed, cognitive film and media theory by no means requires subscribing to cognitivism in the narrow sense (that is, as a model of how cognition works) or to evolutionary accounts or to a specific disciplinary approach. As will be elaborated upon further in chapter two's discussion of cultural psychology, a cognitivist approach to film and media can comfortably accommodate adopting other models and theoretical approaches towards the mind. Certainly, doing so is a good thing for it can compel us to revise or rethink certain claims.

Another objection to relying on scientific methods and evidence would be to argue that much scientific research cannot be straightforwardly extended to an understanding of art. In a response to Murray Smith's naturalised aesthetics of film put forward in *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, Katherine Thomson-Jones is sceptical of science's possible contribution to both film theory and philosophy of art. In particular, she expresses concerns with how the science of emotion (and emotion recognition specifically, which ties closely to research on facial expression) has been applied to film:

It is not enough to cite research on emotion recognition in everyday life. For all we know, emotion recognition could work quite differently in the context of film. Thus, my final concern is with the assumption that we can apply general emotion science to a film as long as we give some accompanying analysis of film composition. If the research on emotion in film is not available ... then the speculative extension of the science needs to be fully acknowledged. (99)

Thomson-Jones is certainly right to suggest that we should acknowledge that we are, often by necessity, making certain speculative extensions from scientific literature to film theorising; however, she does not address the reasons *why* we should believe emotion recognition would work so radically different in the context of film. It would seem entirely reasonable to say that the burden of proof falls on the sceptic to show that we recognise human faces in a radically different way when we are watching a film

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<sup>23</sup> See Smith's chapter 'The Engine of Reason and the Pit of Naturalism' in *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* for an overview.

than in our ordinary lives. As Smith states in his response to Thomson-Jones, ‘aesthetic experience *depends* on ordinary perception, cognition, and affect: we do not have special physiological organs or brain circuits or mental modules that have evolved uniquely for the purpose of apprehending aesthetic qualities in the arts or the natural world’ (‘A Response’ 123). Narrative films are neither direct mirrors of reality, nor do viewers treat them as such, strictly speaking. However, narrative cinema is made *by* humans, to work *on* humans. *Pace* Thomson-Jones, it is therefore quite reasonable to understand the mechanisms by which phenomena in film work on us against the backdrop of an understanding of how similar phenomena work outside of our experience of cinema.

This said, I can offer what I believe is a more compelling response to Thomson-Jones’s concern about citing research on emotion recognition and facial expression when theorising about film. For the specific case of facial expression and recognition, we perhaps need not be as cautious about making speculative extensions from scientific research as Thomson-Jones would have it. Let us consider some general features that have defined mainstream psychological research on faces, facial expression, and emotion recognition over the past sixty years. First, psychological studies on facial expression typically use either still photographs or short films of faces (almost exclusively in close-up). Second, they ordinarily use images of posed facial displays (as opposed to spontaneous facial expressions). Third, these studies are often artificially limited to one ‘expressive channel’ as close-up photographic images of a person’s face exclude both the body and voice as vehicles of expression and emotion. As critics of these studies within psychology have argued, all of these features are ones that undermine the ecological validity of such experiments and studies.<sup>24</sup> To clarify, because of the historical limitations of studying facial expression, emotion, and recognition in controlled laboratory settings, it remains unclear to what extent the findings from these studies are able to be generalised to *real-life scenarios*. You may already see where I am going with this; the limitations of such psychological studies means that they might tell us less about expression and emotion in reality, and more about our capacity to recognise a mediated, exaggerated, and posed facial expression of emotion under conditions which exclude some expressive

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<sup>24</sup> See Barrett’s chapter ‘The Myth of Universal Emotions’ (42-55) and Russell’s ‘Is There Universal Recognition of Emotion From Facial Expression?’ for critiques of these types of studies.

channels of emotion and amplify others. In other words, the extant scientific literature on facial expression might tell us relatively little about how expressions of emotion are produced and recognised in our ordinary lives, but they can tell us something about our recognition and perception of facial expression in film viewing.

There are, of course, some obvious caveats and objections to this claim, and one might readily find some dissimilarities. Unlike in many psychological studies, when we recognise and respond to the expressive and emotional qualities of faces in film, we are not relying on *just* our capacity to make inferences from the face alone; music, lighting, cinematography, and, perhaps above all, narrative guide our perception and response. The point still stands, however, that close-ups of the face, in both psychological studies and films, exclude cues that we would ordinarily rely upon in everyday situations. It could also be said that the static photography used in psychological studies is dissimilar to the moving images of cinema. I do not see this as a significant problem, however. Photography and cinema, though manifestly different, rely upon similar technologies and thus offer similar forms of mediation and bear a perceptual similarity. Another objection would be to say that the posing of subjects for a psychological study differs significantly from the creation of performance in narrative films. To this I would say there remain a number of important similarities. In fact, the subjects used in psychological studies about emotion recognition are often actors. There are some clear parallels with how performances in narrative films may be created: the poser works together with the photographer to produce images of expressions which are the best (or the most expressive) fit for facial expressions of specific emotions. What I do accept, however, is that because these studies utilise highly prototypical posed expressions, they will likely only be able to tell us about films that are aiming for clarity of emotional expression. In any case, I will return to cash out this claim more fully in chapter three when we consider representing expression in film in greater detail.

#### **VIEWS ON FACIAL EXPRESSION**

Many more pages could be given over to exploring what sort of role science ought to play in humanistic disciplines, but this brief response should be sufficient for our purposes. If we are happy to accept that we can understand at least certain aspects of faces and facial expression in film through scientific

research, then the question that follows is what view of facial expression offers the best explanatory model. To arbitrate on this matter, I suggest we turn to Mitchell Green's *Self-Expression* (2007). Green presents a philosophical account of self-expression and how self-expression reveals our states of thought, feeling, and experience. Green's main claim is that self-expression is concerned with *showing* a cognitive, affective, or qualitative state in such a way that the showing is a product of design. 'Design' may be the result of an individual agent's conscious intention or the result of natural selection, artificial selection, or convention.<sup>25</sup> Green rightly identifies that, for humans, the face is a vital locus for self-expression and dedicates a great deal of his account to faces and facial expression. Green's account can help us clarify what is at stake in this discussion and shed some light on how facial expression in film functions. By extending Green's account of self-expression to an understanding of expression in film, I am suggesting that film characters typically express themselves in ways that are related to how humans self-express themselves in reality, and one of the most significant ways that this self-expression occurs is through facial expression.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, based on an expectation that fictions typically cohere around reality, viewers also rely on their everyday knowledge and skills of interpreting human self-expression in order to understand narrative films.

To reiterate, our default stance towards fictional characters is to assume that they will express themselves in ways similar to humans in reality; we generally think of characters as agents capable of self-expression. As we will see in chapter four, this claim is supported particularly well by looking at animation. Animation show us that our propensity to see fictional characters as analogues of real people likely does not even require that a character resemble a human. What about films or directors with highly non-naturalistic performance styles? As Smith puts it, 'in the cases of [Robert] Bresson and [Takeshi] Kitano we find an attenuation of emotional expression which we would find disturbing or

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<sup>25</sup> 'Design' is used by Green in a different sense than we might typically understand it. To explain this, we need to understand that Green's account rests atop a *signalling model of communication*. The signalling model of communication posits that 'signals' are cues that are *designed* for their ability to convey the information that they do (5). The design can be intentional or the product of selection.

<sup>26</sup> This is evidently not a problem for Green; his book is furnished throughout with many examples of self-expression from fictional characters in literature.

even pathological in life' (*FATC* 151). I suggest that such films are still predicated on an assumption that the face, body, and voice are expressive channels which show some aspect of characters' cognitive, affective, or qualitative state. I will flesh out some examples of this later, but even films that flatten, minimise, or de-emphasise overt expressive behaviour or have characters express in highly non-naturalistic ways still require us to understand that these fictional agents are *able to show* their cognitive, affective, or qualitative states. This act of showing may be idiosyncratic or conventionalised, but we can still accept that it is an act of self-expression. Nevertheless, just because we ordinarily perceive that film characters are self-expressing agents, this does not entail that performance itself necessitates self-expression (though this is entirely possible). One of the twenty dicta Green proposes to define self-expression states that 'Dramatic performances, when expressive, need not involve self-expression' (42). In support of Green, we will find that whether the actor embodying a fictional character is technically carrying out an act of *self-expression* is unimportant. Instead, it can be proposed without any incoherence that, under ordinary conditions, we perceive that *characters* (as opposed to actors) themselves are self-expressing agents within the fiction, and that these expressive acts are rooted in how humans are understood to express themselves in reality.

Although self-expression is central to this chapter, I will not engage here with the ways in which films themselves can function as acts of self-expression, a complicated question in its own right. As Green points out, a painting might present, and thereby show, rage without it being rage actually felt by anyone. It might achieve this by depicting an enraged face, but in this case it only shows what rage looks like without enabling us to perceive any one person's rage (194-195). The collaborative nature of filmmaking likewise poses some complications to the position that films themselves can be considered acts of self-expression. Nonetheless, this is not to claim that films cannot be *expressive*. In the most basic and everyday case, it is extremely common to bestow expressive qualities onto a film in order to describe it; we might say that something we watched was 'sad' or 'happy' or 'exciting' or 'scary'. However, to consider the expressive qualities of film itself, it would be necessary to consider the sum of all its parts. Facial expressions alone cannot account for the expressive character of a film taken as a whole; a film is not sad just because the characters in it look sad. The focus here is on how theories of

expression can inform the ways in which facial display can be conceptualised and how this relates to filmmaking norms, broader elements of film style, and the viewer's interpretation of character traits, subjectivity, intentions, and feelings.

Let us now turn to look at three views of facial expression: namely, the neurocultural view, the behavioural ecology view, and Green's own 'strategic readout view'. I will argue here that both the neurocultural view and behavioural ecology view present distinct problems and instead propose that middle-ground approaches towards facial expression, such as Green's strategic readout view, are fruitful alternatives. To further flesh out this account of expression, we will also look more closely at Green's conceptualisation of *conventionalised* and *idiosyncratic* expression. Why am I affording Green such a prominent position here? As I see it, the value of his work lies in his impartial examination of the big claims on both sides of the scientific debate about facial expression. As is often the case in psychology, these research programmes have positioned themselves as diametrically opposed to each other, refusing to concede any sort of middle-ground even when such a move may be pragmatic, if not warranted by the evidence. In these sorts of intractable and entrenched academic debates, it can be beneficial for a disinterested party (often a philosopher) to assess the claims of both sides. In this particular matter, Green is right to point out that many of the claims of the neurocultural view and behavioural ecology view are not mutually exclusive.

Before we turn to these views on expression, a bit of context to this debate over facial expression will help orient us. Charles Darwin was among the first to identify the significance of the relationship between facial expression and emotion. According to Darwin, emotion had an evolutionary history which spanned both different cultures and different species; human – and animal – emotions are biologically innate, evolutionarily adaptive, and fundamentally linked to distinct, perceivable expressions (13). For better or worse, Darwin continues to cast a long shadow over the field. His claims still influence the study of emotion and facial expression today. Indeed, since the publication of *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), the study of emotion has endured as an area of theoretical controversy and continuous research. Darwin's account argues that it is impossible to

consider facial expressions without considering their significance for emotion, a position that has been the subject of much debate.

If we are discussing the science of facial expression, we will also find it impossible to escape the looming shadow of the psychologist Paul Ekman, well-known for his lifetime of work on facial expression. Ekman is one of the chief proponents of the neurocultural view of facial expression. This view began to take shape in the 1960s by taking Darwin's claims seriously and has since come to dominate psychological research on facial expression. Like Darwin's theory, it proposes that facial expressions are 'readouts' of hardwired emotions. In recent years, Ekman has become a particularly fierce defender of his academic legacy and the theoretical validity of the neurocultural view. In 2016, Ekman published a survey he conducted of nearly 250 scientists who identified as significantly involved in studying the emotions. Ekman's results showed that the existence of 'compelling evidence for universals in any aspect of emotion' was endorsed by 88% of the survey respondents. Furthermore, the evidence supporting 'universal signals' was endorsed by 80%. The survey asked which emotion labels should be considered to have been empirically established. Out of a possible eighteen emotions, there was high agreement about five emotions: anger (91%), fear (90%), disgust (86%), sadness (80%), and happiness (76%) (32). Ekman compared the findings from this survey to a similar investigation conducted twenty years earlier. In the previous study, there was little agreement about either universals or about what emotions should be considered; by contrast, 'the agreement now about the evidence for universals in emotional signals and the evidence for five emotions is robust' ('What Scientists' 32).

It is without question worth being wary of Ekman's partiality in conducting this survey given his very significant stake in the debate on facial expression and emotion. Despite this, Ekman's survey does tell us something of the modern conception of emotion. The current understanding tells us that, first, emotions do exist *in some capacity* and, second, that they *can* be perceptible on the face, but the myriad specifics involved with these two claims remain highly contestable. There are several vocal critics who would argue forcefully against the position advocated by Ekman. For José Miguel Fernández-Dols and James A Russell, 'the most fundamental questions, such as whether "facial expressions of emotion" in fact express emotions, remain subjects of great controversy' (4).

Wading into this great debate, Green provides an overview and critique of the two most influential contemporary approaches to the experimental psychology of facial expression: the neurocultural view, associated with Ekman, and the behavioural ecology view, associated with Alan Fridlund. These two views represent the broad divide in theories of facial expression, the former belonging to what we identified in the introduction as an Emotional Expression Approach and the latter to a Social Communication Approach (Chovil, 'Facing others' 321). Despite what proponents on either side of this debate would argue, these two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive and instead can be clarified, refined, and, up to a point, integrated. Green aims to do precisely this and proposes a middle-way approach to facial expression: the strategic readout view, which, he claims, combines the best insights of these two approaches. In order to understand the strategic readout view, we must first turn our attention to the two views that form the backdrop to this theory.

### **THE NEUROCULTURAL VIEW**

For much of the twentieth century, it was widely supposed that there is little in common among the practices of facial expression from one culture to another; cultural relativism was prevalent. The 1960s and 1970s represented a major turning point for the study of facial expression. Research conducted by Carroll Izard, Wallace V Friesen and Ekman overturned this old consensus. These researchers and their collaborators proposed that both the production and recognition of facial expressions of emotion were universal and hardwired adaptations. This marked the emergence of the *neurocultural* view of expression, a theory which is fundamentally interlinked with basic emotion theory (BET). The neurocultural view posits a set of universal and innate 'basic' emotions – the most widely accepted of which are happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, and anger – that are part of our biological makeup rather than a product of culture.<sup>27</sup> These basic emotions are discrete packages of short-term, coordinated, and automated responses. Part of this automated response involves the display of a pan-cultural and

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<sup>27</sup> These are considered the 'classic' basic emotions, but there is little agreement about how many basic emotions there actually are. As Gu et al. note, 'there is no consensus about the precise number of basic emotions'. Alan S Cowen and Dacher Keltner point out that the number of emotions posited by theoretical accounts ranges from 6 to 15 (E7900).

unique combination of the facial musculature (see fig. 2). Humans are born with encapsulated neural circuitry which is responsible both for the production and for the recognition of these facial expressions. Each of these unique facial configurations is held to be both signal and, because of its high correlation with a corresponding affective state, ‘readout’ of that affective state. Its status as a reliable readout thus supports its ability to function as a reliable signal; if my face shows that I am angry, you can safely assume that I am, in fact, feeling angry. Facial expressions are hence understood as a perceivable manifestation of an emotional state. That is, there is a one-to-one correlation between the emotions a person feels and the specific facial expression that the person displays.

The neurocultural view holds that these displays are evolutionarily adaptive in their capacity to function as highly salient signals to members of the same species. Despite this, it does not necessarily follow in this view that facial expressions are intentionally produced for communicative purposes. Facial expressions may well be produced voluntarily, but these are ‘false’ displays. By way of example, psychologists that endorse this view of expression have proposed a distinction between two different types of smile: there are ‘Duchenne smiles’ which are genuine displays of happiness and ‘non-

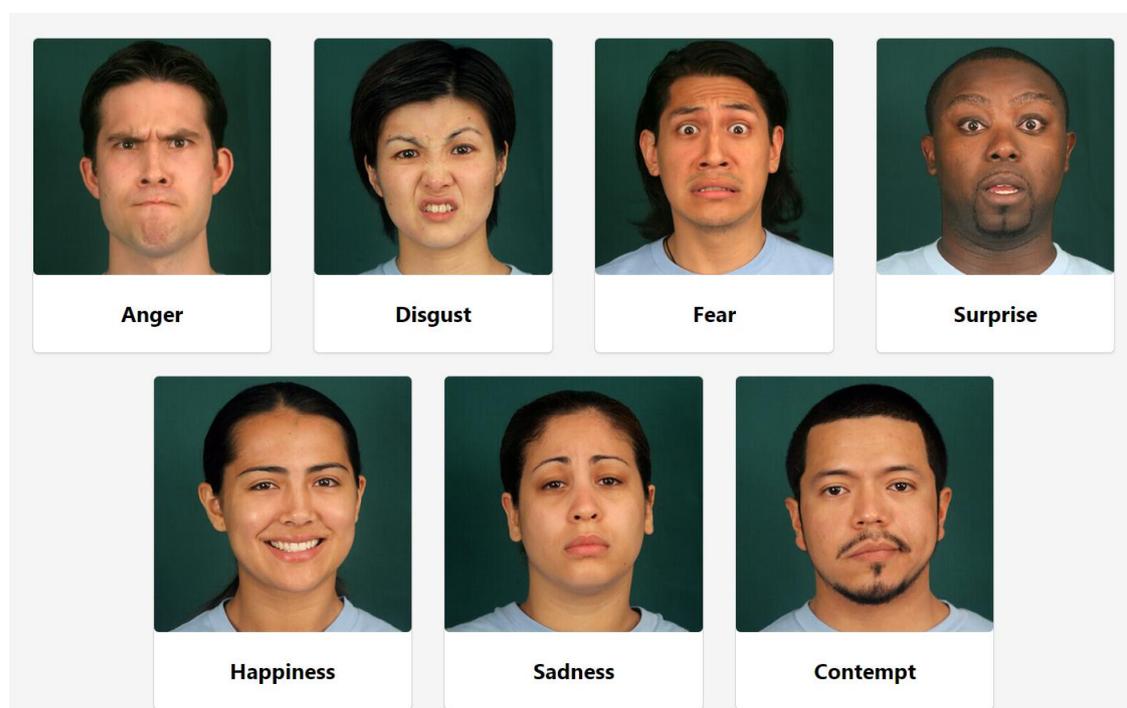


Fig. 2. ‘Seven Universal Facial Expressions’ from the *Paul Ekman Group* website (‘Universal Facial Expressions’). In recent years, Ekman has included ‘Contempt’ as a basic emotion.

Duchenne' smiles which are not genuine displays of happiness. Instead, the non-Duchenne smile primarily serves a social function and is intended to communicate politeness and reassurance. Conversely, the Duchenne smile is a spontaneous 'felt' facial expression of happiness. These felt expressions are understood as spontaneous and involuntary manifestations of internal emotions. We will return to this issue of voluntariness in the production of facial expression momentarily.

This accounts for the 'neuro' part of 'neurocultural', but what about the 'cultural' part? Although emotions are understood to be universal on the neurocultural view, it still supports the possibility of cultural variation. Cultural variation arises principally from the social enforcement of public 'display rules'. For example, imagine you are a lecturer in film studies and you are screening an especially tragic film to your students. You have seen this film dozens of times and, sure enough, when the film reaches its emotional climax you feel yourself welling up. However, you may resist the urge to bawl your eyes out in front of the undergraduates. By contrast, if you were watching this film alone you would feel no such need to mask your expression of sadness. So, display rules govern who can show which emotion to whom and when. They are to an extent both individually and culturally variable. Individuals differ in their success and desire to inhibit, substitute, or mask their facial expressions and cultures differ in what is deemed socially acceptable to display at any given time and place. You personally may be content to weep before your students or you may be in a culture that has less stringent display rules on showing sadness in public. If we assume that facial expressions are involuntary, spontaneous, and authentic readouts of internal states, then display rules are intended to account for the fact that there are many circumstances where we would expect to see certain expressions of emotion but do not.

Although this is not a necessary component of the neurocultural view, Ekman also argues that cultural variation is found in 'conversational actions', which he distinguishes from expressions of emotion. Ekman has attempted to systematise facial and bodily gesture, but research in this area still remains remarkably scant in comparison to emotional research. In short, these forms of facial expression are proposed to be more culturally-variable, ephemeral, and (in some ways) more complex than emotional expressions. They can take the form of, for instance, a raising of the eyebrows to underline a

word or a furrowing of the eyebrows to emphasise a question. Although these nonverbal gestures may well utilise individual components of facial expressions of emotion, Ekman claims that they are still distinct from each other. We will turn to address conversational actions in greater detail in chapter five.

The neurocultural view thus posits a sharp divide between the private and public. As in fig. 3, we may associate the private with the ‘neuro’ part and the public with the ‘cultural’ part. Those expressions you make when you are watching a film alone are ungoverned by display rules and are therefore authentic, spontaneous, and unbidden. But when cultural display rules are enacted in public, our expressions may be masked by the rules that we have internalised and practiced as part of our cultural upbringing. Both display rules and conversational facial actions bring to the fore questions of voluntariness with regards to facial expression. For Ekman,

The fact that expressions may often be managed by display rules, and that sometimes this management is voluntary, does not mean that the facial expressions of emotion that are being managed are also voluntary. If they were voluntary there would be no need to manage them. It is precisely because facial expressions of emotion are involuntary that we learn to manage these expressions, sometimes succeeding in totally inhibiting their visual appearance. (‘Expression or Communication?’ 339)

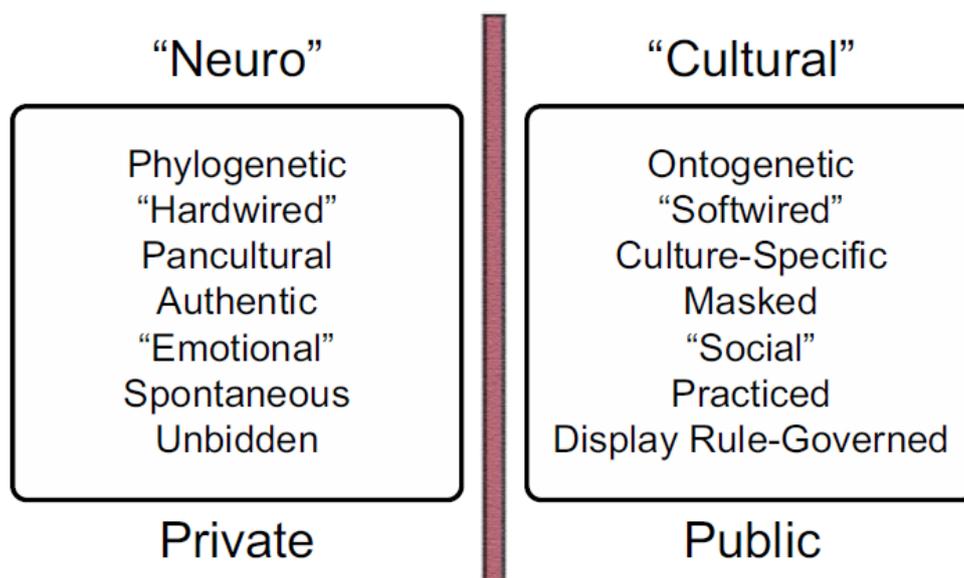


Fig. 3. Crivelli and Fridlund’s characterisation of private and public expression in the neurocultural view (169).

Ekman rests some of his claim that facial expressions are involuntary on the argument that if these expressions were voluntary, there would be no need to manage them through display rules. Green's characterisation of the neurocultural view suggests that emotional expressions are wholly involuntary (see Table 1 at the end of this section for Green's interpretation), but it does not take long to find that Ekman's position on this matter is actually far from consistent over his career. At times, he has been particularly strident: 'I propose that all facial expressions of emotion are involuntary; they are never voluntarily or deliberately made' ('Expression or Communication' 324). Elsewhere, he has shown more uncertainty and stressed that part of the problem encountered in this discussion 'resides in the over simplification of the voluntary-involuntary dichotomy' ('Expression and the Nature of Emotion' 322). He has since suggested that there are many different voluntary expressions and many different involuntary expressions, each probably varying in the underlying neural substrates that are involved. Indeed, Ekman has been criticised for his constant revisions of the neurocultural view, to the point where his revisions begin to contradict the core original claims.<sup>28</sup> Following Ekman's logic though, it is plausible that a voluntary expression and a felt expression of emotion do not differ noticeably in appearance to the average person, but they do differ in their neural origins. Ekman has cited cases of patients with brain lesions which render them unable to smile on request but fully able to smile if happiness is aroused spontaneously ('Expression and the Nature of Emotion' 322).

The matter of voluntariness draws us to another noteworthy part of the neurocultural view. As Table 1 states, facial expressions are only 'discernibly veracious' by 'experts'. According to Ekman, one of the ways in which expertise is applied to face reading is through the recognition of 'micro expressions'. Because facial expressions are involuntary, automatic, and spontaneous and the management of them is voluntary and conscious, then there is often an overlap in which the 'authentic' emotional expression might briefly appear before being masked or inhibited. Micro expressions thus occur when an involuntary emotional response occurs at the same time as a voluntary inhibition or a voluntarily adopted expression. An 'expert' will be able to detect such micro expressions where a lay person cannot. This perceptive individual would be able to see that flash of sadness which was masked

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<sup>28</sup> See Leys for an example of this criticism (354).

with a smile. Like several of Ekman's ideas, micro expressions have crossed over into the popular imagination in the West, particularly through film and television.<sup>29</sup> Due to the fact that micro expressions mask 'true' emotions, they are seen as a way of detecting deception (providing you have the appropriate 'training').<sup>30</sup> There is not good evidence supporting this claim but, as will be discussed more in chapter five, it remains a popularly-held belief about lying.

Voluntariness, authenticity, and spontaneity raise some questions if we are attempting to conceptualise expression and performance in film. If expressions of emotion cannot ever be voluntary, this would mean that screen performances could not be said to contain any expressions of emotion unless the actor is literally feeling the expressed emotion. Despite sounding slightly counterintuitive (i.e. to assert that we do not always see facial expressions of felt emotion in film), this is not necessarily a problem in itself. I will discuss this later, but on the basis that humans cannot easily discern between felt and simulated expressions, then the nature of expressions in films should not bear significantly on our experience as viewers. Even if we do allow that all expressions of emotion are wholly involuntary, it is entirely possible that filmmaking can reproduce the requisite conditions to elicit specific emotional responses for the purposes of performance. Film lore is replete with examples of this occurring. Think how many, apocryphal and otherwise, stories there are of directors orchestrating responses of surprise, fear, and misery from actors, or actors attempting to emulate the fictional lived experiences of their character over the process of filming (à la Stanislavski's system and method acting). This is unnecessary though; if a performer is able to simulate accurately the individual components that are expressive of a particular emotion then its status as a signal is upheld, even if what is observable is not a representation of a 'genuine' felt emotion. Just because such displays are not genuinely felt displays does not render them either ineffective, unrecognisable, or unempathisable.

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, the television series *Lie to Me* (2009-2011) follows Dr Cal Lightman (Tim Roth), an expert in the science of body language, who uses his knowledge of psychology to solve crimes. Ekman served as a scientific advisor to the show and, according to Ekman's website, the main character is loosely based on him ('Lie To Me'). Micro expressions come up numerous times in this series.

<sup>30</sup> Ekman has claimed this in several pop psychology books (e.g. *Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage* (1985))

	FE's signals?	FE's voluntary?	FE's inherently veracious?	FE's discernibly veracious?	Are there pan-cultural FE's?	Distinction between 'felt' and 'false' displays?	Are some FE's non-social?	Are FE's driven by an organism's strategic aims?
<b>Neurocultural View</b>	Yes	Never	Yes	Only by experts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1 Tenets of the neurocultural view (135). 'FE' refers to Facial Expression. Table and contents from Mitchell Green's *Self-Expression* (2007).

Nevertheless, as we will see, we can dismiss this problem altogether by claiming that facial expressions are neither voluntary nor involuntary, neither felt nor false. For now, it can be concluded that whether we hold that expressions of emotion are voluntary or involuntary does not pose a significant problem for conceptualising filmic representations of facial expressions. As Ekman suggests, the truth of the matter is likely one that cannot be easily conceptualised along a straightforward dichotomy of voluntary-involuntary. Individual expressions are also going to vary in their reproducibility and the requisite skill to reproduce an accurate facsimile; a genuine-looking smile of happiness is going to be easier to simulate than a convincing portrayal of sadness, for instance.<sup>31</sup> It may too be the case that certain expressions of emotion simply cannot be easily simulated at all. Actors who cannot cry on cue know this full well.

In sum, we can reduce the neurocultural view to the following claims:

- i. There are a set of basic and universal human emotions, each of which has a unique facial expression.
- ii. Facial expressions are a literal manifestation or 'readout' of an emotional state. These displays are generally considered to be involuntary, but through display rules, we are able to manage their appearance.

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<sup>31</sup> A study by Porter and ten Brinke corroborates this: 'negative emotions were more difficult to falsify than happiness' (508).

- iii. Although expressions of emotion serve social and strategic ends, due to their nature as involuntary manifestations of an emotion, they will still appear in private or non-social contexts.
- iv. The difference between simulated and felt expressions is fine, but nonetheless distinguishable.

There is without question something very intuitive about the central claims of the neurocultural view: it meshes well with what we (as Westerners) perceive our experience of emotion to be like and affords some certainty in being able to attribute emotions (e.g. I can tell my friend is sad because her face tells me so). The world of facial expression and emotion is reasonably straightforward according to the neurocultural view. As the success of Ekman's catalogue of pop psychology books tells us also, the notion that humans can train themselves to discern and detect 'fake' or deceptive expressions and that true feelings typically manifest on our faces is an attractive prospect for many. Indeed, the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory have become rather firmly embedded in the West's folk understanding of emotion. Or, perhaps more likely, the neurocultural view is a theory that is built from these persistent folk ideas and thus appears very attractive. As I will go on to argue, although there is no doubt some truth to a few of its claims, the neurocultural view is in many ways a naïve theory of expression and emotion. It may therefore mislead us about the nature of expression and emotion in reality, but this does not mean that we should totally ignore its insights, for much of the research is invaluable in telling us how we *think* about facial expression and how these presuppositions, right or wrong, enter into filmmaking and film spectatorship.

### **THE BEHAVIOURAL ECOLOGY VIEW**

Alan Fridlund's view of facial expression represents the most radical contemporary alternative to the neurocultural view. According to Fridlund's *behavioural ecology* view, facial expressions are communicative acts that serve social motives. This view understands facial expressions as signals that arise from co-evolution between signaller and audience. There is therefore a strong sense in which facial expressions function to strategically aid both parties. Against the neurocultural view, facial expressions are not physical manifestations of internal and innate states but, instead, are communicative instances that convey our behavioural intentions and elicit behavioural responses from others. The behavioural ecology view posits that facial expressions rarely, if ever, actually appear like the prototypical basic

facial expressions proposed by the neurocultural view. Contrary to the neurocultural view, facial displays should be considered not as expressions of hard-wired, internal, and discrete emotional states leaking out into the external world, but instead as intentional behaviours shaped by evolution in order to communicate motives. Thus, facial expressions are not ‘readouts’, reliable indicators, or direct expressions of felt states. For example, the function of a ‘sad’ face is not to express sorrow but to signal readiness to receive attention or comfort. Likewise, the function of a ‘happy’ face is to signal a readiness to play or affiliate as opposed to a felt expression of happiness. Behavioural ecology thus emphasises the *strategic* character of signals. As opposed to seeing bared teeth as a readout of anger, it functions as a signal that is sufficiently salient for an observer to discern and understand the meaning of its production and react accordingly e.g. by retreating from the toothy aggressor. By avoiding conflict, both the signaller and its intended recipient increase the likelihood of survival and reproduction.

	<b>FE’s signals?</b>	<b>FE’s voluntary?</b>	<b>FE’s inherently veracious?</b>	<b>FE’s discernibly veracious?</b>	<b>Are there pan-cultural FE’s?</b>	<b>Distinction between ‘felt’ and ‘false’ displays?</b>	<b>Are some FE’s non-social?</b>	<b>Are FE’s driven by an organism’s strategic aims?</b>
<b>Neurocultural View</b>	Yes	Never	Yes	Only by experts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Behavioural Ecology View</b>	Yes	Sometimes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

Table 2 Tenets of the neurocultural and behavioural ecology view compared. Table and contents from Mitchell Green’s *Self-Expression* (2007).

Green summarises Fridlund’s central tenets to include the following:

- i. So-called expressive displays provide mutually beneficial signals of future action.
- ii. The dictates of economy and privacy would select against any involuntary displays of emotional information that would be detrimental to the displayer.
- iii. The costs and benefits of signaling would vary with the momentary social context and the animal’s intentions within it.

- iv. Because facial displays are the results of a formalised co-evolution with vigilance for them, they are not readouts but tools that aid the negotiation of social encounters.
- v. No distinction is made between “felt” and “false” displays issued by “authentic” and “social” selves – there is only a social self. (128-129)

From this, the greater emphasis on the relationship between the signaller and the recipient of the signal should be apparent. That is, in Fridlund’s own words, ‘we pick our faces depending on who you are and why you want to know’ (‘Faces When We Are Alone’). Thus, faces are one of the means which we have available to influence others and recruit others to act in accordance with our goals. It can also be seen here how understanding expressions as involuntary, as in the neurocultural view, would be problematic for this account. Automatic signalling of ‘true’ emotion to aggressors might incur heavy costs for the signaller. Due to the conflict of interests between signallers and observers, evolution is instead likely to produce not just veridical signs, but also deceptive ones.

The behavioural ecology view’s lack of distinction between felt and false displays issued by authentic and social selves allows Fridlund to resolve one of the major problems with how display rules are used in the neurocultural view. We will come to these later on, but there are studies that highlight cultural differences in the production (and recognition) of facial expressions and the absence of facial expressions in situations where the neurocultural view would predict them to appear.<sup>32</sup> In response to this, Ekman has climbed down from his original conceptualisation of display rules, by accepting that display rules could influence even solitary expressions:

I expect that some display rules are so well established that some people may follow them even when they are alone. And some people when alone may imagine the reactions of others, and then follow the appropriate display rule, as if the others were present. And finally, there may be display rules that specify the management of expression not just with others but when alone. (‘Expression or Communication’ 328)

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<sup>32</sup> See the cited work of Fernández-Dols, Ruiz-Belda, Jack, Russell, Fridlund, Reisenzein, and Barrett in the bibliography for examples of these studies.

Ekman's movement on display rules solves some problems, but also creates a far greater one in that we seem to be facing a theory which has now become unfalsifiable. How can we be *ever* sure that we are seeing 'authentic' and 'felt' expressions that are unmoderated by display rules if display rules may still act on individuals even when alone? If not in solitude, where are we to see such 'authentic' expressions? It is hard to find a clear response to this from Ekman.

Nevertheless, the behavioural ecology view also faces its own set of problems when it comes to the distinction between what is social and what is non-social. If, as the behavioural ecology view contends, facial expressions exist chiefly as signals intended to influence behaviour then why do we still produce facial expressions in solitude or non-social situations? Given the nature of film spectatorship in the digital age, we might also ask why we make faces if we are watching a film alone. Although our experience of film has historically been as a member of an audience in a cinema, it is increasingly common for viewers to watch films in solitude and privacy, whether on laptops, tablets, mobiles, or home entertainment systems. It remains entirely conceivable for films to elicit facial expressions in viewers when they are alone. Proponents of the neurocultural view hold that the fact humans make facial expressions when alone constitutes definitive evidence for these expressions being readouts or manifestations of emotions and not social communicative displays. Fridlund rejects this and instead claims that sociality is implicit even when alone ('New Ethology' 117). That is, being alone physically does not entail that we are alone psychologically. Fridlund thus does not deny the fact that facial expressions are made in private, but that in these cases they are directed at a virtual, imaginary, or implicit audience. In other words, any situations in which we produce facial displays that do not involve contact with another person are marked by a 'disguised sociality'.

As Fridlund puts it, we make facial expressions when we are alone because we are never really alone. To defend this position, he makes his case as follows:

Everyone considers face-to-face contact quite social, but does speaking through a glass or partition make it non-social? I think not, but then what if the glass is a TV screen? Asserting that watching a televised image is not social would be news to soap-opera lovers who consider the characters to be intimate acquaintances, and to sports fans who throw things at the screen.

And what if the image is not on the TV but in my mind's eye? Finally, what if I freeze a frame of an image and show a photo? Would this make viewing a face non-social? Not necessarily, as sales of baby and family albums would attest; the photos in them are not mere spots of chromatic dye - they are cues to the reconstruction of interactions. ('New Ethology' 118)

There is a great deal to unpack here but let us just focus on the claim that speaking face-to-face with a person through a glass is sufficiently similar to watching a fictional television series. Certainly, interacting through a partition or glass pane would not render face-to-face interaction non-social, but it is a far more demanding leap to argue a direct similarity between interacting with another person through a glass partition with interacting with a fictional character through a glass television screen. It seems entirely reasonable to draw a line down Fridlund's slippery slope between these two examples for the simple reason that the latter does not involve interaction with another human; it is one way. Fridlund's claim that we are liable to respond to fictional screen characters as acquaintances and to a similar level of sociality as real people is a challenging position, and one that he does not particularly develop.<sup>33</sup> We may well adopt a certain level of familiarity with fictional screen characters. For instance, Robert Blanchet and Margrethe Bruun Vaage argue that television series activate mental mechanisms that are similar to those activated by friendships in our ordinary lives (18). However, this scarcely means that the expressions elicited by engaging with a fictional character are the same as how we express ourselves when interacting with real people. Let us think more about Fridlund's example of soap opera. Fridlund's line of reasoning assumes that our facial displays are directed towards soap characters, as if they were 'intimate acquaintances'. This fails to account for scenarios where we may produce expressions that are not necessarily directed towards characters as social agents but instead towards the narrative or towards the artefactual nature of the show itself; we may smile in response to a farcical comical subplot, cry at a tragic situation at the end of an episode or instead roll our eyes at a particularly tedious storyline.

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<sup>33</sup> I will leave aside discussing the fact that Fridlund conflates the experience of watching a fictional soap with watching (nonfictional) live sports on television. There are several ways in which we might conceptualise these as different experiences.

It seems undeniable that people do often respond facially when watching films and television, even when watching alone. This raises the question of to whom or to what are viewers directing these expressions. The neurocultural view has an easy answer to this question: facial expressions are readouts of emotions and films often elicit emotions in viewers (whether this is a satisfactory or complete explanation is another matter). The behavioural ecology view argues that facial displays are not necessarily linked to emotions but are instead communicative acts that serve social motives. It must therefore do more work in coherently explaining why we make faces when we are alone watching a film. If we subscribe to the behavioural ecology view, we are left with, at least, three possible explanations for why we make faces when watching films alone. The first would be the one that we have already discussed: our engagement with film characters is, to an extent, inherently social. Though we are aware that our relationship with characters is one-sided (or parasocial), our facial expressions might be considered social responses to characters *as if* they were real human interactants. Our responses to the expressions of film characters would hence represent an – obviously futile – attempt to communicate with the fictional social agents on screen. I have already raised a problem with this answer: films do not necessarily require characters in order to elicit facial displays in viewers.

The second explanation would be what Ed S Tan has proposed: our responses when watching a film are instead directed towards an imagined filmmaker or author.<sup>34</sup> They are therefore a form of ‘collaborative communication’ between the filmmaker and the viewer. This is a compelling idea, but I am uncertain how much this argument can be generalised to all of cinema. In the experience of watching a narrative film, it is not uncommon that we lose sight of its artefactual nature. Moreover, this does not seem to be able to account for situations in which we ‘catch’ the emotions of others. In the introduction, we considered Plantinga’s ‘scene of empathy’. As Plantinga argues, such scenes elicit empathy through low-level contagion, so it would be unusual to say that our facial expressions are directed towards an imagined filmmaker here. Nevertheless, Tan’s proposal can account well for certain forms of

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<sup>34</sup> Tan presented this claim in a conference paper titled ‘(How) is the filmmaker present in the film viewer’s social mind?’ but, to my knowledge, has yet to publish this anywhere.

engagement with fiction. For instance, we might smile or nod when enjoying a comedy as if to say ‘Yes, more of this sort of thing’.

The third explanation would be to say that watching films alone carries implicit sociality. That is, our ordinary experience of cinema (and moving image narrative fiction more generally) does in fact typically involve watching with at least one other person; we go to the cinema in groups and we watch television in our homes with friends and partners. Our facial expressions in response to film are therefore supported by an ‘audience effect’, which carries over into the times when we watch things alone.<sup>35</sup> The audience effect refers to situations when a person’s behaviour changes when they believe that another person is physically present with them or watching them. This is likely an answer that would be endorsed by Fridlund, who has also referred to audience effects in his work (‘Sociality of Solitary Smiling’ 230). Of course, these three explanations are not mutually exclusive and there is no reason why it may not be some combination of all of these. We need not commit to a definitive answer here though. This thesis is focused on recognition and representation of facial expressions in film, so the matter of what our facial expressions are as viewers is slightly tangential. Nevertheless, if we are interested in the merits and overall explanatory power of one view of facial expression over another, then understanding what viewers’ facial expressions are is pertinent.

As we have seen, the behavioural ecology view holds that facial expressions are social displays intending to influence others over which we exercise some degree of control. We might then question what a person would gain from expressing in which there is no actual recipient (like when watching television alone). Would the dictates of economy not select against this unnecessary display? Fridlund’s response would be to say there is only a ‘social self’, which exists even when we are in solitude. The extent of sociality that Fridlund wishes to claim makes his view a challenging sell; we may be social creatures at heart, but this fact should not wholly disavow our capacity for an inner and private life. To dispel this criticism, Fridlund uses a similar strategy to Ekman. Where Ekman says that voluntary-involuntary is a misleading dichotomy, Fridlund believes that a binary view of what is social and non-

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<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of audience effects in cinemagoing, see Julian Hanich’s *Audience Effect: On the Collective Cinema Experience* (2017).

social is too absolutist. Instead, interacting face-to-face compared to watching a film exhibit different levels of sociality as opposed to being either non-social or social. This may well be the case, but, as with a lot of Fridlund's claims, it is somewhat counterintuitive and seems to fly against phenomenological experience.

Overall, Fridlund offers some compelling objections and should be commended for his efforts in undermining the hegemony of the neurocultural view. However, as is often the case in these sorts of debates, he overstates his case. The exact nature of the relationship between emotions and facial expression may be unclear, but to disavow any kind of significant relationship between them is highly unintuitive, not altogether convincing, and appears to contradict a notable body of empirical evidence. Adopting Fridlund's position means having to refute a wide range of evidence, which it seems his account is unable to do convincingly. Indeed, Fridlund's proposal is highly radical and if we accepted it wholesale then it would drastically reshape how we think about emotion in film and art more generally. As I began with in the introduction, for various reasons narrative cinema generally assumes that viewers understand faces and facial expressions to be reliable entryways into a character's internal emotional life. Furthermore, totally denying the existence of at least *some* universal components of emotions at this time is a very fringe position. It is often the case that when a particular theory has been so dominant for so long in a particular field that any dissenting view must totally go against all the core tenets of the view which it opposes. In this case, where the neurocultural view (and the Darwinian theory which is its forebearer) placed such great emphasis on the relationship between emotion and facial expression, Fridlund entirely rejects this relationship.

My objection to some of Fridlund's argumentation and the strong claims he makes may sound like I am advocating that we should reject his view outright. Despite some of its shortcomings though, the behavioural ecology view has many things to offer and should by no means be rejected out of hand; there are clear merits to the position advocated by Fridlund if we reconstruct and accept weaker versions of some of his claims. First, an emphasis on not only the signaller but also its audience. Facial displays are likely to have evolved to provide benefits to the recipient, affording them with the ability to respond appropriately and beneficially. The neurocultural view, by contrast, has historically been far less

interested in the recipient of facial expressions. Second, Fridlund's account highlights the communicative and strategic functions of facial expression. The neurocultural view considers facial expressions of emotion as adaptations and therefore as serving the interests of the organism. Though they can serve the organism's strategic aims, being involuntary, such expressions cannot be consciously chosen; they are not deliberately made in order to communicate. On the behavioural ecology view though, this is entirely possible. Indeed, the behavioural ecology view can address some of the core problems with the neurocultural view (for instance, the inadequacy of display rules to account for why there is not always coherence between emotion and expression).

Fridlund's opposition to the neurocultural view is part of a wider movement within the study of emotion and facial expression against the dominant research programme of Ekman and his supporters. In the next chapter, we will turn briefly to James A Russell's theory of psychological construction as well as Lisa Feldman Barrett's theory of constructed emotion which both offer alternative accounts of emotion and facial expression. Like Fridlund, both Russell and Barrett urge us to abandon many commonplace presuppositions regarding emotion and expression. The objections of Fridlund, Russell, and Barrett (amongst others) in relation to both the methodologies and principles of the neurocultural view have generated a healthy scepticism, encouraged attempts to replicate the results from the central studies that support the neurocultural view, and paved the way for progress in understanding facial expression. As we will see, some of the ideas from the behavioural ecology view have in fact made their way into the work of researchers who support the basic emotion theory associated with the neurocultural view.

### **THE STRATEGIC READOUT VIEW**

We have seen thus far that both the neurocultural view and the behavioural ecology view each have their own strengths and shortcomings. How do we proceed from this? The differences between the two views may, at first glance, appear to be irreconcilable. However, Green's strategic readout view (SRV) gestures towards one possible way of navigating between these two positions. Green argues that we can keep the best of both worlds and accept the basic tenets from both sides of this debate without any contradiction:

On the SRV, we agree that facial expressions can be genuine displays of emotion, indeed sometimes making those emotions perceptible, while accepting as well that facial expression, be it produced deliberately, or instead something that we allow to occur, is behavior governed by the tenets of behavioral ecology. (133)

For Green, the SRV demonstrates that it is not only the case that we might make our feelings literally perceptible on our face, but also a reasonable hypothesis that our propensity to do so is a product of co-evolution between signallers and the recipients of such signals. Green's view characterises the face as a 'translucent strategist' (133), translucent in the sense that we can 'we can peer through [facial expressions] into the likely course of one another's behavior; but we can also pay attention to those expressions themselves as we negotiate the social world' (136). As a result, we may consider facial displays as tools that aid the negotiation of social encounters, without the inference that such displays cannot also function as readouts; for Green, it is their being readouts that supports their very function in social negotiations. Thus, facial expressions both display affect and aim at influencing the behaviour of others. This is what I consider to be the most valuable part of the SRV: neither Ekman nor Fridlund offer a good enough explanation for why facial expressions cannot serve two ends (both social communication and the expression of emotion). Green's SRV therefore does not go as far as Fridlund's disavowal of the relationship between faces and emotions. Nor does it subscribe to some of the

	<b>FE's signals?</b>	<b>FE's voluntary?</b>	<b>FE's inherently veracious?</b>	<b>FE's discernibly veracious?</b>	<b>Are there pan-cultural FE's?</b>	<b>Distinction between 'felt' and 'false' displays?</b>	<b>Are some FE's non-social?</b>	<b>Are FE's driven by an organism's strategic aims?</b>
<b>Neurocultural View</b>	Yes	Never	Yes	Only by experts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Behavioural Ecology View</b>	Yes	Sometimes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Strategic Readout View</b>	Yes	Sometimes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3 Tenets of the neurocultural, behavioural ecology and strategic readout views compared.

Table and contents from Mitchell Green's *Self-Expression* (2007).

neurocultural view's more problematic claims, such as the position that all facial expressions are involuntary (whilst the management of them is voluntary).

Unfortunately, Green does not offer a very detailed exposition of his strategic readout view; he spends just four pages presenting his account in the first instance. Indeed, some parts of what he proposes do not seem to be fully developed. Here is an example. As we have seen, the neurocultural view holds that only experts can discern between felt and false expressions, whilst the behavioural ecology view dissolves the distinction between felt and false entirely. However, Green supposes that facial expressions are always 'discernibly veracious' (see table 3). Exactly what he means by saying this is unclear. It is evident enough that he does not endorse the neurocultural view's claim that any voluntarily produced emotional expression is a dissimulation. Green notes that asking whether an expression is discernibly veracious is 'a telescopic way of asking whether it is possible for a normal observer to tell, of a given facial expression, whether it reflects a felt emotion or is instead dissimulating' (117). Green suggests that 'our practices for keeping track of dissimulating users of facial expressions are relatively informal. Nevertheless, we know perfectly well how to find someone phony in their use of their face' (124). And yet, he does not point to any ways in which we might detect said phoniness. On the SRV then, a normal observer would be able to tell whether a facial expression is representative of a felt emotion. Such a position does not seem to stand up to either common sense or existing empirical research (see Gosselin et al.). Green's reasoning might be that the cost of being 'found out' as dissimulating facial expressions outweighs the strategic benefits. But given the average observer's ineffectiveness at determining whether a facial expression reflects a felt emotion, this seems like a reasonably low risk. If the differences between truth-tellers and dissimulators was so obvious, then facially cheating dissimulators would be naturally selected towards extinction. At the very least for the topic at hand, it seems unlikely that we can discern reliably the difference between simulated and felt facial expressions of emotion displayed by (somewhat competent) actors.

Despite the brevity of Green's presentation of his view, there is value in his argument that the neurocultural view and the behavioural ecology view can be reconciled. Green's SRV, put forward in a 2007 monograph, has in some ways presaged the direction that research in the field of facial

expression and emotion is moving today. A more pessimistic view of the field would argue that the scientific debate between these two approaches to expression and emotion has become intractable.<sup>36</sup> However, as formerly revolutionary ideas lose their lustre, new evidence emerges, and fresh researchers enter the academic world, we are perhaps seeing a thawing of the frosty relationship between the opposing camps in the facial display and expression debate. Dacher Keltner, a former student of Ekman's and a notable proponent of the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory, remarks of his own work in a recent debate that

we also align with Fridlund's [Behavioral Ecology View], in that we think that the signaling of intentions is critical to the occurrence of the emotion-specific expression ... we believe that the relational context between signaler and perceiver—something first raised by Fridlund in his earlier work — leads to variation in the expression of emotion, and the inferences drawn by perceivers in judging the expression. (Keltner et al., 'Debate')

The 'new and improved' basic emotion theory proposed in 2017 by Keltner and Cordaro now explicitly incorporates many of the criticisms of Fridlund and Russell. As Keltner and Cordaro note, the scientific study of facial expressions has moved beyond examining static portrayals of six basic emotions, instead working on the notion that emotional expressions are multimodal, dynamic patterns of behaviour, involving facial action, bodily movement, gaze, gesture, head movements, touch, and autonomic response (59). Taking snapshots, a mere split-second in time, of facial muscle movements as prototypically representative expressions of discrete emotional categories ignores the other modalities of emotional expression and its dynamic properties which are now increasingly the focus of research. All of this is positive news for the study of film more generally (wherein faces and expressions are not static, but dynamic and there are multiple emotive cues) but also for a cognitive cultural approach to understanding film and facial expression which, likewise, endorses a sensitivity to various forms of context.

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<sup>36</sup> See Leys' *The Ascent of Affect* (2017) for a highly pessimistic assessment of the state of the field.

Green's claim that the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory can be reconciled with Fridlund's behavioural ecology view has thus been vindicated by recent developments in psychology; some of Ekman's acolytes (like Keltner) have proposed significant theoretical revisions in recent years which moves their theory of facial expression closer towards the position of Fridlund. However, just because there are problematic elements to the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory does not warrant totally discarding their contributions. For a long time, the debate on recognition and expression of facial expression across cultures has been framed unproductively in terms of a dichotomous either/or, a zero-sum game in which facial expressions are either universally innate or cultural constructs, either emotional displays or social communication. In recent years, there has been resistance to the notion of universal basic emotions which manifest themselves in the form of a cross-cultural facial expression. Just because the initial universality thesis proposed by Ekman may now be seen as inaccurate does not mean that the entire thesis should be discarded. We will turn to consider this more in the next chapter by looking at Russell's 'Minimal Universality' hypothesis but, for now, we may heed Keltner and Cordaro:

The extent to which a certain pattern of expressive behavior is universally produced and recognized in radically different cultures will vary according to the emotion (e.g., anger may be more recognizable than sadness), its modality of expression (e.g., relief may be recognizable in the voice but not in the face), its subtype (e.g., awe about beauty may be more recognizable than awe about supernatural causation), and the culture in which it is presented (e.g., Japanese facial expressions may be better recognized by Japanese people). (71)

We will address this later but for now it can be said that the existence of cultural difference does not wholly eradicate some of the central ideas of the neurocultural view, contrary to what the critics of that view argue. As we will see in chapter three, if nothing else the research of basic emotion theory and the neurocultural view provides a rich understanding of how people *think* about facial expressions and the kind of *beliefs* we derive from them (at least in the West).

Though I am arguing that there is continuity between how facial expressions function and are recognised in both reality and in film, it would be misguided to suggest that they are identical. As a

consequence, it is unnecessary to cast my entire lot in with one of the dominant research paradigms. When we are talking about facial expression in film, we are often talking about recognition and the question of how we come to believe certain things from the representation of faces. As a consequence, the matter of what facial expressions actually *are* – that is, an ontological question – is less important if we are talking about recognition of facial expression in film. Instead, the more pertinent question is what viewers generally *think* facial expressions are and how they come to recognise, respond to, and believe things from their representation. For instance, if we are looking at film, it does not matter whether facial expressions actually offer an accurate readout of an individual's emotions. What does matter is that we *believe* that this is the case. We are therefore better off focusing on the epistemological claims of these views of facial expression or, put another way, how we recognise and come to believe things from facial expressions.

Nonetheless, it remains the case that if we wish to explore the relationship between real-world expressive behaviour and expressive behaviour in film then we need to have a firm grasp of the former to understand the latter. The behavioural ecology view and the neurocultural view as they stand are not completely satisfactory accounts of facial expression and emotion in reality. Although I will not offer my own positive proposal to resolve this, we will be well-served by considering the virtues of a middle-ground approach like Green's strategic readout view. Green's view is neither fully fleshed out nor has he developed his claims much further beyond what he puts forward in his monograph on self-expression. But the SRV is a good demonstration of how the claims of the neurocultural view and the behavioural ecology view can be reconciled. As mentioned, Green's disinterest also means we avoid a great deal of the dogmatism on both sides of this debate. The strategic nature of facial expression explicit in the SRV also meshes better with the notion that filmic representations of expression are self-conscious and intentional products of design, compatible also with the claim that facial display can be partial or exaggerated or caricatured to enhance its interpretability (Green 138).

### **CONVENTIONALISED EXPRESSION**

Even if Green does not significantly develop his SRV, it gives him a framework that allows him to build up a more nuanced account of expression that can accommodate the fact that humans might express

cognitive, affective, and other states of the self in less typical ways. For the final part of this chapter then, we will turn to consider Green's three categories of expression. Green follows the neurocultural view's claim that humans can recognise and respond to the expression of certain basic emotions, each of which has a facial expression constituted by particular configurations of the face. Following Green, we can call these *naturalised expressions*. Green suggests that we are predisposed to this stereotypical set of facial expressions that manifest a state of emotion. In these cases, we express what is within by making some aspect of what is within directly perceptible. This can occur both voluntarily and involuntarily. However, we are not limited to the packages of information embodied in these forms of natural expression. As Green explains,

Once the exploitation of biologically grounded regularities has become possible, intelligent agents need not be bound by a requirement that their expressive behavior exactly conform to natural expressive patterns. Instead they might truncate, stylize, dramatize, or otherwise modify natural behaviors (138)

It is in art and artistic representation that we find many of these modified representations of natural behaviour, behaviours which may well be amplified, streamlined, stylised, truncated, or dramatised but nonetheless remain recognisable. For instance, an animation can have characters which bear a



Fig. 4. Picasso's *Portrait de femme au col d'hermine (Olga)* (1923). (WikiArt)

recognisable resemblance to humans displaying exaggerated or caricatured facial expressions well beyond what we would encounter in ordinary life. As will be seen in chapter four, non-photorealistic representations (such as we might see in a cartoon) can exaggerate facial expressions, but this does not render these facial expressions either impossible to recognise or respond to. Alternatively, consider an example of cubist portraiture (fig. 4). Even though the ordinary dimensions and positioning of facial features are distorted, we can identify several individual components that are characteristic of the expression of happiness: the angle of the head, the red colour of the cheeks, the curvature of the lips, and the direction of gaze. From this, we can conclude that, on a very superficial level, this is a representation of a woman expressing happiness, or at least a positively-valenced emotion.

Whilst emotions such as happiness and sadness have distinctive forms of expression, there are many more complex thoughts, feelings, or experiences that have no such unique and widely recognised form of expression. There are no universally characteristic or stereotypic expressions for regret, pride, hope, scepticism, humility, resentment, jealousy, envy, anxiety, and so forth. Clearly though, the expression of some of these more complex concepts is entirely possible. How exactly? Green argues that forms of self-expression can become *conventionalised* in order to represent complex or abstract feelings, thoughts, or ideas. According to Green, conventions exhibit at least three features:

1. A regularity in behaviour
2. Arbitrariness: the regularity in behaviour might have been otherwise
3. The regularity is supported by normativity: Given that all or most members of the relevant community conform to this pattern of behaviour, for most members of that community, conforming to that convention is proper or appropriate. (144)

Expressive conventions thus take the following form: ‘To show one’s  $\Psi$ , do  $\Delta$ , where  $\Psi$  is a state that is also a possible object of introspection’ (147). Further to this, Green proposes a minimal condition for conventionalised expressions: ‘*an expressive convention must yield a proper way in which one can show one’s introspectable state*’ (145).

Conventionalised expressions enable us to show the presence within us of certain states with gestures. For instance, consider the expression of what Ekman terms ‘sophisticated scepticism’. For sophisticated scepticism, someone may raise the corner of one of their eyebrows in response to something they deem questionable or dubious (‘About Brows’ 189). Therefore, following Green, the expression of scepticism can be rendered in this manner: To show one’s scepticism, do a single eyebrow raise. This expression of scepticism, as a possible object of introspection, adheres to the three features of convention that Green puts forward. First, raising one eyebrow regularly shows a form of uncertainty in Western cultures; second, it is an arbitrary regularity, i.e. there are other plausible ways that scepticism could be expressed; and third, although he does not cite any evidence to support this, Ekman claims that this expression was invented and disseminated by Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s. The notion that this expression was popularised by the cultural powerhouse that is Hollywood greatly supports the normativity of this expression. Given that no other form of natural expression involves an asymmetric action of the eyebrows, this expression is demonstrably a conscious and mannered expression. As a result, when we observe this facial expression, we can readily infer that the signaller is attempting to communicate the thought or feeling that is associated with raising an eyebrow.

Green’s second condition of arbitrariness deserves some clarification. It seems Green does not mean this in the sense that out of an indefinite number of options to represent something that the outcome is entirely random. Rather that there is just the *possibility* that there is an alternative. Just as a single eyebrow raise can be used to communicate scepticism in Western cultures, so could a different facial action. Consider another example: the ‘facial shrug’. We might shrug our shoulders to indicate ‘I don’t know’, ‘I don’t care’ or ‘What does it matter?’ but we can also signal these attitudes with a facial gesture. Ekman (*Telling Lies* 102) and Nicole Chovil (183) remark that this gesture typically involves a quick eyebrow flash and the retraction of the corners of the mouth, into a sort of upside-down horseshoe shape. Again, the attitudes and thoughts expressed by the facial shrug have no naturalised form of expression. The unique timing and complexity in this combination of the facial musculature involved likewise demarcates this as a self-conscious signal.

Sophisticated scepticism and the facial shrug are two examples of facial expressions that have been conventionalised to communicate specific feelings or thoughts. Without conventions like these, our expressive repertoire is limited by the fact that a number of our introspectable states simply cannot be perceived or easily shown. Perhaps to a greater extent than naturalised expression, the specific meaning of conventionalised expression is contingent on the context in which they are embedded. Whether someone intends to convey either ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I don’t care’ with a facial shrug is informed not only by the physical properties of the display but by a consideration of both what comes before and what comes after displaying this gesture. Furthermore, by contrast to naturalised expressions of emotion, Green suggests conventionalised self-expression typically does not enable either *direct* perception of what is expressed or empathy with what is expressed. To explain, in the case of conventionalised self-expressions, what is within is shown in such a way that depends on the existence of a system of conventions which relates internal states to publicly accessible tokens (151). By contrast, naturalised expressions make some aspect of what is within *directly* perceptible.

Finally, conventionalised expressions with high degrees of regularity and normativity threaten to lead us to the incorrect conclusion that they are pan-culturally recognisable or somehow universally innate, but neither of these are necessarily true. They remain learned behaviours, but it would seem that most adult humans are intuitively capable of learning the meanings of unknown conventionalised expressions from the contexts in which they appear.<sup>37</sup> We will further develop this account of conventionalised expressions and the learning thereof in chapter four through looking at the vast range of conventionalised expressions and visual symbols that are specific to comics and animation from different cultures.

How does this understanding of conventionalised expressions relate to film? The overarching demands of narrative form in film are likely to create conventions of representing characters’ expressive behaviour. On the basis that conventionalised expressive behaviour is created when the limits of naturalised expression are reached, it stands to reason that film – which often aspires to express complex

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<sup>37</sup> Ekman discusses this to some extent in ‘About Brows’ (1979).

thoughts, feelings and experiences – will rely to an extent on forms of conventionalised expression. It is therefore possible that filmmaking has developed its own conventions of expressive behaviour in order to communicate certain feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. For example, suppose a film intends to represent that a character is lying. For strategic reasons, deception does not have a readily apparent form of expression, so how might this be achieved? There are numerous ways deception could be made visually perceptible through expressive behaviour. A character might often touch their face, their eyes might dart around and avoid eye-contact, they might smile falsely or inconstantly, or small expressions might flit across their face. Behaviour that is expressive of lying is very unlikely to appear the same in reality as it does in a fiction film, but we are able to understand what is being signalled through a sort of folk understanding of how people behave when they are lying. Indeed, studies surveying global attitudes to human behaviour when lying indicate that the most universally identified trait considered characteristic of lying was a lack of eye contact (Deception Research Team). However, in truth, eye behaviour has little correlation with truth telling. A body of Western research literature shows that people are almost as likely to avert gaze when telling the truth as when lying; behaviours that are stereotypic of deception bear a negligible relationship to actual deception (Deception Research Team 69). We can also consider how genre norms might govern the extent to which a specific film relies on conventionalised expressions. In any case, we will return to conventionalised facial expressions again in chapters four and five when we consider representations of the face in anime and nonverbal cues, respectively.

#### **BEYOND UNIVERSALS AND CONVENTIONS - IDIOSYNCRATIC EXPRESSION**

For the case of film, it is readily apparent that there are many examples that do not so straightforwardly adhere to the definition of either naturalised expression or conventionalised expression. Individual films, actors, or directors might present us with characters depicting unique or unusual styles or forms of expression. How might we categorise examples that do not fit so easily into either naturalised or conventionalised expressions? These cases can be understood in terms of what Green defines as *idiosyncratic expression*:

For  $\phi$  can be a characteristic component of A's  $\psi$  without being a characteristic component of  $\psi$  for every member of A's species. A's  $\psi$  might show itself in distinctive ways due to A's personality or physiology. My beady look might show my surprise while your beady look might show your anger; the quaver in my voice is a characteristic feature of my trepidation while a quaver in yours might show your rising ire. (140-141)

From this, we can see that idiosyncratic expression shares a kinship with conventionalised expression in that they permit the expression of more complex thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that would otherwise not be expressible. Given enough regularity and normativity in usage, idiosyncratic expressions become conventionalised expressions. For example, let us assume Ekman is correct in saying that sophisticated scepticism was initially created and propagated by Hollywood filmmaking. This expression would have started out as an idiosyncratic expression of a character. The subsequent imitation of this behaviour (both by viewers and in other films) produced the requisite regularity and normativity for this expression to become conventionalised. Idiosyncratic expressions also permit for emotions to appear in ways that are not prototypical, as in Green's example that 'My beady look might show my surprise while your beady look might show your anger' (141). An idiosyncratic display of emotion, such as Green's beady look, still enables perception of that emotion because it is a characteristic component of that emotion for Green. Green shows his surprise with his beady look, and this could remain true even if no other human shows their surprise in this particular way.

Of course, though anybody will be able to *perceive* Green's beady look, to *recognise* what is being expressed by this idiosyncratic expression requires a level of intimacy or knowledge; only intimates would know that they are in fact perceiving Green's surprise. Others will also perceive the visible signs of Green's surprise but without recognising it as such. Idiosyncratic expression requires a similar degree of learning to conventionalised expression then. In the case of idiosyncratic expression, however, learning takes place on an individual basis. That is, we may come to understand a conventionalised expression like sophisticated scepticism through watching film and television from the US, but we can only learn the meaning of Green's beady look by interacting with Green.

Green uses examples from literature to illustrate instances of idiosyncratic expression, but it strikes me that narrative cinema offers us a greater wealth of characters demonstrating memorable idiosyncratic expressive behaviours. For film, it is only through repeated exposure to a character's expressive behaviour that we might become able to discern what a given idiosyncrasy is expressing; where literature may *tell* us the meaning of a particular idiosyncratic form of expression, cinema is, generally speaking, required to *show* us. Take, for instance, Noriko's compulsive smiling in Yasujirō Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949). We quickly learn from the film that her particular smile is rarely connected to genuine displays of happiness and instead seems to express something else. Through sustained alignment with Noriko, we can begin to identify patterns in her expressive behaviour and forge a better idea of what her smiles actually express. We will return to this example later but consider also the case of Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959). Bresson is known for favouring gestural actions of hands and bodies, but this characterisation overlooks the fact that his films offer some interesting cases of idiosyncratic facial expressions. T Jefferson Kline offers an account of Michel's (Martin LaSalle) idiosyncratic facial expression in *Pickpocket*. At the start of the film, Michel goes to a horse race and steals money from a woman's purse. As Kline describes, 'the click of the clasp [on the woman's alligator purse] is immediately followed by the only facial expression Lassalle [*sic*] is to provide in the entire film: a wincing of his eyes, which has an almost orgiastic effect in the bleak facial desert of his expression' (qtd. in Baron and Carnicke 15).

So narrative films may represent characters facially expressing forms of more complex emotions – such as shame, regret, guilt, scepticism, 'orgiastic' pleasure, and so forth – in idiosyncratic ways. Both Smith and Ed S Tan offer similar articulations of this claim. For Smith, narrative films may represent not just 'garden-variety' emotional states (akin to the sorts of states made perceptible by naturalised expression) but may also represent more complex and idiosyncratic emotional states. Smith suggests that these complex emotional states can be expressed through not just the work itself, but also through particular characters. On Ryan Gosling's performance as Dan Dunne in *Half Nelson* (2006), Smith describes that 'There is no obvious, compact expression that comes to mind to describe Dunne's

state: it is a peculiar, evolving admixture of happy, energetic enthusiasm, compromised by an undercurrent of slow-burning anxiety and despair' (214). Tan offers another similar articulation of this:

It may be that within one film a particular actor develops facial signals for [more complex emotions]. As one example consider a description of Norman Maine's typical feelings played by James Mason in *A Star Is Born* (1954) as "vague confusion;" "slight smiles, hesitant blinks of the eyes, moistening and compressing his lips" (Pearson, 1999 p.67). It would be difficult to trace the expression's origin in the six or so basic emotions and their typical action units. ('Three Views' 116)

Smith and Tan's characterisations of Dunne and Maine's expressions fit well within Green's concept of idiosyncratic expression. Such expressions can show complex, nuanced, or perhaps more culturally specific states of thought, feeling, and emotion (just as Smith and Tan's examples show). Furthermore, although they may consist of elements derived from naturalised expressions, idiosyncratic expressions do not necessarily map straightforwardly onto them.

Unusual or interesting idiosyncratic expressions are evidently things that we might value in a screen performance, but they can also fulfil several functions within a narrative film. In Howard Hawks' *The Big Sleep* (1946), Phillip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) frequently tugs on his right ear.<sup>38</sup> This gesture often occurs when he is thinking or confused by something. We can thus define this as an idiosyncratic expression of Marlowe's character in *The Big Sleep*, and it is markedly so given that there are other more conventionalised means through which thinking or confusion can be signalled (e.g. a chin stroke or a head scratch). Despite this, it still functions to signal Marlowe's thinking or confusion given that it is a characteristic component of his thinking or confusion. Viewers can determine this gesture's meaning through observing Marlowe and the contexts in which he displays this gesture. Nevertheless, it is fully possible that a viewer will perceive Marlowe's ear tug throughout the film without knowing that they are perceiving him thinking or confused. Indeed, it often appears that Marlowe himself is unconscious of doing this gesture. According to Scott Allen Nollen, Bogart and

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<sup>38</sup> Thanks to Dominic Topp for suggesting this example.

Hawks developed the ear pull for two reasons: first, ‘to demonstrate the detective’s own bewilderment over the case’ (266) and, second, to differentiate Phillip Marlowe from Bogart’s portrayal of Sam Spade, another one of Bogart’s hardboiled detectives. On the intentions of Bogart and Hawks, the ear pull serves as a shorthand, first, to individuate the character of Marlowe and, second, to show viewers some part of Marlowe’s point of view, in this instance an attitude towards a situation.

Of course, the distinction between conventionalised and idiosyncratic expression is going to get more complex when we view films from other cultures. If a viewer is unfamiliar with certain culturally specific conventionalised displays, we may be uncertain whether what we are perceiving is a culturally specific conventionalised expression or an expression that is idiosyncratic to the character. For example, in the opening scene of Hirokazu Kore-eda’s *Shoplifters* (2018), we see a young boy, Shota, moving through a supermarket before lifting some of its products. Just before he swipes the items, Shota performs a small ‘finger-rolling’ gesture. Shota repeats this gesture throughout the film each time he is about to steal something. For a viewer uninitiated with Japanese culture, they may be uncertain whether this gesture is something that Japanese audiences would understand (i.e. a conventionalised expression) or whether this is particular to the character of Shota (i.e. an idiosyncratic expression). This uninitiated viewer may come to understand the meaning of this gesture from the fact that it is repeated in the same context each time, but she would remain unable to come to any conclusion about whether this is an idiosyncratic or conventionalised expression. This would not be a major impediment for her comprehension of the film, but her understanding will no doubt be less nuanced, nonetheless. This case draws our attention not only to the similarities between idiosyncratic and conventionalised expression but also to one of the ways our understanding of films from other cultures may, at times, be slightly unrefined.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

Green’s account of self-expression presents us with a useful three-part categorisation of expressive behaviour: first, *naturalised expression of emotion*, second, more complex thoughts and feelings through *conventionalised expression* and, third, individually variable *idiosyncratic expressions*. His theory is amenable to being applied to different forms of fiction, and this is no less the case for film, an

art form which he scarcely mentions but which offers many rich examples. How else might distinguishing between naturalised, conventionalised, and idiosyncratic expression contribute to our understanding of facial expression in narrative cinema? This categorisation can assist us in identifying stylistic and aesthetic choices of filmmakers and their corresponding impact. If a film represents more naturalistic forms of expression, one could compellingly argue that it is likely to have a greater potential for mass, international appeal compared to a film that eschews naturalised expression, either in favour of conventionalised expression or idiosyncratic expression.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, films which forego representing any of these forms of facial expression (i.e. they are marked by inexpressiveness) are likely to have a particular style; such a film is unlikely to be a Hollywood blockbuster. Alternatively, an abundance of conventionalised expressions from a specific culture might mark a film as particularly reflective of that culture, and thus the sort of film that might be more commonly found in the art house and film festival circuit. We might too be in a position to say something about a film's relationship with genre based upon the extent to which it relies upon certain generic norms of expression and conventionalised expressions. Finally, unusual and interesting idiosyncratic expressions might be one way in which we value the work of actors and directors in particular films. This categorisation can also be used as a tool for closer analysis of characterisation and narrative by comparing the ways in which different characters express themselves in a given film. For instance, a specific character's enigmatic or curious idiosyncrasy might stand out within a film that eschews naturalised expression. Consider *Pickpocket* again; LaSalle's facial expression when he is stealing stands out because the film generally avoids facial expressions as a means of expressing character interiority. We will pick up some of these strands again in subsequent chapters.

We have also reviewed the two most prominent theories in the study of facial expression: the neurocultural view and the behavioural ecology view. Both of these views come up short in certain ways. I have proposed that we can do better with some sort of middle-ground approach, which we have seen represented by Green's strategic readout view. As I stated, although Green's view is

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<sup>39</sup> Tan has made a similar argument about the distinction between comic books and graphic novels ('The Telling Face').

underdeveloped and little has been built upon it since, it is prescient of the contemporary direction of facial expression research in psychology. Now, the dominant neurocultural view in the psychology of facial expression is ceding ground to its critics and considering a more moderate, middle-ground position. I began this chapter by justifying the claim that scientific methods, research, and evidence may usefully bear upon our understanding of film. If we accept this, then we must also accept that we ought to remain in touch with the debate that is ongoing in the science of facial expression. As Tan observes, ‘researchers of facial expression in film have to follow the development of findings in empirical cross-cultural research, which has been far from concluded’ (‘Three Views’ 118). We have begun to get a sense of these developments and are now in a position to explore in greater detail questions about the universal and cultural dimensions of facial expression and to probe the very framework from which we should consider such questions within cognitive film theory.

## Chapter 2

### What Difference Does Difference Make – Implications of Cultural-Cognitive Differences for Film

One of the major implications of Darwin's account of emotions was the notion that certain aspects of facial expression are universal. For Darwin, facial expressions are visible manifestations of emotional states that are innate to all humans. Thus, the expression of sadness displayed by a remote tribesperson in Papua New Guinea is not only recognisable but also the same in kind as the expression of sadness displayed by you, the reader (I am assuming that Papua New Guinean tribespeople will not read this thesis).<sup>40</sup> Moreover, human expressive behaviour is continuous with the expressive behaviour of non-human animals; transcending both culture and species, faces reveal the mind and emotions of the organism according to Darwin. Darwin's claims flew against the widely accepted view of the time which considered facial expressions as primarily culturally and socially learned behaviours. This view holds that humans do not have an innate and hard-wired facial expression which is an outward expression or manifestation of, say, the emotion of sadness. Instead, we come to learn and acquire this behaviour from observation of cultural and social norms. As we saw in the previous chapter, Darwin's claims were taken up again in earnest in the mid-twentieth century by researchers of facial expression, and these efforts came to form the basis of the neurocultural view of facial expression. The neurocultural view became the mainstream position for some years, but the issue of universality is far from a settled matter and continues to be central to discussions of the nature of faces, facial expression, and emotion.

I argued in the previous chapter that we need to have some level of knowledge about the science of facial expression in order to understand fully how faces and facial expression function in narrative cinema. To this end, we examined three different theoretical views of facial expression. However, we have yet to address in significant detail important questions about universality and cultural specificity.

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<sup>40</sup> Ekman and Friesen's claims for universality of facial expression were derived from studies of the preliterate Fore tribespeople in Papua New Guinea, chosen because they could not possibly be exposed to depictions of facial expressions in visual media from outside their culture ('Constants across cultures' 125).

Are facial expressions of emotion the same the world over? Are humans equally adept at recognising facial expressions of individuals from cultures other than their own? And from where do cultural differences in facial expression arise? These sorts of questions have dominated empirical research in faces and facial expression, but why are such lines of inquiry relevant to the study of film? By following the framework of cognitivism, cognitive film theory has generally sustained an assumption that the cognitive faculties of the ‘viewer’ or the ‘spectator’ are, for the most part, universal. As Daniel Barratt notes, ‘to the extent that cognitive film theory is based on cognitive science – and to the extent that it wishes to distance itself from the social constructivist underpinnings of its predecessors – it has stressed the universal nature of film viewing’ (‘The Geography of Film Viewing’ 63). Research within the tradition of cognitive film theory therefore typically runs with the assumption that, regardless of culture, viewers share some basic capabilities to comprehend, perceive, and respond to the various levels of filmic representation; this may be in our comprehension of narratives and narration, in how we recognise and attribute character to representations of fictive persons, or in our perception of the moving image itself. Supporting the position that all humans possess certain basic capabilities typically entails supporting the existence of human universals. For example, Joseph D Anderson writes of film characters that ‘The problems of character recognition and attribution are universal. The capacities to cope with these problems were developed through evolution, and the manifestations of those capacities are, as we might expect, similar from culture to culture’ (127). Or, take Torben Grodal’s claims about emotion: ‘basic features of body language, such as the expression of key emotions like hate, fear, love, or disgust, are biologically hardwired and therefore have a high degree of universality and a low rate of change’ (*Embodied Visions* 18).

Of course, Anderson, Grodal, and others within the tradition of cognitive film theory would by no means suggest that culture is unimportant or that universality precludes cultural difference; Grodal goes on to say that, ‘the existence of innate mechanisms does not exclude cultural variation’ (18). No doubt, there are few – if any – who would say that culture is not important. As Murray Smith puts it, ‘Only a madman or a fool would deny the significance of culture – and thus of cultural variation – to human life’ (*FATC* 157). Similarly, in their characterisation of cognitivism, Ted Nannicelli and Paul

Taberham state that ‘no serious cognitive theorist ever has or ever would’ claim that humans’ mental lives are *not* somehow connected to and influenced by society and culture (8). Despite this, there is still a general tendency within the various strains of cognitive film and media theory to place a far greater emphasis on universality and basic cognitive faculties. Grodal suggests that his evolutionary bioculturalist account put forward in *Embodied Visions* might come across as ‘lopsided’ (18). Indeed, the quotations from Anderson and Grodal highlight a noteworthy way in which some approaches within cognitive theory to emotion, character, and facial representations could be considered ‘lopsided’.<sup>41</sup> By focusing on basic features and setting aside cultural concerns, such arguments suggest that somehow the universal and the culturally specific can be straightforwardly sifted apart from each other. Culture could hence be said to be ‘bracketed’ in the approaches of scholars like Anderson and Grodal.<sup>42</sup> Although this bracketing may be wholly appropriate for certain research questions, if we are considering the specific case of faces and facial expression, I hold that such bracketing is neither straightforward nor desirable. It is for this reason that I have argued that we adopt a cognitive cultural approach which urges us to probe some of these assumptions about universality and cultural difference with regards to facial expression in film.

This said, it must be stressed that cognitive film and media theory cannot be easily defined by just one methodology or a singular set of assumptions. Thus, by picking up on a tendency to bracket culture in cognitive film theory, I am not intending to tar all work within this broad theoretical framework with the same brush. There is a great deal of research, particularly in recent years, which places great emphasis on the interactions of cognition and culture. Equally, there are those whose work has always touched upon both cognition and culture. For example, Patrick Colm Hogan has consistently focused on the intersection of cognition and culture. Most relevant to our concerns here, his monograph

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<sup>41</sup> As further proof of this tendency, in a tribute to Torben Grodal at the 2019 Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image (SCSMI) annual conference, David Bordwell recast the ‘lopsidedness’ of Grodal’s research as a positive quality of his work (‘Embodied Visions: Torben Grodal and SCSMI’).

<sup>42</sup> Plantinga has used a similar expression: ‘Cognitive theory has often been piecemeal in its scholarly approach, sometimes bracketing larger questions of culture and ideology for the sake of investigating manageable research projects’ (*Screen Stories*, 136).

*Understanding Indian Movies: Culture, Cognition, and Cinematic Imagination* (2008), which we will turn to later in this chapter, shares not only a similar subtitle to this thesis but is also interested in the complex interaction of universals and cultural specificity. Dan Flory's work, such as *Philosophy, Black Film, Film Noir* (2008), integrates philosophy, cognitive film theory, and critical race theory. Murray Smith has also long sought to reconcile evolutionary views and neuroscience with the traditional pursuits of the humanities. This is most clearly articulated in *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* (2017) which, as noted in the introduction, affords an important role to the interactions between biology and culture.

I would go as far as suggesting that the past few years have seen a pronounced 'cultural turn' in cognitive film and media theory, wherein cultural context has come to play a far more significant role.<sup>43</sup> Margrethe Bruun Vaage's more recent work sits at the intersection of moral psychology, evolutionary theory, and cultural particularity, as seen in 'On Punishment and Why We Enjoy It in Fiction' (2019). Likewise, as outlined in the introduction, Carl Plantinga's 'Facing Others: Close-ups of Faces in Narrative Film and in *The Silence of the Lambs*' (2014) advocates a cognitive cultural approach to faces and facial expression and, in doing so, lays some of the groundwork for this thesis. Recent edited collections that endorse a cognitivist approach have increasingly featured one or more chapters that engage closely with questions of culture. For example, Catalin Brylla's 'A Social Cognition Approach to Stereotyping in Documentary Practice' (2018) discusses how documentaries, in committing to certain narrative strategies, may endorse negative stereotypes of disability. Daniel Barratt's 'The Geography of Film Viewing' (2014) also relates closely to the focus of this chapter by assessing the broader implications of cultural-cognitive differences for cognitive film theory. This overview is by no means exhaustive, but it is intended to show that there is a growing trend (of which this thesis is no doubt also part) to pay explicit attention to culture within cognitive film and media theory.

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<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that the authors listed here have greatly neglected the role of culture in the past, but just that it is figuring far more prominently in more recent scholarship.

In line with this recent scholarship, this chapter will discuss some of the underlying assumptions of the disciplines and theoretical views that cognitive film theory has tended to endorse. We will begin by focusing on two noteworthy trends in psychology. The first is the emergence of the field of *cultural psychology*. Contrary to the position of contemporary cognitive psychology, cultural psychologists argue that there may in fact be noteworthy cognitive and perceptual differences in people across the globe. As Richard E Nisbett, one of the major proponents of cultural psychology, plainly puts it, ‘human cognition is not everywhere the same’ (xvii). Cognitive film theory has typically appealed to mainstream cognitive psychology. Cultural psychology, as a significantly less mainstream branch of psychology, thus offers the film theorist an alternative approach which carries with it a different set of underlying assumptions.

The second trend we will consider is the debate concerning universality and cultural specificity in relation to faces, facial expression, and emotion. As my earlier reference to the contentiousness of Darwin’s claims suggests, this is a debate that has raged long and hard in this field and shows little signs of abating. In chapter one, we saw that the neurocultural view of facial expression emerged by taking seriously Darwin’s claims; the neuroculturalists challenged the previously widespread consensus that facial expressions were principally cultural constructions and learned behaviours. In turn, the neurocultural view’s universality thesis has been brought into question in recent years. Detractors of the neurocultural view argue that the foundational studies in support of universalism are premised on fundamentally flawed methodologies and the misinterpretation of results.<sup>44</sup> The previous chapter considered Alan Fridlund’s behavioural ecology view, perhaps the most prominent and radical alternative to the neurocultural view. This chapter will elaborate upon the increasing mass of critics and criticisms of the neurocultural view that have emerged in recent years. Ultimately, the (slowly) emerging consensus on faces and facial expression, and which I too endorse, embraces some of the basic tenets from both sides of this argument. The emergence of cultural psychology and the mounting

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<sup>44</sup> See ‘The Myth of Universal Emotions’ (42-55) in Barrett’s *How Emotions are Made* for a basic summary of these objections and criticisms. See also Russell’s ‘Is There Universal Recognition of Emotion From Facial Expression?’ for a more sustained critique of these studies.

criticism of the neurocultural view are, in a few ways, interrelated: both trends challenge fundamental assumptions about the human mind and about universality. Furthermore, several of cultural psychology's formative studies pertain directly to cultural differences in emotion and expression.

Following this discussion, the chapter will move ahead to consider what these two trends – cultural psychology and the loosened grip of the neurocultural view of facial expression – might mean for a cognitive cultural account of faces and expression in film. I have suggested so far that cognitive film theory has typically held theoretical positions that reflect those of mainstream (cognitive) psychology. This has entailed that accounts of emotion and expression within cognitive film theory have endorsed (implicitly or otherwise) the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory. For instance, Smith's *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* presents an account of emotion in film viewing that subscribes to many of the central claims of the neurocultural view and some version of basic emotion theory. But, as psychologist Rainer Reisenzein argues, Smith's explanatory account of emotion is fully convincing only if one already believes in the validity of basic emotion theory ('Naturalized Aesthetics' 79). I would be hesitant to go as far as Reisenzein in claiming that Smith's account is *only* convincing if one subscribes to basic emotion theory. Nevertheless, it remains the case that challenges to basic emotion theory, and indeed the neurocultural view, may exhort us to revise certain claims we make about emotion and expression in film viewing.

I am suggesting that cognitivists ought to be more circumspect about endorsing the neurocultural view, basic emotion theory, and cognitive psychology more broadly, but it is easy to understand how this state of affairs came about. Cognitive film theory emerged as a distinct and self-conscious approach in the 1980s and 1990s, when both basic emotion theory and the neurocultural view were widely held, mainstream positions. Likewise, cognitive film theory emerged partly in response to the dominance of cultural and critical theory in the humanities. These approaches have traditionally emphasised the important, and often pernicious, influence of culture in shaping individuals and their perceptions of themselves and others within a given society. Against this, cognitive film theory has for the most part stressed the universality of film viewing, working under an assumption that the activity of the film viewer is rooted in a basic set of cognitive mechanisms. However, if cognitive film theory

wishes to understand film viewing in terms of human perception, cognition, and emotion, then any research that suggests that these psychological processes are less homogenous and more culturally variable than previously thought requires addressing. Responding to the claims of cultural psychology and critics of the neurocultural view does not require us to *entirely* abandon the project of conceptualising the viewer's experience in terms of basic cognitive mechanisms. To be clear, I am not suggesting we should completely reject either the neurocultural view, basic emotion theory, or some of the basic tenets of cognitivism. The main claim put forward here is that cultural differences in expression and emotion do exist and they do bear upon filmmaking and film viewing in some capacity. The matter in question therefore becomes *what* are those differences, *how* do they bear upon film, and *to what extent*. Answering these questions will ultimately enable us to speak with more nuance about specific aspects of narrative films and viewership.

Finally, I will conclude the chapter on some further thoughts on *why* it is necessary for cognitive film theory to be sensitive to these developments in psychology. I will suggest that it is important not only for the integrity of cognitive film theory's commitment to scientific methods, knowledge, and evidence, but also for its position within film theory as a whole. Cognitive film and media theory has often been criticised as either incapable of or wholly indifferent towards addressing matters of culture. A greater sensitivity to cultural difference therefore offers a way of allaying these concerns.

### **CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY IS BEYOND WEIRD**

One of the key ideas that underpinned the cognitive revolution in psychology was the belief that human cognitive faculties are universal and that cultural differences are, at best, merely superficial (Pinker 31-41). The past thirty years have seen some criticism of this core tenet of cognitivism. We can find one of the more noteworthy groups of dissenters in the field of cultural psychology. Cultural psychologists have criticised the fact that many psychological studies focus on an unrepresentative and narrow demographic, and yet the conclusions from these studies are taken to apply to the entire human race. Jeffrey J Arnett notes that psychological research is dominated by the United States, which almost exclusively takes North Americans as its subject (602). The theories derived from such studies are taken to apply to the entire human race, the remaining 95% of the world's population. Put another way, most

psychological studies focus on WEIRD societies, that is, Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic societies (Henrich et al. 61). For the cultural psychologist, psychological research must account for the fact that the majority of the human race are not WEIRD. As some psychologists have remarked, most of our apparent knowledge of human psychology is derived almost entirely from probing the minds of Western undergraduate students. Through the lens of cultural psychology, this large body of existing psychological research is not totally invalid, but rather represents a specific case of cultural psychology, namely, the psychology of WEIRD societies (or, perhaps more accurately, the psychology of North American undergraduates). However, this research cannot make any definitive claims about human nature across the globe. If individual studies do not evaluate the possibility of cultural variability in psychological processes, it is impossible to know whether such processes are universal or specific to cultural circumstances.

Cultural psychologists hence explain cultural differences in psychological processes in a different way to mainstream psychology (or, as the cultural psychologists call it, ‘general psychology’). For cultural psychology, mind and culture are deemed both inseparable and mutually constitutive. Richard Shweder, considered the father of modern cultural psychology (Heine 6), defines the field as ‘the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, and transform the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for humankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self, and emotion.’ (72) To the cultural psychologist, the goal of general psychology (underpinned as it is by cognitivist principles) is fundamentally misguided. One cannot abstract the mind from its context and isolate its mechanisms; the old metaphor at the heart of cognitive science that the mind is a computer threatens to lead us astray. The model of a computational mind tells us that we can isolate processes, inputs, and outputs to understand their nature. Cultural psychology, on the other hand, argues that the mind simply cannot exist independently of culture.

For many in the humanities and other areas of social science outside of psychology, the claims of cultural psychology might appear obvious or self-evident. Anthropology, for instance, has long been defined by the assumptions that, first, culture matters; second, that humans and their social worlds are inseparable and; third, that understanding the socially embedded self is key to understanding the diversity of human experience. Likewise, many disciplines in the humanities such as literary studies,

film studies, and media studies have historically gravitated towards continental philosophical thinking, which, to proffer a coarse characterisation, tends towards an assumption that political, cultural, and systemic conditions invariably create certain kinds of subjectivities. As Simon Critchley puts it, the continental tradition locates the individual human as ‘a finite subject embedded in an ultimately contingent network of history, culture, and society’ (64). I have suggested thus far that cognitive film theory has typically, but not always, bestowed less importance to the role of history, culture, and society, particularly through its alignment with the traditions of analytic philosophy and cognitive sciences. Given that I am endorsing a cognitive cultural approach here, cultural psychology may be the more natural bedfellow for such an approach than mainstream (cognitivist) psychology. Indeed, Lisa Zunshine’s characterisation of a cognitive cultural approach is remarkably similar to the characterisation of cultural psychology I have put forward: ‘For just as the concept of the human brain becomes meaningless once we attempt to separate it from the culture in which it develops, so the concept of human culture becomes meaningless once we try to extract the human brain from it’ (8). For both cultural psychology and the cognitive cultural approach then, the mind cannot be straightforwardly separated from its (cultural) context. Equally, Zunshine offers a reminder that the reverse is also true: we cannot make sense of culture if we try to remove the human mind from it. Nevertheless, as we will see through the work of Daniel Barratt, some of the basic claims and tenets of cultural psychology are not necessarily irreconcilable with either cognitive psychology or the model of a computational mind.

At this point, it should be noted that the field of cultural psychology is markedly pluralistic; much like cognitive film theory, the field is made up of researchers of various disciplinary stripes and theoretical backgrounds. I will therefore make no attempt here to include the entire range of research in this discipline and I accept that my characterisation, by necessity, tends towards caricature. We will focus on two topics in this chapter in relation to cultural psychology: first, we will examine one of the more well-researched lines of investigation for cultural psychology, namely, the differences in cognition and thought between Westerners and East Asians. We will look at some claims of cultural difference and consider why these are significant for understanding film viewership. Second, we will drill deeper

into the question of universality as well as the matter of innateness and look at how cultural psychology addresses both of these.

### **THE GEOGRAPHY OF FILM VIEWING**

In *The Geography of Thought* (2003), Nisbett argues that there are fundamental differences between how Westerners and East Asians think. In Nisbett's characterisation, European thought rests on the assumption that the behaviour of physical objects, animals, and humans can be understood in terms of straightforward rules. Westerners (defined as primarily Europeans, Americans, and British Commonwealth) are more interested in categorisation, which helps them to know what rules to apply to the objects in question. Westerners, in short, see the world *analytically*. By contrast, East Asians (defined as primarily the people of China, Korea, and Japan) attend to objects in their broader context. Understanding events always requires consideration of a wide range of factors that operate in intricate relation to one another in no straightforward deterministic way. East Asians, in short, see the world *holistically*. The world hence appears more complex to East Asians than to Westerners. These different social realities, Nisbett claims, produce different patterns of seeing the world.

Why does this matter for film theory? Nisbett's overview points to numerous studies which indicate possible differences between East Asians and Westerners, and many of these differences bear directly upon how we might understand the act of viewing, experiencing, and comprehending narrative films. For starters, Nisbett cites several studies claiming that there are fundamental differences in how Westerners and East Asians perceive complex visual scenes: Westerners generally tend to focus to a greater extent on the focal objects in a complex visual scene whereas East Asians are more likely to scan the whole scene and attend to the background and the relations between objects. This has been found to be the case across several different media: in paintings, photographs, animations, and films. This difference is, in turn, related to the tendency of Westerners to attend more to objects and for East Asians to attend more to context. Using a metaphor appropriate to our focus here, Nisbett suggests that 'Asians view the world through a wide-angle lens, whereas Westerners have tunnel vision' (89). If we accept this claim, then it could entail that visual scenes in films from Eastern cultures might differ to films from Western cultures. To elaborate, filmmakers are typically sensitive to where the viewer's

attention is likely to gravitate towards in a given shot. In putting together a particular shot or sequence, they therefore utilise specific aspects of mise-en-scène (e.g. set design, lighting, characters' eyelines, framing, movement, staging) and cinematography (e.g. shot distance, depth of focus, colour) to guide viewers' gaze and attention to the salient part of the shot in any given moment. If Westerners attend more to objects in complex visual scenes, then we might anticipate that this means Western films will be designed in such a way that tends toward closer framing and less cluttered mise-en-scène, in order to avoid other objects in the frame distracting the viewer's attention. East Asian films, by contrast, may tend towards wider framings and have greater complexity and background detail in visual scenes (fig. 5).

If we compare general stylistic tendencies of classical Hollywood filmmaking and the same period of Japanese filmmaking, this hypothesis certainly appears to bear out. In an analysis of the visual style of Japanese cinema from 1925-1945, David Bordwell claims that Japanese directors often made it harder to see what is important than their counterparts in Hollywood. As he notes, staging and lighting in Japanese films of this period sometimes block access to relevant story information which encourages



Fig. 5. A complex visual scene in Kenji Mizoguchi's *Street of Shame* (1956).

viewers to scan the frame for information that is important to the narrative (12). The visual style of Japanese films that Bordwell outlines may, at least in part, emanate from the cultural difference that Nisbett proposes. Or put another way, a certain style proliferated in Japanese cinema because it meshed well with the intended audience's perceptual make-up. Bordwell suggests that Japanese films of this period 'exercise the eye' in a manner that distinguishes it from Hollywood filmmaking. However, the complex visual scenes in Japanese films that Bordwell describes may in fact not prove as challenging for East Asian audiences, simply because they read such images in different ways to Western viewers. If we extrapolate from Nisbett's claims, Eastern viewers are less focused on discerning narratively salient *objects*, but instead scan the frame to determine, in a more holistic fashion, how the parts all relate to each other. Having said this, I do not intend to attribute visual style in Japanese cinema entirely to this supposed cultural difference in perception. Artistic decisions like this are constituted by a complex confluence of human perceptual and cognitive capabilities, cultural differences, the history of representation in a given culture, as well as artistic convention and invention; one cannot straightforwardly reduce artistic decision-making to a single natural, or indeed cultural, cause. It is also fully possible that individual filmmakers will entirely flout certain conventions (both artistic and cultural). Nonetheless, further investigation may well show that this cultural difference is a salient factor in why stylistic differences emerged between Japanese and American cinema in their early years.

Let us take another example. The cultural differences that Nisbett proposes extend beyond perception and into social cognition which is also of utmost importance to film viewership. Consider the *fundamental attribution error*. The fundamental attribution error is a naïve or folk tendency for individuals to rely upon dispositions, instead of situations, to make inferences about another's behaviour. Nisbett claims that Easterners and Westerners significantly differ in their tendency to commit this error. As he argues, although Easterners and Westerners use similar personality dimensions to describe individuals, Westerners are significantly more likely to rely on personality traits to explain behaviour. That is, they are more likely to commit the fundamental attribution error (Nisbett 123). By way of demonstration, imagine Hana, who is at a dinner party. At the dinner party, Hana is introduced to someone she has never met before, Ren. Hana talks for some time with Ren. Through the course of the conversation, Hana perceives Ren's actions and demeanour as unfriendly. In this scenario, if Hana

were a Westerner, she would be more likely to attribute Ren's behaviour at the party to his personality or disposition. This Hana might, therefore, consider Ren to be an unfriendly or unsociable person. By contrast, if Hana were an Easterner, she would be more likely to attribute Ren's behaviour to situational or contextual factors. She might instead imagine outside factors that contributed to Ren's behaviour; perhaps he was having an especially bad day, or he had just received some bad news directly before the party.

As other film scholars have argued, the fundamental attribution error is central to comprehending film narratives, an exercise that almost invariably relies upon our capacity to build up rapid and largely unreflective impressions of characters based upon their behaviour. For instance, Bordwell suggests that although the fundamental attribution error might lead us astray in real life, as 'intuitive psychologists', filmmakers 'realize how strong these heuristics are, so they design their stories so as to make use of them' ('Minding Movies'). Likewise, Michael Z Newman has argued that film narratives frequently rely upon our proclivity to make this fundamental attribution error. For Newman, we intuitively seek explanations for a character's behaviour *in the character* (57). To mainstream psychology, the fundamental attribution error is a well-established bias in Western cultures. Bordwell and Newman are therefore well within their rights to extrapolate that Western filmmakers will seek to exploit this tendency. But implicit in their claims is that this heuristic applies to *all* of narrative cinema. Let us assume that Nisbett is right to claim that Easterners are less likely to commit this error. If we accept that filmmakers are intuitive psychologists who make informed guesses about how viewers will respond, then we should expect that characterisation will work slightly differently in narrative films from cultures that have different forms of naïve or folk psychology. That is, a Japanese director, say, may not make the same informed guesses about how viewers will respond as a North American director. Equally, East Asians might comprehend Western films in slightly different ways because they build up different impressions of characters.

These are two instances where the cultural differences proposed by Nisbett might bear upon how we theorise about filmmaking and film viewership. I will remain neutral on whether these two cultural differences, first, are actually the case; second, impact to a noteworthy extent upon East Asian

and Western filmmaking and film viewership; or, third, whether this impact is significant or not. However, I offer these as examples to illustrate how evidence from the field of cultural psychology might lead cognitivists to revise some of their claims. There are other possible ways one might respond to the evidence from cultural psychology. As mentioned previously, Daniel Barratt attempts to reconcile some of the implications of Nisbett's research for cognitive media theory by proposing that we think of the human mind in terms of 'modularity', a theory resurrected in the 1980s by philosopher Jerry A Fodor. To précis briefly, the modularity hypothesis maintains that our minds are largely (or entirely) made up of innate, domain-specific computational mechanisms or 'modules'. As Barratt characterises it, the modularity hypothesis distinguishes between three levels of cognition.

The first level is *modular perception*. The main candidates for these mental modules are the five 'classical' senses, that is, sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. The architecture of these modules is innately specified or 'hardwired', requiring minimal environmental conditions to develop. These first level systems are both 'informationally encapsulated' and 'cognitively impenetrable' in relation to our beliefs, expectations, and knowledge. In the case of, say, visual perception, we need to be able to recognise and locate a man-eating tiger coming at us in an automatic and unconscious manner. Under the modularity hypothesis, our ability to see is understood to be consistent across both individuals and cultures i.e. we will all perceive a tiger if we are faced with one (63-64).

The second level is *modular cognition*. Where the first level deals with perception, this second level considers how the mind developed several domain-specific computational systems that evolved by natural selection to solve the adaptive problems that our forebears faced. It is proposed that we are born equipped with modules that pertain to our basic 'folk understanding' of physics, biology, psychology, and the social world. These cognitive modules are similar to the first level of modular perception in that they are fast and automatic, but they differ in that they are only partially informationally encapsulated. The modularity hypothesis here suggests that objects and events are, up to a point, universally comprehended in physical, biological, psychological, and social terms (64).

The third level is *non-modular cognition*. Non-modular cognitive processing is more plastic and malleable and thus more susceptible to cultural influences. For Barratt, this is where the claims of

cultural psychology fit into the picture: all examples of cognitive processing that are potentially influenced by cultural factors can be understood as instances of *non-modular* cognition. Under the modularity hypothesis then, the evolved structure of the human mind provides a scaffolding or framework upon which can be built complex, analytical, or holistic ways of thinking. In other words, universal frameworks provide the framework for culture-specific variations.

I suspect that a cultural psychologist would object to using the modularity hypothesis to explain cultural differences. The modularity hypothesis requires endorsing an approach to mind which, as we have seen, runs directly against some of the tenets of cultural psychology. By this I mean that massive modularity proceeds from an assumption that cognitive processes are classical computational ones. Thus, it is a theory fundamentally grounded in a theoretical principle of cognitivism to which cultural psychology objects. Indeed, as a card-carrying cognitive psychologist, it is apparent that although Barratt does take the cultural differences proposed by Nisbett seriously, his project appears far more interested in mitigating any of the possible implications of cultural difference proposed by cultural psychology. In his words, ‘As a universalist by training, I am still tempted to say that the pointer should be placed much closer to the universalist end of the spectrum than the culturalist end’ (78). Of course, I am not expecting Barratt to abandon his disciplinary and theoretical allegiance in the face of some counterevidence, but we would perhaps be better served by considering cultural psychology’s claims of cultural difference and universalism on their own terms. On this question, we ought now turn to consider this question of universality in greater detail and we will return to the differences between Westerners and Easterners both later in this chapter and later in the thesis.

#### **UNIVERSALISM WITHOUT THE UNIFORMITY**

As we have seen, cultural psychology is sceptical of the central tenet of cognitivism that cultural differences are largely superficial. For cognitive psychology, if you scratch away the surface of culture, you will find universal mechanisms and capacities beneath, but for the cultural psychologist these cultural differences run deeper. In its opposition to the cognitivist underpinnings of general psychology, however, cultural psychology does not disavow the possibility of universals. Shweder and Jonathan Haidt highlight a slogan popular among some cultural psychologists: ‘one mind, but many mentalities:

universalism without the uniformity' (393).<sup>45</sup> Thus, cultural psychology does not entirely disavow universality, as indicated by the belief of 'one mind', but humans in disparate cultures may develop different mentalities in different social and cultural environments. Cognitive psychologists would counter by saying that a commitment to cognitivism does not entail denying the possibility that different cultures may develop different mentalities, but, as Usha Menon and Julia L Cassaniti suggest, cultural psychologists 'tend to assume that there are hardly any "deep" or "hard-wired" mental structures' (5). Cultural differences in mental processes and in moral and emotional functioning are therefore not merely superficial and, instead, run deep.

Beyond slogans, let us consider in more concrete terms what 'universality' might entail for a cultural psychologist. Ara Norenzayan and Steven J Heine offer a conceptual and methodological framework to guide the investigation of universals. They suggest that when we investigate human cognitive tools and capabilities, we can consider four levels of universality:

- i. *Accessibility universal*: The first and highest level of universality, which states that a given cognitive tool exists across cultures, is used to solve the same problem across cultures, and is accessible to the same degree across cultures.
- ii. *Functional universal*: The second level of universality, which states that a given cognitive tool exists across cultures and is used to solve the same problem across cultures, but is more accessible to people from some cultures than others.
- iii. *Existential universal*: the third level of universality, which states that a given cognitive tool exists across cultures, although the tool is not necessarily used to solve the same problems across cultures, nor is it equally accessible across cultures.
- iv. *Nonuniversal*: The fourth, and lowest, level of universality, which states that a given cognitive tool does not exist in all cultures and can be considered a cultural invention. (772-776)

Norenzayan and Heine's model rests on an analogy which likens the mind to a toolbox. Understood as such, psychological processes (including cognitive structures, emotions, and motivations) can be

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<sup>45</sup> The importance of this mantra to cultural psychology is made apparent by the title of Cassaniti and Menon's edited collection, *Universalism without Uniformity: Explorations in Mind and Culture* (2017).

thought of as tools for thought and behaviour; the mental toolbox is accessed to solve the various problems that everyday existence poses for humans (772). A few examples will help explain the distinctions between the different levels in this hierarchy. Accessibility universals represent the highest level of universality. The term accessibility here denotes the likelihood that a person is to use the cognitive tool in question. Psychological phenomena and cognitive tools which are most likely to belong to this category are those which emerge very early in infancy or are shared across species. For instance, all humans demonstrate a folk understanding of the laws of physics, such as the understanding that objects cannot just suddenly disappear, and this is something evident from infants at a very young age (Heine 18). Consider also the ‘mere exposure effect’, a phenomenon whereby repeated exposure to a stimulus can positively influence a person’s attitudes towards the stimulus (772-773). This too has been found cross-culturally and to apply to a wide variety of stimuli.

On the other end of the hierarchy, nonuniversals are psychological tools which arise solely from cultural inventions. It is typically hard to demonstrate nonuniversality conclusively; however, one likely candidate for a nonuniversal is certain arithmetic reasoning strategies that emerge among abacus users but are likely to be non-existent among nonabacus users. That is, abacus users will reason with numbers in ways that reflect the structural features of the abacus system of calculation. Norenzayan and Heine suggest that the two ends of the hierarchy, accessibility universals and nonuniversals, are both likely to be relatively rare and difficult to prove empirically. Instead, because of the minimal criteria necessary for their occurrence, existential universals are likely to be the most common.

Norenzayan and Heine propose several reasons to explain how and why the universality of a given cognitive tool arises. Processes can be universal because they are the result of:

- i. innate, naturally selected psychological tendencies that emerge everywhere in the same ontogenetic sequence
- ii. cultural byproducts of naturally selected tendencies (e.g. religion)
- iii. independent cultural inventions or cultural diffusions of learned responses that serve a useful purpose everywhere, such as counting systems, calendars, writing, trading, and cognitions and behaviours associated with these inventions (778)

So, for Norenzayan and Heine, proving something is a psychological universal does not necessarily equate to a claim for the innateness of that tool or tendency; universality is ‘encouraging but not conclusive evidence for the innateness of a psychological process’ (778). We can therefore remain neutral on the question of innateness whilst still endorsing the claim that there exist certain psychological universals.

Norenzayan and Heine’s hierarchy of universals shows us one way a cultural psychologist might conceptualise universality. It is also a good example of what cultural psychology can offer cognitive film theory. This framework of universality could be used to form finer-grained explanations for why certain aspects of film have become widespread and stable across different cultures. In particular, we can build upon Bordwell’s discussion of contingent universals and film conventions.<sup>46</sup> As Bordwell characterises them, contingent universals are human skills, practices, and so forth that are near universals inasmuch as they can be found widely in different human cultures, but they do not necessarily have to be the way that they are (‘Convention’ 61). As Bordwell explains,

I propose that we can make some progress if we bypass the nature–culture couplet for the moment and concentrate upon some “contingent universals” of human life. They are contingent because they did not, for any metaphysical reasons, have to be the way they are; and they are universal insofar as we can find them to be widely present in human societies. They consist of practices and propensities that arise in and through human activities. The core assumption here is that given certain uniformities in the environment across cultures, humans have in their social activities faced comparable tasks in surviving and creating their ways of life. Neither wholly “natural” nor wholly “cultural,” these sorts of contingent universals are good candidates for being at least partly responsible for the “naturalness” of artistic conventions. (‘Convention’ 61)

Bordwell’s argument continues that certain cinematic techniques like shot/reverse-shot have developed over time and disseminated across different cultures because they ‘amplify and streamline’ certain

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<sup>46</sup> See also Nannicelli’s insightful discussion of Bordwell’s account of contingent universals (‘Contingent Universals’).

contingent universal human practices (76). Norenzayan and Heine's hierarchy of universals fulfils similar goals to Bordwell's account of contingent universals: we can stay neutral on *why* something is universal, and we can move beyond the nature-culture binary. What we gain though with Norenzayan and Heine's hierarchy is that we can distinguish between more levels of universality. If we draw a parallel between Bordwell's contingent universals and the second level of universality proposed by Norenzayan and Heine (functional universals), then we might find that aspects of cinema that rely on an *accessibility* universal (the highest level) are highly cross-culturally stable.

How do aspects of facial expression and emotion fit into this hierarchy of universality? Heine suggests that there is sufficiently strong evidence for some degree of universality in emotions and facial expression across the world ('Cultural Psychology' 566). For the most part, people are universally skilled at recognising facial expressions associated with 'basic' emotions. However, there is not sufficient evidence for the highest level of universality for the reason that, on average, people are more adept at recognising expressions made by people from their own culture and perform worse when evaluating the facial expressions of those from cultures beyond their own. Heine therefore posits that it would only meet the criteria of *functional universal*. His position, then, is that we can consider facial expression as universal, but only to an extent. Such a position flies in the face of the neurocultural view which, as we have seen, denies that there are significant cultural differences in recognising facial expressions of basic emotion. Neuroculturalists like Ekman would hence make a case that emotion expression belongs to the highest level of universality. Heine's claim that producing and recognising facial expressions are functional universals is based upon recent research (both within and outwith the field of cultural psychology) which is sceptical of the neurocultural view's strong claim of universality of facial expression.

If facial expressions are functional universals, then we may find greater variability across cultures in how films represent faces and facial expression. Equally, we might find that different facial expressions are more universal than others. Anger, for instance, has often been considered to be more universally recognisable than any other expression ('What Scientists' 32). Of course, given the contingency of artistic conventions and practices, it is unlikely to be as straightforward as this; we may

find that the particular demands of representing faces and expression in narrative cinema erodes cultural differences, or that the historical dominance of a ‘Western style’ of cinema has influenced the cinema of other cultures to the extent that certain cultural nuances are lost. We will explore this matter in greater detail in time. For now, let us look closer at what evidence there is to support Heine’s position and hear out the advocates for nonuniversals in facial expression.

### **A DOMAIN IN STASIS?**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the past fifty years have seen the establishment and, arguably, the waning influence of the neurocultural view of facial expression and the basic emotion theory. Ruth Leys’ *The Ascent of Affect* (2017) offers a lucid, albeit unashamedly partial, history and critique of the field of research into emotions and facial expression. Leys begins with a warning to the reader that there is virtually no consensus regarding even the most basic assumptions in the science of emotion. For Leys, this situation is exacerbated by a tendency for advocates of the neurocultural view to routinely fail to acknowledge any criticisms that have been raised against them. Leys begins the book by saying that ‘The impression left is of a scientific domain in stasis, one in which the majority of researchers cling to their contested positions and research strategies, leaving fundamental questions unresolved’ (Leys 1). I will not replicate an historical overview like Leys’ but it will be worth drawing out how the opposition to the neurocultural view might compel us to understand film viewer’s activity in different ways.

In the previous chapter, we looked at Fridlund as one of the most outspoken critics of the neurocultural view. Fridlund is far from alone, however. If we understand the neurocultural view to belong to the ‘Emotional Expression’ approach to facial expression and the behavioural ecology view to belong to the ‘Social Communication’ approach, then we might consider a third noteworthy approach: the ‘Psychological Constructionism’ approach. The most prominent advocates for some form of constructionism are James A Russell and Lisa Feldman Barrett. Before we turn to Russell and Barrett, it is worth stressing again what I noted in the previous chapter: we need not get bogged down in the ontological claims that these differing views on facial expressions are forwarding. This is to say that settling the matter of what facial expressions *are* is not necessarily a priority if we are talking about

production, recognition, and responses to facial expressions in films. What is more important is how film viewers understand facial expressions, come to believe and infer things from their display, and the cognitive and affective responses that this knowledge produces. This said, if we wish to make claims about emotions in film viewing (to which facial expressions do relate), then this would require us to make a firmer commitment to a specific theory of emotion.

How, then, do proponents of psychological constructionism understand emotion, the recognition and production of facial expressions, and the universality thesis? For Russell, an emotional episode is not biologically determined (contra the Emotional Expression approach) or socially determined (contra the Social Communication approach); instead, emotions are psychologically constructed. Russell's model rests on the concept of *core affect*. Core affect refers to 'a neurophysiological state that is consciously accessible as a simple, nonreflective feeling' ('Core Affect' 147). Put simply, it is how we *feel* at any particular point in time. It involves an assessment along two continuums, valence (pleasure–displeasure) and arousal (sleepy–activated) (fig. 6). As Russell claims, core affect is primitive, universal, and simple; it exists without being labelled, interpreted, or attributed to any specific cause. Core affect becomes emotion when our categorisation of this core affect into an emotion category (e.g. angry, sad, happy) is coupled with our affective bodily state to an external event.

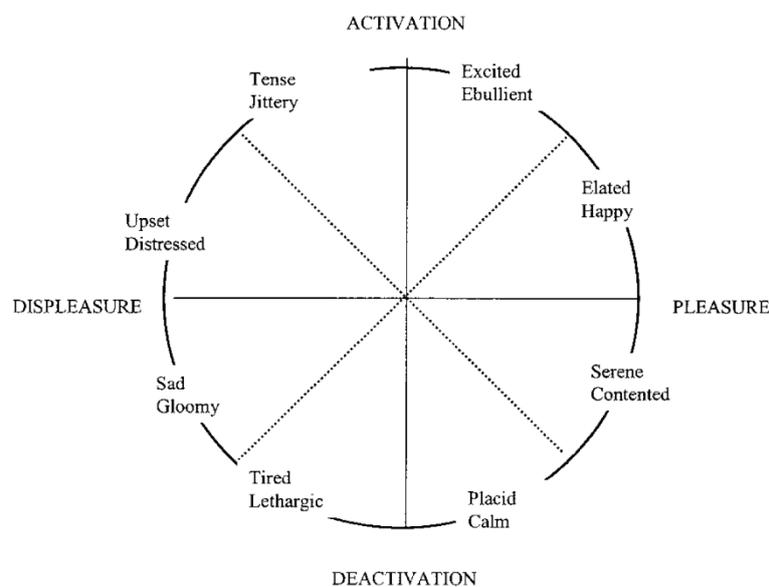


Fig. 6. Russell's 'core affect'. Core affect refers to the 'neurophysiological state consciously accessible as the simplest raw (nonreflective) feelings evident in moods and emotions' ('Core Affect' 148).

For example, when a hiker couples her onset of sweating and elevated heart rate with the fact that she can see a snake, she labels this experience as ‘fear’. On Russell’s view, there is no strict coupling with ‘basic emotions’ like fear or anger, but they are associated with the more fundamental dimensions of valence and arousal seen in fig. 6.

More recently, Barrett has proposed her own constructivist theory of emotions which argues that emotions are neither universal nor located in specific brain regions. Instead, they vary by culture and result from dynamic neuronal networks.<sup>47</sup> *Emotion concepts* are key to Barrett’s account; the brain uses these emotion concepts to categorise sensations in order to construct particular instances of emotion. Against the neurocultural view, there is not a unique neural fingerprint for, say, fear. Barrett’s account hinges on an understanding that brain activity consists of ‘millions and millions of nonstop predictions’ (59). Through this prediction process, our brains construct the world that we experience. Taking our hiker again, when her brain predicts the presence of a snake as well as the negative affect that is associated with encountering a snake, her brain categorises and construct an experience of ‘fear’. All this processing occurs before any sensory input of a snake is conscious to the hiker. By contrast, advocates of basic emotion theory would instead say that the person sees the snake, and then this sensory input triggers the ‘fear centre’ in the brain. Barrett’s model thus combines three different forms of construction: social construction (i.e. emotions are cultural concepts), psychological construction (i.e. emotions are constructed by core systems in the brain and body) and neuroconstruction (i.e. experience wires the brain).

For this chapter, we need not delve too deeply into the entirety of either Russell or Barrett’s theories of emotion. Rather, we can consider the more specific question of what their theories say about the production and recognition of facial expression as well as universality. Barrett asserts that emotions are not inborn, and if they are in fact universal, then this is merely a result of shared concepts (38). Barrett recommends that we dispense with the term ‘facial expression’ for it presupposes that the face

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<sup>47</sup> Barrett’s *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (2017) is an accessible summation of her theory and work.

broadcasts emotion and that unique fingerprints for each emotion exist. She instead proposes the term facial configuration. Related to this, Barrett suggests that speaking of facial expressions of emotion in terms of 'recognition' is also erroneous. Barrett's terminological gripes evince her strong opposition to the core tenets of the neurocultural view: for her, facial expressions do not function as readouts of emotion, they are not innate, and they are not manifestations of discrete emotions as natural kinds.

Russell similarly offers a very clear rejection of the universality thesis for facial expression recognition:

Evidence does not support the claim that observers universally recognize basic emotions from signals on the face. The percentage of observers who matched the face with the predicted emotion (matching score) is not universal, but varies with culture and language. (Nelson and Russell 8)

Elsewhere, Russell has suggested a different way of thinking of the matter of universality in facial expression. Consider a continuum of universality for the attribution of emotion based on facial expression. At one end is the position that the relationship between facial movements and emotion is wholly constructed and culturally variable; the amount of universality is 0%. At the other end of the continuum is the position that there is no variance across cultures and languages and the relation between facial movements and emotions is completely fixed; the amount of universality is 100%. As Russell rightly points out, neither of these positions are tenable nor are there any researchers seriously arguing for these positions nowadays. The debate about universality, however, has been inaccurately cast as a choice between the 0% and 100% positions. That is, the likes of Ekman have sought to disprove the viability of the 0% universality position, and this is the baseline against which hypotheses are tested. This, in turn, is wrongly used as evidence for 100% universality. Russell argues that the continuum must be replaced by more specific hypotheses about what is universal and why, and what varies with culture and why. His solution to this is proposing a new baseline position, which he calls 'Minimal Universality'.

Russell's Minimal Universality puts forward four plausible minimal assumptions about facial expression:

1. Patterns of facial muscle movement occur in all human beings.
2. Facial movements, as with all movements, are correlated with a person's state, whether it be physical, emotional, or cognitive; action or preparation for action; or other condition.
3. Most people everywhere can infer something of another's state from facial movement, just as they can from anything else the person does.
4. People in Western cultures implicitly believe that certain categories of emotion are natural kinds and that specific facial actions express those emotions. Stylized versions of facial actions are used as symbols of those emotions (e.g., a smile for happiness, crying face for grief, wide-open mouth and eyes for surprise, frown for anger, and wrinkled nose or tongue protrusion for disgust). ('Minimal Universality' 383)

From this baseline, Russell proposes that we can probably make several other predictions:

- i. Observers everywhere agree with each other at a level greater than chance when inferring the state of another from facial movements.
- ii. Observers are often accurate in the inferences that they make on the basis of facial movements.
- iii. There are similarities across cultures in what is inferred from facial movements.
- iv. People familiar with Western culture can associate specific emotion terms with specific facial expressions on a high degree of consensus. ('Minimal Universality' 383)

Russell's four minimal assumptions and four predictions are highly useful for our discussion here and can provide us an alternative point of departure for talking about the role of faces and facial expression in film. Based on Minimal Universality, we can assume that, regardless of our theoretical view on facial expression, facial muscle movements occur in all humans, and that these movements allow us to infer *something* about a person's cognitive or emotional state and their future actions. Assumption four is perhaps the most important for us and will come to the fore in the next chapter: regardless of the reality of facial expression, Western cultures believe that certain basic categories of emotion are natural kinds, that there are distinct expressions tied to these emotions and that stylised representations of facial displays can be used as symbols of those emotions. Furthermore, as prediction iv indicates, those who are familiar with Western culture are able to associate certain emotions with specific facial expressions. If we adopt Russell's Minimal Universality, we can subscribe to any theoretical view of facial expression and still make sense of why a smile is the best way to depict happiness or a frown is the best way to depict anger. As I argued in the previous chapter, the neurocultural view has at times endorsed

an either/or binary at the two extremes of this debate. Minimal Universality offers us another route to bypass this dichotomy. We can instead build from these minimal hypotheses and, as Russell suggests, start asking *exactly* what is universal and culturally specific. Let us turn now to some research which attempts to address this question.

Rachel E Jack, belonging broadly to the Social Communication approach, has consistently criticised the universality thesis by showing that individuals from non-Western cultures often confuse different expressions when tasked with recognising emotions. In the provocatively titled 'Facial expressions of emotion are not culturally universal', Jack and colleagues make two claims:

First, whereas Westerners represent each of the six basic emotions with a distinct set of facial movements common to the group, Easterners do not. Second, Easterners represent emotional intensity with distinctive dynamic eye activity. By refuting the long-standing universality hypothesis, our data highlight the powerful influence of culture on shaping basic behaviors once considered biologically hardwired. (7241)

The first claim reinforces Russell's view that Westerners tend to represent and believe in a coherence between facial movements and discrete basic emotions. If we move beyond the West though, this coherence between emotion and expression is not so widely endorsed. Elsewhere, Jack has shown that Easterners find it harder to distinguish between fear and disgust (two emotions often considered basic) and makes the case that Eastern observers use a culturally-specific strategy where, instead of looking evenly across the face as Westerners do, they fixate on the eye region to discern emotion. If this is the case, we could expect that this difference would be reflected in how filmmakers choose to represent the emotions of characters. We will explore these claims in greater detail in chapter four when we look at facial representations in Japanese animation.

There are other possible cultural differences in emotion categorisation between East Asians and Westerners. Nisbett refers to a study that asked Japanese and American participants to look at faces and

to indicate the extent of positive and negative emotions.<sup>48</sup> For Americans, faces were either happy or sad, angry or frightened. Japanese participants were instead likely to report seeing both positive and negative emotions in the same face whilst American participants tended to report either uniformly positive or uniformly negative emotions. The authors of this study make sense of this cultural difference in a similar way to Nisbett, arguing that Westerner's particular logic and reasoning means that someone must be feeling positive or negative emotions as opposed to East Asian dialecticism and the reasoning that a person can simultaneously be feeling both positive and negative emotions.

The claims of this study are supported by several recent studies which hypothesise that different cultures place differing importance on contextual factors when it comes to emotion and expression. For example, Masuda et al. argue that Americans' folk understanding of emotion tends to view emotional expressions as spontaneous manifestations of an individual's inner feelings. In addition, most Americans believe that they can infer emotion from facial expressions alone. As a result, there is little need to look beyond the individual to recognise or identify the affective state of an individual. In East Asian cultures, however, people are more likely to attend to wider social contexts and the group in deciding what an individual is feeling. Masuda et al.'s study sought to investigate this possible cultural difference. Their study had participants view cartoons depicting a central figure with a happy, sad, angry, or neutral facial expression surrounded by other people either expressing the same emotion as



Fig. 7. Two examples of the cartoon images used in the studies of Masuda et al. A Caucasian person (left) or an Asian person (right) were differentially used as the central figure.

<sup>48</sup> Nisbett describes this study from an unpublished manuscript by Kaipeng Peng, Dacher Keltner and Satoru Morikawa (187)

the central person or a different one (see fig. 7). The surrounding people's emotions influenced Japanese participants, but not the Westerners' perception of the central person. For the Japanese participants, if the surrounding people's expression matched the central person's expression, then they inferred that the person felt that emotion more strongly; if the surrounding people expressed a different emotion, then they perceived traces of that emotion in the individual. The study by Masuda et al. corroborates the broader claim that we have observed thus far that East Asians tend to pay more attention to context and situation for understanding the behaviour, personality, and emotions of others.

All these studies that identify cultural differences in emotion and expression represent a challenge to both general psychology and the neurocultural view of facial expression. Nonetheless, for the supporters of universality, the cultural differences raised by the likes of Nisbett, Masuda, Jack, Russell, Barrett, and so forth are insufficient grounds to reject the universality thesis for facial expression. It might be argued that a universal theory does not necessarily deny the cultural variability of emotions, but rather that such a theory may think of emotions in just that way: as culturally inflected variations on innate human capabilities. As we saw in the previous chapter, Ekman and supporters of the neurocultural view often chalk up any differences to 'display rules' or argue that such differences are simply insignificant. Neither of these responses are sufficient to entirely dispel all of the problems raised by the neurocultural sceptics. Display rules in particular are employed to do an impossible amount of work in explaining away any cultural differences with very little experimental evidence. It is also the case that, as Leys notes, Ekman and the many supporters of the neurocultural view tend to either ignore criticism or instead argue against uncharitable interpretations of said criticisms.<sup>49</sup>

Another way of holding on to the claim for basic emotion – alongside retaining 'basic emotions' as items of folk theory – whilst addressing some of the criticisms of the neurocultural view's stance on cultural difference would be to turn to Hillary Anger Elfenbein's *dialect theory of emotion*. The dialect theory tells us that the physical components of expression remain, for the most part, universally

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Ekman's rebuttal to Russell's original critique, 'Strong evidence for universals in facial expressions: A reply to Russell's mistaken critique'. The title alone says a lot about Ekman's attitude.

consistent across cultures but different cultural contexts stress both slightly different expressions and slightly different interpretations of these expressions. For instance, there are a good number of studies that provide evidence that observers are more accurate in judging the expressions of members of their own nationality than of other nationalities. This is referred to as the *in-group advantage*. The dialect theory of communicating emotion offers one means of explaining why this occurs and represents an intermediary position between the universalist and culturally determined theories of facial expression. It proposes the presence of ‘cultural differences in the use of cues for emotional expression that are subtle enough to allow accurate communication across cultural boundaries in general, yet substantive enough to result in a potential for miscommunication’ (Elfenbein et al., ‘Toward a Dialect Theory’ 131). Put more simply, this theory considers that there is a universal ‘language’ of expression but that individual societies or cultures form dialects, unique to that specific group. Hence, the in-group advantage exists because members of a given country become accustomed to seeing a particular manifestation (the dialect) of an otherwise universal facial expression as well as culturally specific elements of nonverbal expression.<sup>50</sup>

Cultural differences in the production and recognition of facial expressions are consequently a result of learning. Just as you can learn a language, you can over time become ‘fluent’ in the expressive dialect of a given culture. Thus, cultural differences, though they exist, are far from insurmountable. The question that follows then is how difficult is it to become versed in another culture’s expressive behaviour? Derived from the findings of one study, Elfenbein suggested that the in-group advantage disappeared in as little as ten minutes training and feedback with participants (‘Learning in emotion judgments’). It would be remiss to accept this at face value given that this is just one study. However, let us entertain the possibility that there is some truth to the notion that these dialects are relatively easy to learn. If it really is this easy to overcome cultural differences in emotion recognition, then it would stand to reason that cinema, with its tendency to disambiguate facial expressions through a redundant number of cues, would be well-equipped to quickly and effectively overcome the in-group advantage.

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<sup>50</sup> We will return to ‘nonverbal expression’ in chapter five.

We could extend Elfenbein's dialect theory to thinking about 'differences' in films in a broader sense. It is not only the case that viewers can become 'trained' in understanding the culturally specific idiosyncrasies of cinematic expression, but we might think about a viewer, say, watching a film from a different time period. Show someone a silent film for the first time and it is likely that they will find the performance style overly demonstrative, if not comical or unintelligible. However, it takes little time for a viewer to become more adept at responding to and understanding the expressive vocabulary in silent cinema based upon context and various other cues which guide our recognition and understanding. We can go even finer grained than this and propose that we also learn to understand idiosyncratic forms of expression by specific directors and filmmakers. As Smith notes, individual directors may develop 'distinctive artistic strategies' in relation to facial expression and 'aesthetically sculpt' expression (*FATC* 152). A first-time viewer of an Ozu film or a Bresson film may misunderstand the expressions of the characters due to the particular ways in which these directors choose to represent characters' thoughts, emotions, intentions, and desires. It may take several films before a viewer 'learns' these idiosyncrasies. In the next chapter, I will suggest this might also apply to learning the rules governing expression in specific genres. We will also see in the case studies in the second half of the thesis some further possible examples of how filmmaking from various cultures might 'teach' viewers how to understand and respond to conventionalised and idiosyncratic expressive behaviour.

#### **UNIVERSALS AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN FILM**

Thus far in this chapter, we have considered two interrelated trends in psychology: the establishment of cultural psychology (positioned against mainstream cognitive psychology) and the turn against the universality proposed by the neurocultural view of facial expression. These two trends are significant for cognitive film theory because it has, first, typically appealed to cognitive psychology, and, second, typically endorsed some version of the neurocultural view and the related basic emotion theory. If we are working on the assumption that filmic representations take ordinary human mental activity (such as perception, social cognition, expression, and emotion) as its building blocks and if we also agree that there are noteworthy cultural differences in this activity, then we are led to two propositions: first, that narrative films from different cultures may differ in accordance with these cultural differences and,

second, that viewers from different cultures will differ in their perception, understanding, and responses towards narrative films. Plantinga has proposed that films are a product of a ‘filmmaker-audience loop’ wherein filmmakers use folk psychology and shared assumptions about human psychology to make guesses about how viewers might respond to their films (‘Folk Psychology’ 30).<sup>51</sup> Based on this feedback loop, a filmmaker’s cultural background will shape the guesses and assumptions that they make about how viewers will respond. Layered on top of this, if we agree with L P Hartley that the past is a foreign country (9), we might expect that these differences will also manifest themselves when we view films far removed from us in time. By putting forward this first proposition, this is not to say that filmmakers are bound to slavishly follow the particularities of their cultural background; individual filmmakers can make creative choices that cut against the grain of culture or take as their primary influence art from other cultures.

It is also true that, as viewers, we are simply not aware of what we are missing. However, though we may miss nuances, it is clear enough that we can still understand *on some level* the expressive behaviour of film characters and respond appropriately to films from other cultures and, indeed, films removed from us in time. In the previous chapter, I described how a viewer unfamiliar with Japanese culture may not fully understand a particular gesture in *Shoplifters*, but this viewer would not be totally at sea. We can therefore easily reject the ‘0% position’ that cultural differences in expression produce insurmountable hurdles for film viewership. This leaves a few possible explanations:

- 1) The core constituents of expression and emotion that are of relevance to narrative films are rooted in human universals.
- 2) Narrative cinema has long been a global artform and has been historically dominated by a ‘Western-style’ (particularly as it emerged in the US) of filmmaking which, in the interest of maximising viewers’ comprehension, tends towards a style that emphasises expressive clarity.

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<sup>51</sup> We will discuss folk psychology in greater detail in the next chapter.

- 3) Cultural differences do exist, but they are not significant enough to impede greatly comprehension or engagement with narrative films. Viewers may, however, be excluded from higher-level and more nuanced understanding.
- 4) The act of representing faces and facial expression in a narrative film washes away many cultural differences. The representation of expressive behaviour in narrative films often streamlines and amplifies ordinary human behaviour which means that many cultural nuances are lost. Related to this, facial expressions in cinema are often supported by a number of other cues which serve to disambiguate expressive behaviour.

These answers are not mutually exclusive, and it seems likely that a combination of these reflect the fact of the matter. Patrick Colm Hogan uses a mixture of option one and three in *Understanding Indian Movies*, wherein he argues that though there are cultural differences that may impede a Westerner's understanding of Bollywood filmmaking, the central components of cinema (narrative, theme, and emotion) are human universals. As he states, 'In my view, the emotions are the same across cultures. However, the cues and related responses may differ. The differences are superficial, but they may be consequential in particular cases' (4). Hogan's position matches up with the assumption in cognitivism we noted at the start of the chapter: cultural differences exist, but they are superficial and belie universality.

Hogan develops this position by arguing that a full emotional response to art relies not merely on extensive cultural knowledge but also on a successful internalisation of that knowledge:

Ultimately, it requires the incorporation of that knowledge into ordinary cognitive processes, so that we spontaneously encode the crucial aspects of a scene, so that we readily come to have the expectations tacitly anticipated by the author, composer, or director, so that we implicitly link the events with a complex of emotionally consequential memories. (253)

The 'expectations tacitly anticipated' by the director is akin to the folk presumptions of filmmakers we have touched upon so far. In turn, these expectations must be picked up on by viewers, who are capable

of making sense of these expectations. Earlier in his book, Hogan uses an example of representing facial expression to furnish this point:

we may require cultural knowledge to “encode” emotional information in relevant ways. Encoding is a process by which we tacitly select pieces of information from our environment, group these into sets, and assign structure to them by connecting them with already organized mental entities, such as prototypes. For instance, if we are unaware that a particular culture minimizes the facial expression of negative emotions, we may simply not encode a slight trembling of a character’s lip. (106).

Hogan identifies an instance where a viewer’s cultural background will lead to a failure in recognition when watching a film from a different culture. Of course, as the preceding quotation from Hogan tells us, viewers are able to incorporate new knowledge into their cognitive processes and *learn* how to encode, say, the trembling of a character’s lips.

Underlying this claim, we can see that Hogan assumes that cultural differences in expression and emotion are closely mirrored by art and fiction:

If a given culture strongly suppresses the expression of grief, then even the slightest hint of sorrow may be more revealing than a flood of tears from someone in a culture that encourages flamboyant display. This is particularly true in art, where cultural conventions may be followed more rigorously than in real life. (For example, with real people, grief has a tendency to break through, even when strongly discouraged by the culture.) (106)

By suggesting that art (or, more specifically, narrative films it seems) may *more* slavishly follow cultural conventions, Hogan goes against what I see as the more intuitive position that filmic expression may exaggerate or streamline real-world expressive behaviour. If we follow Hogan and imagine a culture that suppresses the expression of grief, but also that grief has a tendency to breakthrough despite this, then could this not *also* be said to be a cultural convention, and therefore precisely a reason why a film would choose to flout the convention that one should suppress grief. Hogan seems to have in mind the idea that expression and emotion are a bit ‘messier’ in reality than in fiction. I see his point here,

but plenty of examples spring to mind of narratives where both drama and comedy are mined from violations of cultural conventions of expressive behaviour (emotional outbreaks at weddings and funeral, for instance). Hogan's chosen example presents some problems (what grounds are there to suppose that grief tends to break through with real people and not fictional people?), but we need not focus on this particular example in order to assess his claim that cultural conventions are followed more rigorously in film – and art – than in real life.

It would seem that the best way of interpreting Hogan's claim is that when he says 'art', he has a fairly narrow conception in mind. That is, he seems to be talking specifically about dramatic works, or at least works that take a psychologically realistic approach to the emotional lives of its characters. If we go beyond drama, we can find many counterexamples. Consider the *Carry On* film series. The *Carry On* series was a long-running franchise of British comedy films. The thirty-one films in this series carry forward the British tradition of music hall entertainment: a typical *Carry On* film is only loosely tied together by plot and is mainly a showcase of bawdy humour, sexual innuendo, and farce. These films, as many other comedies do, rely upon 'reaction shots' that underline the outrageousness of the particular situation through characters' exaggerated facial expressions and comic gurning. Fig. 8 shows



Fig. 8. Miss Haggard (Hattie Jacques) and Dr Kenneth Soaper (Kenneth Williams) expression of surprise in *Carry On Camping* (1969).

us an archetypal example: Hattie Jacques and Kenneth Williams grossly caricatured depiction of surprise goes far beyond what an individual would ordinarily express in virtually any social situation. The Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC) suggest that British people tend towards scepticism of excessive emotional displays ('American style "gushing"' as the report calls it (*Britain: A nation of emotion?* 11)).<sup>52</sup> Over-the-top expressive behaviour, therefore, is often socially proscribed. This is certainly not the impression one would have from watching a *Carry On* film. Indeed, contra to Hogan, it is possible that it is precisely these social norms that create the conditions for films like those in the *Carry On* series. By this I mean that art and fiction may offer some sort of relief from the rules that govern facial displays and cultural conventions and instead choose to either flout or exaggerate them, instead of obeying them more closely than in real life. This is not only true for comedies, but also for dramatic art. Indeed, Japan is often cited as a culture with stringent cultural rules on expressing emotion, yet you would struggle to believe this fact from watching a lot of anime.

We can certainly agree with Hogan then that cultural differences in emotion and expression do exist, but they do not necessarily determine in a straightforward way how art, and filmmaking more specifically, represent emotion and expression. Filmmakers and artists may either stringently adhere to cultural conventions or flout them entirely. If we accept that cultural differences do exist and that they contribute to how faces and facial expression are represented and recognised, then it follows that an understanding of the cultural specificities at play in particular contexts will allow us to better understand what a given film is doing. For instance, in chapter six we will consider *Fargo* (1996). *Fargo* represents an exaggerated version of 'Minnesota Nice', the stereotypical behaviour of people from Minnesota to be emotionally reserved, mild-mannered, and polite. This is a case that would support Hogan's idea of art more stringently adhering to cultural conventions; the Minnesotan characters of *Fargo* follow this stereotypical polite and reserved behaviour to an absurd degree. We can consider this

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<sup>52</sup> The SIRC is a non-profit think tank with links to big corporations and is not always transparent about its funding. These entanglements are not especially relevant to this particular study on the emotional character of British people. Unfortunately, there is remarkably little research that looks at emotion and expression in British culture.

as a useful counterpoint to *Carry On*. Both examples create comedy from the expressive behaviour of its characters, but whereas in *Carry On* films it is from the flouting of British cultural conventions governing emotional display, in *Fargo* it arises from the characters exaggerated adherence to the culturally specific expressive behaviour of Minnesota.

Alongside Hogan, Smith offers us another example of a broadly cognitivist approach attempting to reconcile cultural difference and universality in relation to emotion and expression in film. In *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, Smith puts forward a ‘biocultural’ approach to emotion. The biocultural approach resists the notion that the biological basis of emotions can be separated from their elaboration within specific cultures. In order to demonstrate that this approach is able to deal with a diverse range of examples, Smith takes Edgar Reitz’s *Heimat* film cycle as a case study. The *Heimat* films, Smith suggests, would seem to represent a challenge to universalistic explanations and his proposed naturalised aesthetics due to its cultural specificity and modernist sensibility. Smith explains, ‘I choose *Heimat* precisely as a difficult test for the biocultural account of the emotions advanced here’ (167). However, in choosing *Heimat*, Smith sets himself a test that is not all that difficult to pass. Despite the modernist sensibility of the *Heimat* films, they still have a fairly naturalistic performance style and, perhaps more significantly, they are still Western films. As a result, they are arguably not a world apart from Hollywood filmmaking.<sup>53</sup> Smith does concede this point, noting that art cinema and the film festival culture through which it has come to exist are both themselves profoundly international and therefore not too dissimilar to the Hollywood films that are tailored to reach global audiences. In any case, Smith’s discussion of *Heimat* reveals similarities with Hogan’s approach to emotion and expression: although the cues and related responses may differ, emotions are deemed to be, by and large, the same across cultures, thus making any cultural differences in emotion largely superficial. Of course, neither Smith nor Hogan deny that culturally specific factors play an important role in our

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<sup>53</sup> Topp offers similar criticisms of Smith’s use of *Heimat* as a test for the biocultural account. Topp instead proposes a more appropriate test would be what he considers a far more culturally specific and challenging example of modernist filmmaking, the Japanese New Wave film *Eros + Massacre* (1969).

understanding and appreciation of films. As Smith puts it, cultural distance ‘obviously throws up practical difficulties in comprehension, but it does not erect a metaphysical barrier’ (173)

I propose that we take a different strategy from Hogan and Smith, however. Hogan and Smith work from the position that the ‘dial’ points universality. I suggest instead that we may make better progress by working differently: that is, instead of assuming universality, we first identify a supposed cultural difference and then proceed to examine whether we can identify evidence for this cultural difference in films (and art more generally). We will do just this in chapter four when we consider how Japanese animated films represent cultural differences in the recognition of facial expression and in chapter five when we look at the representation of nonverbal cues and gestures. Evidently, the relationship between the universal and the culturally specific is complex in the case of facial expression, and made even more complex when represented in narrative cinema. We will proceed, then, from the following assumptions:

1. Cultural differences in facial expression and expressive behaviour do exist.
2. Cultural differences bear upon the representation of facial expression and expressive behaviour in film to some extent.
3. Cultural differences bear upon viewers’ understanding and responses to facial expression and expressive behaviour represented in film to some extent.

From these assumptions, we can build up more nuanced accounts of facial expression in film. They allow us to ask what exactly the relevant cultural differences are and to what extent do they have an impact. The subtitle of this chapter asks, ‘What difference does difference make?’ There are some who have argued that such cultural differences are just not significant or noteworthy. Although I am not fundamentally disagreeing with universalist accounts, I advocate here for greater modesty in the assertions made about innateness and universality. Think of it this way: I am not suggesting we turn our universality dial to 0%, but simply that we move it down from its current position. Ultimately, drilling deeper into cultural differences allows us to reach a better understanding of the principles according to which films are constructed and organised in order to appeal to viewers.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have looked at several criticisms of the theories and theoretical approaches that have been endorsed by cognitivists. In particular, we have seen what we might gain by turning to cultural psychology and how this approach may exhort us to revise certain claims about film viewership. Furthermore, we have considered some more objections to the neurocultural view and the universality thesis of facial expression. There are two good reasons why it is worth heeding these criticisms of cognitive psychology and the neurocultural view. The first is that if cognitive theory claims to be committed to up-to-date scientific knowledge and understandings of the mind, then this must include the entire gamut of knowledge available. As Carroll argues, the best framework for understanding empirical and scientific inquiry is *fallibilism*:

The fallibilist agrees that he or she may have to revise his or her theories in light of future evidence or in response to the implications of later theoretical developments, because the fallibilist realizes that theories are at best well-justified and that well-justified theory may turn out to be false. ('Prospects for Film Theory' 60)

We must therefore be open to revising or discarding many ideas that have traditionally been central to our theorising. It is worth taking cultural psychology and the like seriously then because it urges us to think carefully over some of the core tenets and assumptions of cognitivism. Equally, one might get the impression from reading some scholarship within cognitive film theory that scientific questions about facial expression have been resolved, but this is scarcely the case; the matter of universality is far from concluded.

There is one objection to what I have proposed in this chapter that I will head off briefly here. It could be said that cognitivists cannot coherently incorporate the claims of cultural psychology on the basis that the approach of cultural psychology is antithetical to the tenets of cognitivism. It is therefore impossible to endorse simultaneously the basic tenets of both cognitivism and cultural psychology. However, despite what the name suggests, cognitive theorists of media do not necessarily commit

themselves to cognitive science. As Ted Nannicelli and Paul Taberham stress in their characterisation of cognitive media theory, cognitive science can be construed in at least two different ways:<sup>54</sup>

Broadly construed, it is a domain of inquiry—specifically, it is an investigation of cognition, encompassing attention, learning, memory, reasoning, problem-solving, and perception, that draws upon research in a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, artificial intelligence, linguistics, neuroscience, philosophy, and psychology. Narrowly construed, cognitive science is a specific understanding of how cognition works — namely, along the lines of the computational theory of mind, according to which the mind/brain is akin to a computer. (5)

Cultural psychology's objections to cognitive science are largely focused on it as a narrowly construed theory of mind, and the experimental methodology that underpins this. Thus, there is no contradiction in endorsing the claims of cultural psychology as a cognitive film theorist. Of course, as I stated in the introduction, neither cultural psychology nor the cognitive cultural approach can lay exclusive claim on recognising cultural variability or on destabilising the dichotomy between nature and culture; if we wish to highlight the importance of both nature and nurture, we are by no means required to endorse either of these theoretical approaches. It remains the case, though, that both cultural psychology and a cognitive cultural approach offer cognitive film theory something novel and valuable.

The second reason why cognitive film theory ought to take cultural psychology seriously relates to its position within film studies and, more specifically, as a branch of film theory. Adopting the position that certain universal mental mechanisms underlie our understanding, perception, and response to film has left cognitive film theory open to the criticism that cognitivist approaches to film are somehow indifferent to issues of, for instance, culture, politics, race, ethnicity, and gender. As Plantinga puts it, 'The film studies establishment has critiqued cognitivism for its alleged commitment to science and objectivity and its seeming lack of concern for the cultural issues that currently occupy film studies' ('Cognitive Film Theory' 27). This attitude still prevails in some form within mainstream film studies.

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<sup>54</sup> Most characterisations of cognitivism and cognitive media theory note that its name is somewhat misleading. See Currie ('Cognitivism') and Plantinga ('Cognitive Theory of the Moving Image').

As I noted in the preceding chapter, many undergraduates of film will first encounter cognitivism in Robert Stam's introduction to film theory, in which he claims that 'In cognitive theory, a raceless, genderless, classless, understander/interpreter encounters abstract schemata' (241). To be as charitable as possible to this position, it would be fair to say that cognitive film theory has traditionally not paid the same level of attention to cultural issues compared to many other dominant approaches in film theory. However, to suggest, as Stam does, that cognitive theory is somehow oblivious or incapable of doing justice to these issues is a fundamental misunderstanding. If anything, the opposite is true. Psychology, as one of the core disciplines to which cognitive film theory appeals, is perfectly equipped to examine matters relating to culture through its ability to, say, understand unconscious and implicit biases, stereotyping and attitude formation, and the role that media might play in these.<sup>55</sup>

As I said at the start of the chapter, there are good historical reasons why cognitive film and media theory has gravitated towards universalist theoretical positions. But now that cognitive film theory (and cognitivist approaches more generally) are established as legitimate theoretical approaches, it is high time to start taking questions about culture more seriously or, at the very least, directly addressing criticisms of its indifference to cultural issues. If cognitive film theory wishes to move beyond just a fringe theoretical approach it must *explicitly* address criticisms that are in the same spirit as Stam's objections and do so in good faith. We should not only openly acknowledge cultural difference, but also examine the fundamental assumptions of the disciplines to which cognitive film theory has typically appealed.

Admittedly, both of the trends we have looked at in this chapter pose large challenges. Cultural psychology invites us to consider the mind in a way that is significantly messier, more complicated, and more variable than many competing models. Moreover, it relies upon an experimental methodology that is far more logistically complex and time-consuming than most psychological research. There will no doubt be similar challenges when it comes to considering cultural differences in narrative cinema. Identifying how cultural differences might manifest in film requires sampling a large number of films

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<sup>55</sup> For an exemplar of this, see Flory's 'Audience, Implicit Racial Bias, and Cinematic Twists in *Zootopia*' (2019).

from a particular culture, of varying quality, of different genres, and of various time periods. Such an endeavour is nonetheless well-suited to an approach akin to the ‘historical poetics’ advocated by Bordwell. Historical poetics exhorts us to understand how films are put together in order to serve specific functions and achieve specific effects (*Making Meaning* 266-267). Bordwell states that such an approach produces knowledge in relation to two questions:

1. What are the principles according to which films are constructed and by means of which they achieve particular effects?
2. How and why have these principles arisen and changed in particular empirical circumstances?  
(‘Historical Poetics of Cinema’ 371)

An understanding of cultural difference in, say, facial expression should form an important part of making sense of the principles according to which films are constructed and the means by which they achieve particular effects. As Bordwell too would acknowledge, culture forms a key part of the ‘empirical circumstances’ out of which the organising principles of films arise. Furthermore, historical poetics asks of its practitioners that they watch widely in order to identify these principles.

For the case of facial expression, moving away from the neurocultural view is similarly challenging. As we have seen, most of the alternative views provide accounts that are not immediately intuitive and require us to abandon many apparently common-sense or intuitive assumptions about facial expression. I would venture that at least part of the dominance of basic emotion theory and the neurocultural view is because they offer a straightforward, totalising, and ‘romantic’ account of how emotion and expression function.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, the neurocultural view’s understanding of emotion and expression is intuitive for Westerners and meshes well with their folk understandings of emotion. By contrast, Alan Fridlund has suggested that his own behavioural ecology view will ‘always be a tough sell. It requires shaking off a romanticized view of human nature that makes the face a battleground

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<sup>56</sup> Crivelli and Fridlund identify that the neurocultural view is attractive also because it lends itself well to being tested with standard laboratory methods and deductive hypothesis-testing (168).

between an “authentic self” and an impression-managed “social self” (87).<sup>57</sup> Indeed, as we will turn to in the next chapter, narrative filmmaking generally endorses a ‘romanticised view’ of human nature, expression, and emotion which sits uneasily with theoretical positions that disavow a significant relationship between outward expression and inner experience.

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<sup>57</sup> Mitchell Green also suggests that the neurocultural view can be caricatured with the word ‘romantic’ on the basis that expressions are understood to be emanations of what is within (127). This is in contrast to his caricature of the behavioural ecology view as ‘pragmatic’.

### Chapter 3

#### Filming Faces – A Romantic View

What do faces reveal? So far, we have seen that the answer to this question is not straightforward: facial expressions *can* express emotions, but they do not necessarily always tell us anything meaningful about a person's emotional state. Furthermore, humans across the globe differ in their recognition and understanding of facial expression. There is not cross-cultural agreement over what faces reveal. Despite this, Western cultures endorse the belief that facial expressions can accurately tell us about emotions and that certain categories of emotion are natural kinds. But what about cinema? What do faces embedded within narrative fiction films reveal? In this chapter, I will argue that narrative cinema typically embodies certain naïve psychological beliefs about facial expression and assumes a *romantic view* of facial expression. In other words, faces often reveal a great deal more in cinema than they do in reality.

Cognitivist scholarship often highlights that two of the most salient and important features of narrative fiction films are *emotion* and *character*.<sup>58</sup> Carl Plantinga says that 'The expression and elicitation of emotion in film is a central element of the film experience' (*Moving Viewers* 5). For Ed S Tan, film narration and emotional responses are two sides of the very same coin; 'to narrate is to produce emotion' as he puts it (*Emotion* 4). In many ways, emotion and character are intimately related. Murray Smith's account of character engagement draws particular attention to this fact: 'Our propensity to respond emotionally to fictional characters is a key aspect of our experience and enjoyment of narrative films' (*EC* 1). As scholars like Plantinga, Tan, and Smith have identified, a significant part of 'our propensity to respond emotionally to fictional characters' relies upon our capacity to recognise and respond appropriately to the representation of characters' facial expressions. If we accept that this is the case, then we can say that narrative films typically depend on successfully communicating the attitudes, thoughts, intentions, beliefs, and feelings of its characters. That is, on a basic level, for a film narrative

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<sup>58</sup> These are not the *only* important features of narrative fiction films, but they are no doubt particularly central ones.

to make sense and for it to bring about specific responses requires viewers to be able to 'read' characters and come to some sort of understanding of their personality and interior experience. One of the most conventional ways that this is achieved in narrative cinema is through the representation of faces and facial expression. This much has already been recognised not only by film scholars, but also by practitioners and filmmakers for over a century; faces and facial expression play an undeniably central role in many – and arguably the vast majority of – narrative fiction films.

Although faces and facial expressions are vital to narrative cinema, there remain significant questions here. The representation and recognition of facial expression in cinema is of great import, yet the mechanisms by which this works are often taken for granted. How do we come to understand characters and situations through perceiving representations of faces and facial expression? I argued in the two previous chapters that responding to a question of this sort requires us to grasp how humans recognise and come to believe things through the faces and expressions of others in our everyday lives. To this end, we have largely focused on theoretical views of facial expression from branches of psychology and philosophy. In chapter one, we considered two leading views from evolutionary psychology for understanding facial expression, namely, the neurocultural view and the behavioural ecology view. We also saw that a middle-ground approach between these two views is entirely conceivable and we can combine the best insights from these two dominant views without contradiction. Following Mitchell Green, we also looked at three interrelated categories of expressive behaviour: naturalised expression, conventionalised expression, and idiosyncratic expression. In chapter two, we pushed this discussion further by more carefully considering the universal and culturally specific dimensions of facial expression as well as the implications of cultural difference for understanding film viewership. We have already touched on a few questions pertaining to how cinema represents faces and expression, but this chapter will consider in greater detail some general principles that underpin the representation of facial expression in narrative films.

The appearance and representation of facial expression in film does not mechanically or straightforwardly mimic facial expression in the real world, but it would be erroneous to say that filmic expression has a totally arbitrary relation to reality. Imagine an otherwise ordinary dramatic film, but

the characters in this film display what appears as a prototypical expression of sadness whenever they are happy. Perhaps we would eventually be able to understand what these characters' faces mean if the context in which their expressions are displayed made this unusual quirk clear, but it would make this hypothetical film absurd, alienating, and virtually incomprehensible.<sup>59</sup> For films to make sense thus requires reasonably stable norms and conventions governing the representation of expressive behaviour, and these cinematic norms and conventions are rooted in reality. This holds true even in less mainstream or less conventional examples of narrative filmmaking. For instance, art films are far more likely than mainstream films to represent ambiguously or idiosyncratically the thoughts and feelings of characters or to contain emotionally inexpressive characters. Despite this, our comprehension of and response to such films and its characters still requires a stable understanding of how faces and expression ordinarily function. Consider some cases of films with what we might call 'blunted' or 'flat' character affect. For example, films by the likes of Yorgos Lanthimos, Robert Bresson, or Wong Kar-Wai. Characters in such films may be less facially expressive, but faces are still responsible for a good deal of our inference making and understanding of situations, characters, and narrative.

Nonetheless, while there is some continuity between everyday expression and filmic expression, it would be just as mistaken to say that the representation of human expression in film is *identical* to reality. Instead, as the title of the chapter indicates, I propose that most narrative films tend towards a *romantic view* of expression. The romantic view of expression in cinema that I propose is a naïve psychological understanding of facial expression and emotion which involves a set of basic assumptions. These assumptions include, but are not limited to, beliefs that faces are readouts of emotions, faces provide us reliable access to a character's interiority, and facial expressions when alone are truthful manifestations of emotion. As should be apparent, these are also assumptions that are in the neurocultural view and are very common beliefs in Western cultures. As I will develop further here, the neurocultural view does not reflect the reality of expression and emotion and is instead a theoretical elaboration of Western romantic, folk, and naïve beliefs. However, despite this, the intuitiveness and

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<sup>59</sup> Smith stages a similar thought experiment in 'Against Nature? or, Confessions of a Darwinian Modernist' (175-176).

pervasiveness of these beliefs means that they have found their way into narrative cinema. The romantic view of expression that is common in narrative cinema deviates from how expression actually appears and works in reality. Instead, it is akin to a naïve psychological understanding of faces, expression, and emotion which is grounded in a number of familiar Western assumptions about what emotions and facial expressions are. These assumptions about facial expression are intuitive, attractive, easy to learn, and lend themselves well to the requirements of narrative cinema. Thus, they have worked their way into a diverse range of narrative films, even though these assumptions mislead us about the reality of facial expression and emotion.

What do I mean by naïve psychology? In several ways, this is similar to what people usually refer to as folk psychology. I will elaborate further in this chapter on what I take naïve psychology to mean (as well as why I choose the word ‘naïve’), but this term is intended to encompass the entire range of cultural platitudes, ‘common sense’ knowledge, biases, intuitions, cultural stereotypes, and assumptions about the mental states and future actions of others. The form of naïve psychology presumed by a given film will differ with respect to genre, culture, and historical time period (for instance, a 1940s American war film might presume an understanding of certain negative stereotypes about Japanese people). Although I take naïve psychology as a general principle through which we understand the psychology and expressive capacities of fictional characters, there are a host of other factors that mediate how faces are represented in film and how viewers are likely to respond. This chapter will therefore also introduce how elements of film style, convention, and genre bear upon the representation and recognition of faces and facial expression in narrative cinema.

If I am suggesting a romantic view of expression and naïve psychology underpin the representation of faces and facial expression in narrative cinema, then how does culture fit into this picture? In chapters one and two, we saw how the production and recognition of facial expressions differs across cultures. I have suggested that these cultural differences in expression and emotion will not necessarily manifest in straightforward ways in narrative cinema. What I will argue in this chapter then is that the romantic view refers to a set of very basic assumptions about faces and facial expression.

Upon these basic assumptions, there is ample room for cultural variation and the influence of cultural-aesthetic traditions. We will look in this chapter at some examples that make this evident.

### **‘ARTISTIC TRUTH’ AND ‘OPTICAL TRUTH’ OF FACIAL EXPRESSION**

Imagine, if you will, that you are a Hollywood actor. You are in the middle of shooting your latest film. There you are on set, preparing for your next scene. The next take is your close-up. The director calls you aside. She instructs you to show your character’s joy in response to some wondrous news in this next take. What do you do? It should be safe to assert that, in all likelihood, the first thing you would do in this given situation is *smile*. Imagine the same situation, but instead the director asks you to show your response to a great injustice and for you to appear angry. This time, you might instead furrow your brow and clench your jaw, an apt and clear expression of rage you would, quite rightly, think.<sup>60</sup> However, of all the times in your life that you have felt angry, it is unlikely that on each occasion you displayed that same angered facial expression as the one you displayed at the behest of your director in this imagined scenario. It is similarly unlikely that you smiled on every single occasion that you experienced happiness.

In recent years, some psychologists have argued that clear-cut and prototypical expressions, like smiles and frowns, do not appear as frequently in reality as the neurocultural view of facial expression would lead us to believe.<sup>61</sup> José Miguel Fernández-Dols and María-Angeles Ruiz-Belda point out that several of the important studies dealing with prototypical expressions of emotion (many of which are foundational evidence for the neurocultural view) come from judgements about *posed* faces and not spontaneous expression. The assumption that these prototypical expressions actually occur spontaneously as part of clear-cut emotional experiences rests on a much smaller set of studies.

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<sup>60</sup> I appreciate that this is a gross oversimplification of directing, performance, and filmmaking – it is sufficient for our present purposes, however.

<sup>61</sup> As we saw in chapter one, the neurocultural view’s default defence against this argument is that the absence of facial expression when we would otherwise expect them is due to the pervasive influence of display rules. Though this may be true in some circumstances, this response is generally unsatisfactory and fails to account for many cases.

Indeed, in reality facial expressions of emotion are often conspicuously absent in situations in which the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory would predict that they would occur.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, if they do occur, facial expressions of emotion in these contexts seem to be more often partial rather than complete.

How might we resolve this discrepancy? Fernández-Dols and Ruiz-Belda suggest the answer lies with photography pioneer Eadweard Muybridge's study of horses. In 1872, Muybridge was commissioned to use photography to test whether horses actually galloped in the same way that artists had historically represented them. As Fernández-Dols and Ruiz-Belda describe,

Muybridge's "optically true" photographs showed the running horse with an asymmetrical, "clumsy" stride. A symmetrical and simpler stride, although fictional, has an "artistic truth" in that it communicates easily to an audience not only the physical movement but more importantly the beauty and elegance of a moving horse. (255).

Fernández-Dols and Ruiz-Belda suggest that we ought to ask the same question about facial expression as Muybridge asked about horses:

What is the actual facial behavior of a happy person, an angry person, and so on? Nothing would seem more obvious than that the answer is smiling, frowning, and so on. Like Muybridge, we suggest that this conventional answer, known to artists, actors, and everyone else throughout the ages, is wrong. (256)

Fernández-Dols and Ruiz-Belda thus argue that posed facial expressions of emotion, just like the faces you mugged for the director, represent an 'artistic truth' which is opposed to the 'optical truth' of facial expression.<sup>63</sup> This optical truth refers to the actual and spontaneous facial behaviour of a person. Hence, for Fernández-Dols and Ruiz-Belda, 'the consensual "artistic truth" that smiles convey happiness has not, so far, been shown to correspond to an "optical truth"' (264).

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<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, Kraut and Johnston's (1979) influential study of the facial expressions of ten-pin bowlers and Ruiz-Belda et al.'s expansion of this research (2003).

<sup>63</sup> Fernández-Dols and Ruiz-Belda derive this term from Anita Ventura Mozley's discussion of Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of horses.

Fernández-Dols and Ruiz-Belda implicitly link artistic truth of facial expression with the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory, and optical truth of facial expression with the behavioural ecology view. Considered in this way, asking participants in a psychology experiment to recognise emotions from posed facial expressions (as research supporting the neurocultural view typically has done) merely replicates an ‘artistic’ understanding of facial expression which lacks ecological validity and fails to explain how facial expressions actually function in real-world situations. Yet, even if in reality people do not necessarily display expressions such as smiles, frowns, and other prototypical facial expressions of emotion when we might expect them to, these expressions still do unquestionably possess an ‘artistic truth’. That is, if an actor, painter, sculptor, cartoonist, and so forth set out to show an emotion like happiness in the clearest and simplest way, then it would be hard to dispute the idea that a smiling face is the most appropriate way to depict this.<sup>64</sup> The messy reality of facial expressions as facilitated by social interaction appears to differ from what we understand of prototypical expressions of emotion, but this does not render either prototypical or ‘artistic’ expressions as unrecognisable or expressively inert. In fact, it is the opposite; it stands to reason that artistic expressions or prototypical expressions are more recognisable and will be perceived as being of greater intensity than optically true facial expression. At first glance, this might not make sense. Would we not expect human behaviour to maximise the recognisability of expressions in real-world situations?

Psychologist Rainer Reisenzein offers one way of addressing this question. Reisenzein is also sceptical of the coherence between emotion and facial expressions; based on laboratory experiments, he notes that there is often a dissociation between emotion and facial expression, a claim which puts him at odds with the neurocultural view (‘Emotional Coherence’ 16). In one particular study, Reisenzein et al. reviewed evidence from eight experiments that examined the facial expression of surprise (‘Evidence for Strong Dissociation’). The eight experiments under review all involved eliciting surprise in participants and recording their response in laboratory settings. Reisenzein et al. found that self-reports and behavioural measures suggested that almost all of the participants experienced surprise

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<sup>64</sup> Of course, as far as art goes, it would be a fairly uninteresting depiction of happiness. I am also not suggesting that art seeks to always show emotions in the clearest and simplest way possible either.

across these experiments, and yet prototypical expressions of surprise were observed only in between 4%–25% of the participants. Most facial displays were of eyebrow raising only, whilst the full prototypical display, as Ekman and Friesen's Facial Action Coding System (FACS) propose, was never seen.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, participants still believed that they displayed the full prototypical display of surprise, even when they did not. As James M Carroll and James A Russell note, this leads us to a paradox: 'The evidence associating facial patterns with emotions is very weak; the belief that facial patterns are associated with emotions is very strong' (174).

To respond to this paradox, Reisenzein et al. suggest that the research of the Affect Program Theory (APT) (a term that the authors use as more or less synonymous with the neurocultural view of facial expression) are 'first and foremost studies of *folk-psychological* beliefs about the association between emotions and facial displays' (295, emphasis added). Thus, the folk beliefs at the heart of the APT do not represent the actual association between emotions and facial expressions, but instead reflect their association in '*ideal-type* cases', wherein 'all the components of the emotion syndrome are present' (295). As a consequence, truly prototypical or ideal-type expressions of emotion will infrequently actually manifest in reality. This position offers a response to some of the criticisms made against the neurocultural view, namely, why prototypical facial expressions are often absent in situations in which we would expect them to appear, without going as extreme as Alan Fridlund's proposal that there is no significant relationship between felt emotion and facial expression.

These '*ideal-type*' expressions that Reisenzein proposes, though rarely exemplified in everyday life, can be – and are – exemplified to a great degree in narrative cinema. By tending to represent these ideal-type expressions and generally upholding the notion that faces reliably inform us about a character's interiority and subjectivity, film therefore embodies certain folk or naïve psychological beliefs about the association between emotions and facial displays. Even though they are inaccurate or misleading, these folk or naïve beliefs clearly hold considerable sway in our perception of expression

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<sup>65</sup> The FACS assigns an 'action unit' to each muscular movement of the face so that emotional expressions can be broken down into component parts (e.g. sadness involves action units 1, 4 and 15). See Ekman and Friesen's *Manual for the facial action code* (1978).

and emotion in reality; in the aforementioned studies on surprise, participants frequently *believed* that they displayed a strong, prototypical facial expression of surprise, even when they did not. Contrary to what the neurocultural view might suggest, the absence of the surprise expression in these studies was not sufficient to infer that someone was not surprised. However, when the facial expression of surprise was present, it reliably indicated that people were surprised.

Allow me to clarify the argument that I am putting forward in this chapter. For the most part, when scholars have discussed psychological views of facial expression in relation to film, they follow a line of reasoning like this:

1. The neurocultural view of facial expression is true.
2. Therefore, the neurocultural view can be used to understand facial expression in film.

This argument proceeds from the belief that the neurocultural view accurately captures how facial expression functions in reality and how we come to recognise and believe things from facial expressions. If we accept the criticisms that I have raised against the neurocultural view and agree that it is not a fully convincing account of expression and emotion, then we cannot follow this line of reasoning. But then we are left with a problem: many of the claims of the neurocultural view do, at least superficially, appear to work well in understanding faces and facial expression in narrative cinema. That is, characters' faces are ordinarily represented as accurate readouts of their interiority and emotions whilst cinema is full of facial expressions which viewers can intuitively recognise and respond to. How can we explain this gap? Here is what I propose:

1. The neurocultural view is not true. The neurocultural view is chiefly an elaboration of folk views of expression and emotion. It therefore endorses misleading, naïve, and romantic beliefs about human psychology.
2. Narrative cinema generally represents human expressive behaviour in accordance with folk, naïve, and romantic beliefs about human psychology.
3. Therefore, the psychological research of the neurocultural view can tell us something about how viewers recognise and understand characters and their interactions from their expressions in film.

We have considered a number of criticisms of the neurocultural view to this point. I align with these criticisms in holding that the neurocultural view posits a theory of emotion and expression which mainly replicates Western folk beliefs about facial expressions and their relationship with emotion. The research of the neurocultural view thus may mislead us about the nature of emotions and expression in reality, but it can reveal a great deal about our understanding about emotion and expression in art (which often rests atop naïve, romantic, and folk beliefs). For instance, as we saw in the previous chapter with Russell's Minimal Universality, the neurocultural view's research can show that humans across the globe can recognise certain expressions and link them with specific emotions at a rate higher than chance. But this fact does not necessarily mean that when we feel an emotion that we invariably display the expression associated with that emotion. Arguing that the neurocultural view is wrong does not mean that all the empirical research in support of this position cannot tell us anything; we can learn a lot about a sort of 'folk epistemology' of emotion and expression from this kind of research. This is particularly useful for an understanding of filmmaking and film viewing, but we should hesitate before endorsing the wider claims of the neurocultural view.

Ironically then, the research of the neurocultural view – which has historically used posed, prototypical close-ups of facial expressions of emotion without any other cues – can tell us less about real-world expression but can be applied quite readily to our understanding of filmic facial expression. As I argued at the start of chapter one, experiments that are artificially limited to information from a single channel (photographs of posed facial expressions in isolation) share a greater kinship with our experience of faces in film than it does to our quotidian experience of human facial behaviour.<sup>66</sup> This move also allows us to head off the objection that any insights gleaned from scientific research making claims on real-world human behaviour will tell us little about how we perceive, recognise, and respond to faces in film. It is apparent that naïve psychological beliefs – even though they may be misleading

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<sup>66</sup> It should be acknowledged that narrative films rarely, if ever, limit our perception of faces to a single channel of information. As will be discussed later in this chapter, contextual information is provided through several other elements such as editing, sound, lighting, narrative, and so forth.

as a complete account of emotional expression ‘in the wild’ – clearly still hold a lot of sway over how people think about expression and emotion.

This leads us to the central claim that I am putting forward in this chapter: narrative cinema presents a *romantic view* of human expression.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, this romantic view is rooted in entrenched Western ideals about emotion. Why am I using the word romantic to describe this? There are a few ways in which we might think of this view as romantic. First, there is the Rousseauian notion that we have ‘authentic’ selves, which are tamped down by social control. When it comes to facial expression, we see this in the form of display rules which lead us to inhibit or mask our facial expressions of emotion. Facial expressions are involuntary manifestations of our inner selves, but they manifest fully only when we are free from social inhibitions. Second, our passions are physically and involuntarily manifested through our bodies or, as Mitchell Green puts it, facial expressions are ‘emanations’ of what is within (127). Psychologists Dacher Keltner and Jennifer S Lerner offer the similar claim that Western theories of emotion have been guided by the ‘*Romanticism thesis* which dates back to Plato and found its clearest expression in the writings of Rousseau. The romanticism thesis holds that emotions are powerful, involuntary forces ...’ (317). Third, the view under discussion is ‘romantic’ in that it focuses on the *individual* as an expressive agent. In the previous chapter, we noted that Westerners tend to perceive facial expressions as spontaneous manifestations of an *individual’s* inner feelings. Equally, we saw in chapter one that the neurocultural view (as a romantic account of expression) places significantly less emphasis on the recipient of an expression and greater emphasis on the expresser.

There is one more problem leftover: although narrative cinema may represent ideal-type and highly prototypical expressions, this is clearly not always the case. As in reality, characters are also

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<sup>67</sup> In some ways, my claim builds upon a hypothesis previously made by Tan. Tan has argued ‘first, that *in traditional narrative film, basic emotions are expressed in accordance with the theory of universal facial expression and that the expression is exaggerated to some extent*, compared to some norm from everyday life. Second, that this typical use of facial *expression enhances both recognition and amusement* in the viewer’ (‘Three Views’ 111, emphasis original).

likely to show *partial* expressions of emotions. In a particularly remarkable piece of research, Carroll and Russell surveyed four well-known Hollywood films which are generally acclaimed for their performances: *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), *Ordinary People* (1980), *Terms of Endearment* (1983), and *Dead Poets Society* (1989). Their study sought to critique the neurocultural view through identifying how often prototypical facial expressions of emotion (as measured by the Facial Action Coding System) actually accompany a basic emotion within these films.<sup>68</sup> Carroll and Russell found that prototypical expressions appeared rarely in these four Hollywood films. Instead, just like in the experiments Reisenzein et al. examined, facial expressions were often partial.

How does this square with my claim that narrative cinema tends to represent ideal-type expressions? I propose we can account for this through considering the ‘Componential Model’ of facial expression. As Craig A Smith and Heather S Scott argue, we can think of the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory as postulating a ‘Categorical Model’ (230). To explain, take the facial expression of surprise. The FACS codes the expression of surprise as comprising of Facial Action Units 1+2+5B+26. According to Smith and Scott, the Categorical Model holds that these individual facial units are ‘essentially meaningless’ in isolation (230). In other words, seeing a person show Action Units 1+2 (raised eyebrows) alone would be insufficient to infer anything meaningful about their emotional state; because both fear and surprise involve raising the eyebrows, you would not know whether they are surprised or scared. By contrast, the Componential Model hypothesises that ‘rather than being arbitrary and meaningless, at least some of the individual components contributing to a given facial expression are inherently meaningful’ (230-231). Thus,

the fact that the prototypical expressions of fear and surprise share raised eyebrows and widely opened eyes indicates something about the properties that these states share – possibly that the person experiencing either emotion is uncertain about some aspect of his or her circumstances and is actively attending to the environment in an attempt to reduce that uncertainty. (231)

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<sup>68</sup> In this study, the basic emotions were the traditional six: happiness, anger, sadness, surprise, fear, and disgust.

Under the Componential Model then, partial expressions are still meaningful. Carroll and Russell offer a useful analogy to explain this model. Imagine being asked to show ‘thinking’ or ‘being in a state of thought’. You might scratch your head, stroke your chin, say ‘hmm’, narrow your eyes, direct your gaze up and to the side, and so forth. These actions will not necessarily occur when you are actually thinking and certainly not all in combination, but in order to communicate ‘thinking’ clearly, then you perform *all* these individual components of how thinking can be made perceivable because, together, they will surely imply ‘thinking’. For facial expression then, the individual components or signs of an emotion will not necessarily appear in all cases, but we can still infer meaning from the display of *individual components*. If *all* components of an emotion or internal state are displayed, then it will make the expression as easy to recognise as possible.

The Componential Model asserts that we can infer meaning about and recognise emotions and internal states from not just ideal-type expressions, but also partial or incomplete expressions as well. Thus, there are several choices available when it comes to representing facial expression in cinema: films can not only show ideal-type forms of facial expression, but also exaggerate, emphasise, stylise, or modify the *individual components* that are expressive of certain emotions or internal states. Facial expressions in cinema can therefore appear quite different to facial expressions in reality, but this does not negatively impact upon our capacity to recognise such expressions (and, as we will see, may enhance this capacity). This is also one way in which cultural differences come into play; the individual components that constitute an emotion or internal state might differ across cultures (although there may be some commonalities). Furthermore, different cultural and artistic traditions can emphasise different expressive components. We will see some examples of this in the next chapter when we look at anime.

### **FOLK PSYCHOLOGY, THE ROMANTIC VIEW AND NARRATIVE CINEMA**

As I have set out the argument thus far, narrative filmmaking assumes a romantic view of facial expression; it does not necessarily present us with ‘optical truth’ but ‘artistic truth’, a recognisable but amplified and simplified version of reality. It likely does not matter if facial expressions represented in narrative film are optically true. That is, facial expressions do not need to appear as they would in reality to be recognisable and to elicit viewer responses. Given this, it is worth stressing again that theorising

about facial expression in films need not get bogged down in the precise nature of what expressions actually express or actually are. We can therefore (for the most part) remain neutral on the ontological status of facial expressions. Instead, if we are talking about facial expression in film, we are better off focusing on the fact that people understand facial expressions to express emotions and that they react in light of this fact. To reiterate Reizenzein's point, the one-to-one association between facial expressions and emotion may be poorly reflected in our ordinary experience, but it remains a strongly held folk-psychological belief in many cultures and thus finds its way into narrative cinema.

As a result, we might get closer to the fact of the matter for filmic faces by thinking in terms of *folk psychology*. This is by no means a novel approach in cognitive film theory. Scholars have often appealed to forms of folk psychology in order to conceptualise both filmmaking and film viewing. Construed in the broadest fashion, folk psychology refers to a human capacity to predict and explain the behaviour of others as well as attribute mental states to other people. It remains, however, a highly contested term and means significantly different things in different disciplines. Whereas philosophers have typically pursued a narrower conception of folk psychology, its usage in film theory has typically seen it understood in a far broader sense.<sup>69</sup> Carl Plantinga, Per Persson, Michael Z Newman, and Jeff Smith have all argued for the important role that folk psychology has for both filmmaking and spectatorship. Persson understands it as 'a naïve, common-sense "theory" about the constituents and common processes of the psyche and how these are related to actions and behavior' (163). Plantinga's more expansive use of folk psychology encompasses 'untutored or intuitive psychology' and 'includes all of the diverse tenets of intuitive or commonsense psychology, including elements that are more culturally and historically variable and with strong moral and ideological implications'. (28) According to Plantinga, the folk psychological model accounts for what he terms the 'filmmaker-audience loop', which refers to the common assumptions about human psychology and behaviour shared by filmmakers

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<sup>69</sup> I will not offer a full summary of the different ways in which folk psychology can be understood. See the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entries on 'Folk Psychology as a Theory' by Ian Ravenscroft and 'Folk Psychology as Mental Simulation' by Luca Barlassina and Robert M Gordon for an overview of how folk psychology has been discussed in philosophy.

and audiences. These shared assumptions allow filmmakers to predict spectator response and for spectators to understand characters. Jeff Smith follows a similar line of argument and an equally broad construal:

Filmmakers design their products to produce particular kinds of cognitive and emotional responses from spectators, and in doing so, they assume that audiences will employ certain types of inferential routines when they engage with the film's characters and situation. Filmmakers make guesses about how viewers will respond to their work ... through more commonsensical assumptions regarding the mental habits that people have when they try to understand another person's thoughts, motivations, intentions and emotions. (484)

And, finally, Newman claims that 'audiovisual representations do not merely reproduce folk psychology; they exploit it' (55).

I am proposing here that if we wish to understand how we come to believe things from faces in cinema, then we are better off focusing on what science can tell us about naïve assumptions about what faces mean. Although this may make folk psychology a natural way of exploring this, I will eschew using this term due to its unnecessary baggage. Within film theory at least, appealing to folk psychology has been met with suspicion for concealing sociocultural difference. Put another way, folk psychology is just a euphemistic way of describing mere prejudice. As Robert Stam asks, 'In the contemporary era, is there any unalloyed "folk" consensus that joins rich and poor, black and white, male and female?' (241). I appreciate Stam's concern here in that folk psychology could be construed as erasing the inequality of lived experiences of individuals within a given culture. We can see this exemplified well by what Dan Flory identifies as divergent viewer responses to Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989). In the climax of the film, an Italian American pizzeria owner, Sal (Danny Aiello), loses his temper and in the heat of the moment unleashes a torrent of racist invectives towards a black character. To this point, Sal has been a relatively sympathetic character. Flory notes that many white viewers having watched this film fail to see Sal as a racist, but rather a non-racist who when pushed to breaking point acts *like* a racist ('Spike Lee' 70). By contrast, nonwhite viewers see Sal unambiguously as a racist. Flory's case study presents divergent responses between white and nonwhite viewers with regards to

predictions made from a character's behaviour. According to Flory, nonwhite viewers may identify Sal as a racist *because* he behaves like a racist in this moment, whereas white viewers may believe Sal is not a racist *in spite of the fact* that he behaves like a racist in this moment. In this case, viewers of different sociocultural backgrounds follow different inferential routes to explain Sal's behaviour.

In response to this criticism, it is worth noting what Persson and Plantinga claim: they are both very clear that folk psychology is a *cultural* model that varies with respect to cultural context and historical period. Endorsing folk psychology does not entail believing, as Stam puts it, that people of all races, classes, and genders think alike. It remains the case though that if I am to emphasise the role of culture, then it would be remiss to wed myself needlessly to a concept which carries certain negative associations to the culturalist. Instead, I will propose that we employ *naïve psychology* in narrative filmmaking. I believe this term more accurately reflects the nature of our psychological engagement with fictional narrative films and the characters therein. Naïve psychology, as I consider it here, similarly involves our capacity to attribute mental states to others as well as predict and explain behaviour on the basis of these presumed mental states. However, taking a cue from Plantinga's conception of folk psychology, this includes many biases, culturally specific assumptions, and platitudes as well as unexamined stereotypes and prejudices about expression and emotion. Opting for the term naïve I think also draws attention to the fact that we are willingly lazy psychologists when engaging with fiction and therefore more likely to make naïve assumptions about characters. By this I mean that we will generally follow the easiest inferential routes when it comes to understanding a character and narratives. As I will discuss later, this can take the form of, for instance, making judgements based merely on a character's appearance and face. It would be naïve to make such inferences about someone's personality, thoughts, motivations, and intentions from their face alone in reality, but this is a very normal thing for us to do when watching narrative films.

Naïve psychology can encompass not merely assumptions about the mental states and future actions of others, but also an understanding of how biases and cultural stereotypes lead us to make judgements and inferences about others. There are a number of conventions in film that are generated by this sort of thinking. For starters, Hollywood filmmaking could be said to perpetuate, at the very

least historically if not contemporarily, culturally specific racial or gender stereotypes such as ‘Women are more expressive and emotional than men’ or ‘East Asians are inexpressive and inscrutable’. Conversely, we might consider stereotypes from East Asia about North Americans. For instance, Japanese anime often portrays a stereotype like ‘People from the US are loud and demonstrative’. There are no doubt several other conventions and stereotypes that will determine the expressive behaviour of characters in narrative cinema; for example, James Naremore notes that ‘Hollywood in the studio period usually required that supporting players, ethnic minorities, and women act in more vividly expressive fashion than white male leads’ (51). When it comes to faces and facial expressions, there are also a number of different cognitive-cultural biases which we might consider. For instance, there is evidence from research on impression formation that gender determines how North Americans use facial expressions as a cue for evaluating a person’s traits: when women smile, they are perceived more positively on traits related to warmth than men (Hack 566-567).

In chapter one, I asked how a film might show us that a character is lying. For a number of reasons, lying will not have an easily perceivable form of expression. If a fiction film wishes to indicate that a character is lying then, it might instead rely upon certain stereotypes and unrefined ideas about what lying looks like (e.g. shifting eyes, moving head a lot, touching of the head or face, inconstant facial expressions). In reality, these are not good indicators that a person is lying, but we understand that these behaviours in fiction are intended to demonstrate unambiguously (though defeasibly) that a character is lying.

It is apparent that cinema endorses many naïve assumptions about emotion, expression, and faces which do not correspond directly to how these work in ordinary scenarios. As has been stated, faces in film function as readouts of a character’s emotional state and spontaneous manifestations of their inner feelings. I will furnish this claim in a moment with some examples of films that make this particularly apparent and we shall see throughout this thesis other ways in which films embrace naïve psychology and a romantic view of expression. Given that this model of naïve psychology relies upon unexamined stereotypes and platitudes, the specific nature of the psychology that film presumes is going to differ based upon the cultural and historical context in which a work is created. As Per Persson

remarks, folk psychology is a cultural or social schema circulating in a given society and it is crucial to stress its cultural aspect given that its structure and organisation may vary as a result (163).<sup>70</sup>

Thus far, I have been making the argument that narrative cinema typically endorses a romantic view of expression in abstract terms, so let us turn to some cases that demonstrate this tendency. It is easy to find examples of this in mainstream Western narrative filmmaking, which characteristically assumes (both implicitly and explicitly) romantic notions of facial expression and emotion. Pixar's *Inside Out* (2015) and its modelling of the human mind provides an exemplary case. *Inside Out* takes as its setting the mind of an eleven-year-old girl called Riley. The plot of the film is instigated by Riley and her parents moving from Minnesota to San Francisco. In San Francisco, Riley finds it hard to adjust to her new life, and the film shows us how this struggle plays out within her mind. In the world of *Inside Out*, the mind of every character contains five personified emotions: Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust. These anthropomorphised emotions together inhabit a 'control centre' that regulates the thoughts and behaviour of a person (quite literally through a command console). Emotions are thus portrayed as discrete entities, each of which has clearly identifiable patterns of behaviour. When a particular emotion is 'piloting' the person through the command console, we see the person act in accordance with the expected pattern of behaviour associated with each emotion, which includes the display of prototypical facial expressions.

Rather tellingly, Dacher Keltner and Paul Ekman (as we have seen, both major proponents of the neurocultural view and basic emotion theory) served as consultants for the film. The modelling of Ekman's theory in the storyworld of *Inside Out* reinforces many of the folk and romantic ideas central to his theory: emotions are innate to all humans; emotions and their expression are involuntary and they are things that happen to us; they are discrete, natural kinds; and emotions produce a specific pattern of behaviour. The fact that a simplified rendering of Ekman's theory lends itself so well to a family film again speaks to the intuitive and romantic appeal of the neurocultural view; I have a very hard time imagining Pixar making a film based upon Fridlund's behavioural ecology view. Of course, this is a

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<sup>70</sup> It should also be noted that, though all cultures will have some form of folk psychology, empirical research on folk psychology outside of the West is comparatively minimal.

mainstream fictional animated family film, I am by no means suggesting we need to demand it represent the mind with utmost (or any) scientific accuracy. This is in no way a significant flaw of the film either; *Inside Out* imparts fairly positive, nuanced messages about the function and nature of both positive and negative emotions. Nevertheless, mainstream and globally popular fictional narrative films like *Inside Out* offer good reflections of how Westerners think about emotions and expressions and how these beliefs can be disseminated through cinema.

This romantic view of emotion and expression, which is intertwined with the neurocultural view and many of Ekman's claims, is not only evoked by mainstream Hollywood filmmaking. Although it would be foolish to expect a high degree of scientific accuracy from a mainstream family film, we might expect slightly more rigour from the realm of science fiction. In Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014), an independent British production released in cinemas the same year as *Inside Out*, Ava (Alicia Vikander) is a humanoid robot who is shown to be capable of accurately discerning minor details from the face to infer the thoughts and emotions of others. In a conversation with Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), a human interactant, it is made apparent that Ava can perceive and identify emotions and attitudes that Caleb himself is unaware that he is expressing:

AVA. Are you attracted to me? You give indications that you are.

CALEB. ... I do?

AVA. Yes.

CALEB. How?

AVA. Micro expressions.

As the conversation progresses, micro expressions are invoked again: 'Now your micro expressions are telegraphing discomfort', Ava states matter-of-factly.<sup>71</sup> 'Telegraphing' echoes the notion that facial expressions are 'readouts' of inner states and, once more, we encounter the claim central to the neurocultural view that faces involuntarily reveal our inner states, attitudes, or thoughts. Caleb in this scene is physically incapable of disguising his underlying emotions or attitudes from the artificial

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<sup>71</sup> There are several more references to micro expressions in the screenplay, but these are not in the final cut of the film (see '*Ex Machina* screenplay')

intelligence of Ava, one of many moments throughout the film intended to communicate to the viewer Ava's advanced programming and her highly sophisticated social perception and cognition. The reference to micro expressions here also resonates with Ekman's claims that, given some training and the harnessing of natural talent, individuals are capable of distinguishing real from simulated emotional expressions and discerning whether expressions are being masked. As a science fiction film, a viewer might expect slightly more scientific rigour from *Ex Machina* or, alternatively, take its implicit claims about human expressive behaviour and emotion slightly more seriously than, say, *Inside Out*.

So far, I have only put forward contemporary Western films as evidence of this romantic tendency. What about films beyond this category? We can return here to the film with which we started: the Japanese New Wave film *The Face of Another*. James Quandt refers to this film as 'a masterful amalgam of high international modernism ... and traditional Japanese fine arts' ('Double Vision'), a considerable cultural distance from mainstream Hollywood fare like *Inside Out* then. To recap, when the film begins, Okuyama has his face covered in bandages after a severe industrial accident. Eventually, Okuyama comes to acquire 'the face of another'; a psychiatrist provides him with a 'lifelike mask' and, sure enough, after acquiring his new face, Okuyama finds himself changed in both behaviour and personality. With his 'true face' hidden beneath a lifelike mask, the world no longer has access to Okuyama. The story thus plays out as an anxious rumination on the consequences of losing one's face and acquiring that of another whilst many of the scenes consist of characters philosophising the role that faces, masks, and appearances play in shaping identity and the self. Despite the film's modernist sensibility, it still seems to assume a number of familiar romantic and naïve beliefs concerning the ways in which faces connect to inner experience. I began the thesis with a quotation from Okuyama in which he relates a number of platitudes, for instance, 'The face is the door to the soul. When the face is closed off, so too is the soul. Nobody is allowed inside'. The narrative of the film certainly appears to align with Okuyama's viewpoint. Just as the 'soul' is revealed through the face, the face is a constitutive part of the self. Okuyama is no longer himself after he loses his face for it 'closes off' the route inside.

Let us consider another example from Japanese cinema. In characterising the films of Ozu, Western scholars have often imposed abstract notions of ‘Japaneseness’ onto his films. For instance, as noted by Bordwell, Western scholars frequently invoke the Japanese aesthetic concept of *mono no aware* in discussions of Ozu (*Ozu* 28). *Mono no aware* is best translated as ‘the pathos of things’. For Ozu’s films, instead of showing emotions play out across the faces of characters, emotions would be expressed by showing the ‘faces’ of things.<sup>72</sup> This sort of approach to Ozu at times hinges on a fairly reductive notion of ‘Japaneseness’ and belies the fact that there are plenty of instances where he adopts a far more ‘straightforward’ rendering of emotion through the face. As Donald Richie suggests, ‘For Ozu the face was always the most important part of the character ... the face, and particularly the eyes, that counted the most. Often, in his later films, the actors were directed not to move their faces. All their emotions had to appear in the eyes alone.’ (152). As one of his later films, *Tokyo Story* (1953) offers us a good example of this in the funeral scene. Keizō is at the funeral of his mother. He cannot bear the ceremony any longer and he leaves to sit in an adjacent room. Alone, his face barely moves whilst his



Fig. 9. Keizō Hirayama (Shirō Ōsaka) at the funeral of his mother in Yasujiro Ozu’s *Tokyo Story* (1953).

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<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the best-known and frequently discussed example of this in Ozu’s films is a sustained shot of a vase towards the end of *Late Spring* (1949).

eyes fill with tears as he looks out across the graves outside (fig. 9). This is another demonstration of some of those romantic beliefs about expression and emotion: the faces we make when we are alone are expressions of our true feelings and our faces are reflections of our interiority. There are some clear ways in which Ozu's films deviate from mainstream, Western filmmaking, but yet they still assume a reasonably similar basic understanding of how faces work as readouts of emotion. Granted, Ozu acknowledges that *Tokyo Story* is perhaps his most 'melodramatic' film (Bordwell, *Ozu* 330) and thus this scene may not be strictly typical of Ozu and how he represents expression and emotion. Nonetheless, *Tokyo Story* is melodramatic only in comparison to Ozu's other films; relative to a Hollywood melodrama, it is decidedly muted in tone. This scene also provides us a good example of how films might represent partial expressions by isolating individual 'components' that are expressive of certain emotions. Keizō's face in this scene does not fully resemble a prototypical expression of sadness, but the performance of sadness here takes a specific facet of sadness and, to borrow Richie's phrasing, makes the emotion appear in the eyes alone.

This may sound like I am advocating that culture has a negligible impact on how faces and expression are represented in cinema, but this is not the case. As I have stated, the romantic view refers to a set of very basic common assumptions in narrative cinema. On top of this, cultural background can shape the creative choices made in *how* to express emotions and internal states. That is, filmmakers and actors are faced with numerous choices when it comes to representing a character's emotions or internal state. The cultural background of individual creative agents can conceivably weight this decision-making towards certain outcomes. For instance, as noted in the previous chapter, there is an ever-growing body of evidence that individuals from East Asian cultures fixate upon the eye region to determine the emotional content of facial expression to a greater extent than individuals from Western cultures.<sup>73</sup> In the case of Ozu then, this is not to say that his decisions on how to represent emotion are determined by his cultural background; individual creative agents can make creative choices that cut against the grain of culture and artistic convention. There is something of a tradition in Japanese visual

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<sup>73</sup> See Haensel et al., Jack et al., and Senju et al.

media in particular to emphasise the eyes as vehicles of emotion. The fact that East Asian cultures fixate upon the eyes to recognise emotion therefore just offers part of an explanation for *why* a pattern like this emerges; the eyes (as an individual component which is expressive of different emotions and internal states) are conventionally 'weightier'. Ultimately, films across different cultures may represent faces in accordance with certain very basic principles, but this still leaves ample room for both cultural and idiosyncratic variation.

We have looked at a range of films that provide support for the central claim of this chapter that many narrative films assume a romantic view of expression. I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong about these films and how they represent expression and emotion, but rather regard them as further evidence of the attractive intuitiveness of specific psychological beliefs. It would of course be difficult to understand characters in films if their facial behaviour actually resembled what people do in reality. Likewise, it would rob narrative cinema of a great deal of its dramatic heft if this were the case. I also fully accept that there are cases of narrative films which do not offer *any* sort of significant access to characters through faces. However, though we may be more limited in what we can infer and know from faces in such films, this does not mean that we switch off our predisposition to find meaning and understanding from faces when we are watching a film. The inferences that we make will be more tentative and our knowledge more provisional, but faces still remain vital to our understanding.

To this point, I have been focusing on how cinema represents faces and facial expression in accordance with certain basic assumptions. However, there is much more to say about the nature of representations of faces and the sorts of things viewers believe or come to believe from these representations. Barring the use of an insidious hidden optical device, we are not normally privy to the facial expressions of those who are alone, but it is commonplace in film to have situations in which the only observer of an individual character's facial expression is the viewer. In these situations, the communication to the audience goes beyond a purely mimetic representation of reality and presents an act of expression that does not quite have a clear analogue or equivalent in reality. As we discussed in chapter one, people do oftentimes make facial expressions when alone, however, the intensity of these

expressions is ordinarily diminished. In film, however, facial expressions of characters in solitude have an implicit recipient (i.e. the viewer) so will frequently be intensified for the sake of clarity and expressiveness. We can perhaps conceive of two basic scenarios for filmic expression. On the one hand, situations where characters' expressions are directed to other characters within the diegesis, and thereby indirectly to the audience. In this case, we witness characters in conversation or dialogue, but we are aware that their expressive behaviour is modified by this fact. In this scenario, we might also be attuned to the strategic nature of expression between two or more characters, recognising that their expressions reflect not only their goals in a given situation, but also the social context, their intended future actions, and their relationship with the characters with whom they are interacting (we will focus on such an example of this in chapter five).

On the other hand, there are those situations where a character's expression is not intentionally directed to another character within the diegesis and is observable only by the viewer. In more unconventional cases, this could take a literal form of a direct address to the camera, in a moment of 'breaking the fourth wall'. In the standard case, however, the viewer is to believe that, by virtue of lacking a recipient within the diegesis, the character's facial expression is a 'truthful' manifestation of their cognitive, affective, or qualitative state. As discussed by Plantinga in relation to his conception of the 'scene of empathy', sometimes these moments of characters expressing emotions when they are alone can function as important triggers for viewers' empathic responses to facial expression. We see here another means through which a romantic view of expression is embodied in film narratives. That is, in suggesting that characters' faces are often liable to reveal 'true' emotions when they are alone, cinema assumes the neurocultural view's claim that facial expressions are spontaneous, involuntary, and accurate readouts of an internal emotional state when uninfluenced by display rules.

Nonetheless, there is more complexity to our response to characters' faces that must be acknowledged. In watching films, viewers typically hold a background awareness of their artefactual nature and know that its contents have, in most cases, been specifically selected. Murray Smith has argued that we might think of our response towards characters as marked by 'twofoldness'. Expanding upon Wollheim's conception of the term, Smith explains twofoldness as a response to character that

takes them to be simultaneously like real people and yet also fictional constructs ('Twofoldness' 279).<sup>74</sup> Crucially, following Wollheim, Smith argues that we are aware of both levels *at the same time*. The most significant way that this manifests itself in film is that we are simultaneously aware of both the performer and the character who they are embodying. For facial expression, the fact that we are aware that characters are fictional constructs entails a background awareness that the expressions and gestures we see have been selected to communicate *something* about a character's emotional state, beliefs, intentions, goals, or personality. Unlike in real life, it is perfectly valid to make judgements, inferences, and assumptions from any and all the gestures and expressions of characters that we perceive.

However, just because there are some dissimilarities between what we understand from expression and emotion in fiction and reality does not mean we need to be totally sceptical about this relationship. Greg Currie writes that 'when we learn something about a fictional character because the work itself tells or suggests it, this is not at all like learning something about someone in the real world by casual observation. For what the fiction tells us comes labeled as having a special evidential relevance; we are told this *for a reason*' ('Capacities' 296). Currie is right that we might think more carefully in fiction about the significance of certain behaviours or we are more likely to attribute behaviour to disposition (as we saw with the fundamental attribution error in the previous chapter). However, we need not go as far as Currie does in claiming that 'understanding real people and understanding fictional ... characters are very different activities' ('Capacities' 296). One problem with this position is that it assumes that different media and artforms show or suggest things about fictive persons in the same way. To clarify, Currie's claims seems to work well for novels in which, indeed, it is often the case that we are told that things are the case about characters. There is a relevant difference here between showing and telling. Films often do resemble real world interactions in that we learn things about characters through observation. An omniscient narrator in a novel might state that 'Alice is an angry person' and we come to believe that the character Alice is quick to anger through the fact that we are told this. In a film, however, we could come to believe that the character Alice is an angry

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<sup>74</sup> In Wollheim's account of depiction, his 'twofold thesis' refers to our *simultaneous* visual awareness of both the surface and of the represented object in pictorial representations (213)

person through observing ourselves that Alice is quick to fly into a rage by perceiving her anger. If Alice were a real person, the way in which we would come to an understanding of Alice's personality is remarkably similar to the film example. Of course, upon reflection, we may be aware that the film's narration is showing us that Alice is an angry person for a reason, but I hold that this is generally not at the forefront of the ordinary viewer's mind in the experience of watching films.

### NAÏVE PHYSIOGNOMY AND STEREOTYPES

This leads us to another significant way in which we come to believe things about characters through the representation of faces. I suggested earlier that part of the naïve psychology of cinema relates to how viewers typically follow the easiest inferential route to make judgements of characters. In this regard, we often make judgements about characters based on what their faces look like, and this practice is actively encouraged by film narratives and narration. As noted in the introduction, physiognomic theories revolve around the idea that a person's face reveals their character and moral fibre; Johann Kaspar Lavater, the most notorious pioneer of physiognomy, claims that, 'The moral life of man, particularly, reveals itself in the lines, marks, and transitions of the countenance' (9). Physiognomy is rightly condemned as a pseudoscience and is historically associated with racist, sexist, classist, and eugenicist discourses. However, it remains true that humans are highly susceptible to making snap judgements and inferences about a person's character from their face. As Alexander Todorov, one of the foremost researchers in this area, notes, 'We may poke fun at the physiognomists' ideas, but the modern science of first impressions shows that we are all naïve physiognomists. We form instantaneous impressions of others from their facial appearance' ('Can We Read'). Modern psychologists thus argue that humans tend to make assumptions about a person's traits from their face, but these assumptions are not very reliable.<sup>75</sup> The questions that researchers in this field ask then are: what is the nature of these judgements from faces? How do they arise? What sort of faces prompt what sort of inferences? And why do humans still make these judgements even though they are generally inaccurate?

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<sup>75</sup> See Todorov's *Face Value: The Irresistible Influence of First Impressions* (2017) for an account of this research.

Of course, we are talking about fictional characters here. It therefore does not matter whether inferences from faces in actuality are correct, only that they are made in the first place and also that filmmakers assume that viewers make these inferences. Received wisdom in Western and English-speaking cultures ordinarily advises against making judgements based upon the appearance of others ('do not judge a book by its cover', 'appearances can be deceiving', 'beauty is only skin deep'). We may find similar examples of proverbs and platitudes from many non-Western cultures, but consider a few East Asian examples: from China, 'You may draw a tiger's skin, not his bones. You may know a man's face, but not his mind' and from Japan, 'Even a monkey may appear to advantage when dressed up' or 'a person is not always what he appears to be'. These sorts of platitudes may also take the reverse form, that a harmless looking person may also be a wrongdoer: we should watch out for 'wolves in sheep's clothing,' whilst a Japanese proverb admonishes 'When you see someone, assume that he's a thief'.

So conventional wisdom – across many cultures – tells us that we ought not make judgements (both negative and positive) from a person's appearance. Cinema more often than not fully endorses such behaviour though. We are frequently encouraged to make inferences about a character's personality based on their appearance.<sup>76</sup> The fact that, unlike in our ordinary lives, there are not going to be any significant negative costs to incorrectly made inferences likewise encourages us to carry out this behaviour as film viewers. Filmmakers will often presume that viewers will take the least cognitively demanding route and therefore make rapid and intuitive inferences about characters based on their appearance, facial and otherwise. In discussing folk psychology and person perception, Bordwell makes a similar point:

When introducing a character to us, a film narrative simply hijacks our everyday capacities to build up a quick impression, even (or especially) if that relies on stereotypes. That impression

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<sup>76</sup> This is not exclusive to film. Many canonical Western literary works trade in the notion that appearances can be deceiving and mislead readers based on the narration's description of a character's outward appearance (and behaviour) e.g. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Great Expectations* (1861), *Middlemarch* (1871) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

may be confirmed, tested, or repudiated as the story develops, but our quick and dirty habits of person perception provide a point of departure. ('Common Sense + Film Theory')

Bordwell rightly draws attention to both the rapidity of these inferences and that these inferences are an influential point of departure. Todorov et al. cite models of social cognition and decision-making which posit a qualitative distinction between system 1 processing (which is fast, unreflective, and effortless) with system 2 processing (which is slow, deliberate, and effortful) ('Inferences of Competence' 1623-1624). The authors suggest that inferences from faces are based on the 'quick-and-dirty' system 1 processing; indeed, a later study by Todorov and colleagues proposed that we form certain assessments of personality like trustworthiness from faces in fewer than 50 milliseconds ('Evaluating faces on trustworthiness' 813). If these inferences are built on a dual-process model (system 1 and system 2), this means that those quick, unreflective inferences from faces can come to influence processing of subsequent information about the person. In other words, our first impressions of a person (system 1) can have subtle and often unconscious effects on subsequent deliberation (system 2).

If we make 'physiognomic' readings of characters' faces in fiction films, then we also need to account for the fact that it is frequently the case we will already be familiar with the appearance of a 'new' character because they are embodied by an actor with whom we are already familiar. In turn, this may influence the sorts of judgements and inferences we make. Put simply, how do we form 'first impressions' of a character, if we are already familiar with what they look like? For example, in relation to 'perverse allegiances', Smith suggests that positive associations of an actor's previous roles can sometimes dilute a sense of 'evil' in a character ('Perverse' 227). The argument, then, would be that pre-formed associations of an actor would supersede or influence the quick-and-dirty inferences we make when we see their face as a 'new' character.

There is a – perhaps counterintuitive sounding – claim that I will sketch out here in order to account for how we make inferences about characters based on physiognomy even though we are already familiar with the actor embodying said character. To respond to this, we can lean on Smith's notion that our response to fictional characters is twofold. Even if we are already familiar with an actor, when he or she is introduced to us in a given film, this is the first time that we have seen the *character*

that they are embodying. Thus, we engage in a sort of imaginative pretence that this is the first time we have seen this *character's* face. Following Smith's adaptation of Wollheim's theory, we can refer to the *configurational* and *recognitional* aspects of character. The configurational aspects are the 'designed status of a character' whilst the recognitional aspects are the ways in which we see characters as 'virtual persons' ('Twofoldness' 280). Individual films can manipulate configurational aspects in a plethora of different ways; lighting, make-up, cinematography, editing and performance itself all radically shape how we perceive an actor's face. This, in turn, shapes the recognitional aspects and supports the imaginative pretence that we are seeing the character for the first time. We see this exemplified by 'character actors' like Gary Oldman and Charlize Theron or Takashi Shimura and Tatsuya Nakadai, actors known for portraying very different roles from film to film. The ways in which these actors' characters are (audio)visually presented differs radically from film to film to the extent that we can easily lose sight of the actor behind the character. Of course, there is a continuum with character actors on one end and stars on the other. Hence there are no doubt cases where an actor's star persona utterly overwhelms the character.<sup>77</sup> In these cases, our judgements may be strongly influenced by our associations of the actor. We will come to such an example of this in chapter six.

So, films will encourage us to make certain assumptions about characters, in large part based on their facial appearance. In the absence of other information, we usually trust our first impressions and choose the most obvious interpretation. Although, as Bordwell notes, films may test or repudiate these judgements, in most cases the rapid inferences from faces that viewers make will be proven correct. Furthermore, we are likely to hold onto our initial judgements. For instance, if we believe intuitively – on the basis of their appearance – that a particular character is trustworthy, we will continue to hold this belief unless the character does something to contradict this inference. Our predisposition towards making inferences from faces is also a plausible contributor to why actors may become 'type-

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<sup>77</sup> Nannicelli has recently discussed the relationship between stardom and twofoldness in 'Seeing and Hearing Screen Characters' (2019).

cast' in certain roles and be said to 'look the part'. We will return again to the topic of physiognomy in chapter six when we consider faces of antipathetic characters.

### ACTING AND PERFORMANCE

The account I have put forward has stressed that there is a continuity between film and everyday expressive behaviour. This is in relation not only to the viewers' ability to recognise and respond to the faces of others, but also for shaping how filmmaking selects and represents expressive behaviour. In particular, the faces of film characters are typically intended to *show* viewers some aspect of characters' cognitive, affective, or qualitative state whilst also normally providing us access to stable character traits. A sceptic of this sort of argument might point to the fact that films can feature highly non-naturalistic performance styles and characters who appear and express themselves in ways quite unlike anything we ordinarily see in our day-to-day lives. To return to Smith's point, the forms of emotional expression we find in certain films would be disturbing or downright pathological in life (*FATC* 151). It could instead be said that acting, and viewers' understanding thereof, typically does not model itself on ordinary human behaviour but is instead rooted to a greater extent in certain artistic conventions and traditions of performance and acting. For instance, in Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke's monograph on acting and performance in film, they suggest that 'acting choices belong to cultural-aesthetic conventions that change over time' and 'Performances belong to cultural-aesthetic traditions that also differ from place to place' (139).

Nevertheless, cultural-aesthetic conventions are by necessity shaped and constrained by the limits of humans' ability to produce, recognise, and understand expressive behaviour. An example will help flesh this out. There are several internationally popular and acclaimed Japanese films that feature performances heavily inspired by theatrical traditions such as Noh theatre or Kabuki theatre, both of which make heavy use of masks and non-naturalistic, exaggerated facial expressions. For instance, Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) incorporates numerous elements of Noh theatre; the performance style in particular is inspired by the style of performance found in Noh. As Keiko I McDonald has claimed, 'Kurosawa's treatment of reality in *Throne of Blood* owes more to the ghostly world of *noh* than it does to any Western theatrical tradition' (36). Though this is no doubt true, there are many ways

in which *Throne of Blood* brings to the fore the complex transnational nature of film performance and aesthetic choices in the representation of expression and emotion. After all, this is a Japanese adaptation of a canonical Western work (namely, *Macbeth*) by a director often noted for his incorporation of the style of classical American filmmaking.<sup>78</sup>

The denouement of *Throne of Blood* is particularly instructive for our purposes here. Toshiro Mifune as Taketoki Washizu performs his death scene with highly exaggerated physical movements and facial expressions. His expression remains virtually fixed in the horrified grimace seen in fig. 10 as he dives and lunges about, grabbing futilely at the air whilst he is barraged with arrows from his own archers. Mifune's performance in this scene can be elucidated by understanding some of the aesthetic and formal principles of Noh theatre. 'Jo-ha-kyū' is a tripartite formal structure employed in many traditional Japanese arts. This concept is typically translated to Jo (beginning), ha (break) and kyū



Fig. 10. Exemplifying the influence of Noh theatre in Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957).

Left: an example of a Noh theatre mask by photographer Toshiro Morita (Ko). Right: Taketoki Washizu (Toshiro Mifune) faces his death in *Throne of Blood*.

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<sup>78</sup> This is similarly noted by Savas: 'In *Throne of Blood*, the complex interplay of eastern and western cultures is embodied, and Noh performance is effectively incorporated to reflect the historical era in which the film is set' (20).

(rapid). This structure originated in Noh theatre and is also apparent in the organisation of *Throne of Blood*. Washizu's death is the final part of the *kyū* movement in the film, and thus Mifune's performance emphasises rapid and urgent movements, a 'controlled frenzy' as Minae Yamamoto Savas puts it (23). Furthermore, Washizu's fixed facial expression of fear and horror greatly resembles the use of expressive masks in Noh. These aesthetic choices are even more apparent in Isuzu Yamada's portrayal of Asaji (the analogue of Lady Macbeth). Camera angles and lighting work together with Asaji's make-up and performance to make her face appear 'mask-like' and, more specifically, to resemble a 'fukai' mask which is typically expressive of the sorrow of a woman who has lost her child (Savas 21) (fig. 11).

In the case of *Throne of Blood*, it is apparent that there are performance choices that are very much so rooted in certain cultural-aesthetic traditions and conventions (namely, Noh theatre). Knowing of *Jo-ha-kyū* might enhance our appreciation and understanding of the performance, yet this scene (and others in the film) are by no means impenetrable to viewers unfamiliar with the cultural-aesthetic conventions of this particular non-naturalistic performance style. For Washizu's death scene, Mifune's performance takes components that are expressive of fear and exaggerates them. Even highly non-naturalistic performance styles like this must take a culture's understanding of expressive behaviour as



Fig. 11. Exemplifying the influence of Noh theatre in Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957). Left: an example of a Noh theatre mask (Savas 21). Right: Lady Asaji Washizu (Isuzu Yamada) in *Throne of Blood*.

its building blocks. Of course, a viewer's understanding and appreciation of Mifune's expressions and movements here will be refined by understanding Noh theatre conventions, but a viewer can still use very ordinary naïve psychology to recognise what Washizu is expressing in this scene.

Mifune's performance in this scene leads us on to another matter. There is a well-known bit of film lore about this scene that the arrows being shot at Mifune were real, apparently, making his expression of fear here genuine. Typically, this is treated as an example of actors being extremely dedicated to their craft; Mifune was complicit in the plan to fire real arrows at him, and so he risks his life in the pursuit of making the fear he expresses 'real'. This has always struck me as an odd interpretation which relies on some spurious assumptions about performance. It proceeds from a belief that 'doing it for real' (akin to the method school of acting) as an actor is somehow superior to 'just acting'. But it is hard to see Mifune's highly exaggerated expressions in this scene as a realistic portrayal of fear. Mifune may well have used the fact that the arrows are real (and an accidentally wayward shot to his face would kill or seriously injure him) as an imaginative prop to perform such an exaggerated rendering of fear, but this scarcely means that what we see here is somehow more 'authentic' as an expression of fear than if the arrows were harmless props. It simply does not follow that Mifune's performance would have been worse had the arrows not been real. If anything, all this tells us is that exaggerated or caricatured expressions of emotion, although they fail to portray *realistically* an emotion, may be more successful in capturing that particular emotion than expressions that are more 'optically true'. I have argued that our default stance towards characters is to understand them as agents capable of self-expression. As has been discussed, an actor can play a character and portray a face that is expressive of fear, but it does not necessarily follow that the actor is self-expressing *their* fear. When film performances are expressive then, this need not involve self-expression from the performer. Following something like the Stanislavski method, it is possible the actor can recall a negative experience and come to feel fear. This may in turn influence their performance and they may, truthfully, express that feeling.

This is by no means required, however. The same actor could be equally convincing without necessarily feeling any fear at all. For Green,

part of what makes the portrayal successful will often be that the actor uses techniques that are *expressive* of grief, and these will include how he carries himself, his tone of voice, and his facial configurations among other things. All these techniques may be used to build an expressive performance without the actor expressing any emotion. (42)

There are some empirical grounds to support this position. Pierre Gosselin et al. conducted a study which sought to examine the encoding and decoding of facial expressions of emotion by actors. Essentially, the researchers asked: what is the difference between felt and simulated facial expressions of emotion, as produced by two different performance techniques? The authors suggest that the fact that fictive communication of emotions in dramatic arts have long sustained our interest suggests that there must exist some relationship between fictive and real communication. Across two studies, they examined the facial expressions portrayed by actors in two encoding conditions. In the first (encoding felt emotions) condition, actors trained with Stanislavski-like techniques were asked to feel and to portray emotions while performing short scenarios. In the broadest sense, the Stanislavski technique involves actors retrieving past experiences that are akin to those experienced by their characters. In the process of retrieving these experiences, they re-experience or relive the relevant emotions and subsequently express them in the context of the performances. The theory holds that by retrieving a past felt emotion, the expression portrayed by the actor more closely resembles an actual and 'authentic' felt emotion.<sup>79</sup> In the second (encoding unfeelt emotions) condition of the study, another group of actors were asked to portray emotions without feeling them while acting out the same short scenarios. Both the felt and unfeelt encoding conditions were compared for their similarities to prototypical facial expressions of emotion through the Facial Action Coding System (FACS). Following this, another group of participants (the decoders) were asked to judge the encoded expressions of the actors. The decoders first had to identify the emotional category (i.e. whether it was an expression of happiness, anger, surprise etc.) and then to discriminate between the two encoding conditions (i.e. whether it was a felt or unfeelt expression).

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<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that whether actors feel 'genuine' emotions through Stanislavski techniques is unclear.

This study is of interest for several reasons. First, when asked to portray emotions without a special emphasis on ‘authenticity’, actors produce facial expressions that were well recognised by the decoders. Likewise, the high accuracy generally reached by decoders in the felt emotions encoding condition suggests that the Stanislavski technique allowed actors to produce facial expressions that clearly signal certain emotions. Second, the accuracy level of judging the encoding condition was low. That is, people were generally unable to tell the difference between felt and unfelt emotions by actors. There was also a response bias in judging the encoding condition: the decoders were more likely to judge emotions as felt rather than unfelt. This finding supports other evidence that people tend towards believing that emotional states and their corresponding expressions are genuine.

It is unlikely that we can extrapolate or generalise very much from this study to ordinary scenarios, but it does suggest certain things about film performance and facial expression. It lends support to the claim that actors are capable of successfully communicating an emotion through not only simulating the components of an emotional facial expression (without necessarily feeling it) but also genuinely feeling that emotion through performance techniques. The study proceeds from a questionable assumption that acting requires ‘that actors achieve a great level of authenticity in portraying emotions so as to produce the expected effect’ (244). Yet, the study seems to provide some evidence that authenticity is not particularly necessary when it comes to performance. We also have here a good example of research that, as a consequence of working from the faulty assumptions of Ekman’s theory, tells us less about how people actually express themselves and more about how posing, performance, and recognition work. The researchers used Ekman and Friesen’s FACS to score the actors’ performances for accuracy to ‘felt emotion’. This of course assumes that those highly prototypical and exaggerated expressions proposed by the FACS accurately represent the expression of felt emotions in reality. I have already argued that there are problems with this claim. Instead what this research tells us is that when performers are asked to perform for the sake of clarity and communication, exaggerated expressions appear to be the most effective way of achieving this.

If we think again of Mifune in *Throne of Blood*, it would be strange to refer to his expressions as ‘authentic’ in this scene, but they are highly expressive due to the way in which Mifune exaggerates

components that are expressive of fear. The self-conscious selection and exaggeration of specific aspects that are expressive of an emotion of course means that it is less, to borrow Fernández-Dols and Ruiz-Belda's term again, 'optically true' but it may be thought of as more 'artistically true' in that it more easily recognised and more potent in its expressive force. Indeed, an actor's portrayal of fear may well produce something that we recognise as more like fear than fear itself. We can recognise and respond to a wide range of facial behaviour, including expressions which might be voluntarily exaggerated. An actor's rendering of an emotion may well not be a representation of a felt emotion or an act of self-expression, but the resultant display may be even more evocative of a specific emotion than if the facial display was a genuine felt expression. Ultimately, Washizu's fear in *Throne of Blood* is recognisable and intense due to Mifune's highly exaggerated and evocative – but by no means realistic – expression of fear. As will be developed in the coming chapters, narrative films employ varying levels of amplification and simplification when it comes to representing facial expression. Thought of in this way, facial expressions in many narrative films function like a 'caricature effect'. The caricature effect refers to the counterintuitive idea that a distorted caricature of something or somebody is more recognisable than an undistorted version of that same thing. We will return to the caricature effect in the next chapter, and we shall also return to several of these matters relating to acting and performance throughout the coming chapters.

### **KULESHOV EFFECTS**

When we discuss faces and facial expression in narrative cinema, we must also be aware of how these representations and our perception of these representations are mediated through the formal aspects of film. It has long been acknowledged that film techniques – such as mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound – have the potential to shape how we perceive and respond to cinematic faces. This notion is one that has found itself particularly embedded in film theory and the mythology of the medium. For instance, as Stephen Prince and Wayne E Hensley suggest, open any film textbook and you are guaranteed to find discussions of the 'Kuleshov effect' (59). In his influential editing experiment, Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov edited together a shot of Ivan Mosjoukine, a well-known actor of the time, displaying a 'neutral expression' looking off-screen with three shots of different

objects – a bowl of soup, a child in a coffin, and a woman on a divan. For the sake of clarity, let us call the shot of the actor the ‘glance shot’ and the following shots the ‘object shot’. It is claimed that when this footage was shown to audiences, not only did they make the inference that Mosjoukine was in each case looking at the object, but also attributed different emotions or internal states (hunger, sadness, and love or lust, respectively) to him depending on the contents of the object shot. Audiences purportedly praised Mosjoukine’s skills of performance, even though it was the exact same shot and neutral facial expression in each instance. Kuleshov’s experiment and the ‘Kuleshov effect’ have attained a near-mythic status in film theory, and yet there is remarkably little clarity or consensus over what it actually proves. In fact, the original film that was used remains lost, there is no proof the experiment actually took place (the accounts that do exist for it are both conflicting and vague) and attempts to replicate the experiment have produced mixed results. Daniel Barratt et al. suggest that the numerous references to Kuleshov’s experiment by film theorists, and even psychologists, would lead one to believe that the effect is a well-established and uncontroversial phenomenon. Upon closer examination, though, it remains unclear whether the Kuleshov effect really exists and, if it does, what it actually shows (848).

Film theorists have drawn quite a range of different conclusions from Kuleshov’s experiment. Some interpretations emphasise the construction of space through editing. The experiment is understood to have Mosjoukine gazing off-screen before the cut to the object shot. As a consequence, viewers are highly likely to infer a spatial link between the glance shot and the object shot. Bordwell and Thompson, for instance, define the Kuleshov effect in these terms: ‘cutting together portions of a space in a way that prompts the spectator to assume a spatial whole that isn’t shown onscreen’ (226). Other interpretations stress the potency of editing and the proclivity of viewers to create meaningful connections between unrelated images. This was a position adopted by many notable Soviet filmmakers, such as Kuleshov himself, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Sergei Eisenstein. This argument goes that by placing different images together, the technique of editing can create meanings that did not exist before. A strong version of this thesis holds that the meaning of a facial expression is *determined* by the context provided by editing; a face is inert without contextual cues. This version considers Kuleshov’s experiment as proof of medium-specific cinematic technique – montage above all – superseding

performance. On this view, performance is predominantly created in the editing room or through the expressive manipulation of *mise-en-scène*. Through editing, the viewer's perception of the *contents* of an individual shot will largely be determined by the *context* of an individual shot. Thus, perception of a given character's emotional state is governed by the situational context. We might understand this interpretation as analogous to what has been argued by proponents of the social communicative approaches to facial expression we have seen thus far. Those who focus on the social aspects of expression argue that we cannot understand a given facial expression isolated out of its context: we need to know who, if anyone, is the recipient of this facial display, why it has been selected, and what is it intended to communicate in order to make it legible.

A few issues present themselves with this stronger version of the Kuleshov thesis. There are going to be clear limitations to the expressions that we perceive, regardless of the selected object shot. Let us imagine that we do in fact infer that the ambiguous neutral expression of Mosjoukine expresses lust or love towards the woman reclining on the divan, it seems implausible that we would be able to perceive him expressing, say, disgust or rage or fear towards the woman. By using a neutral expression, which (if we accept that this is possible) by definition does not express or communicate anything, Kuleshov loads the experiment towards a certain outcome. That is, the ambiguity of a neutral expression forces us to rely upon contextual cues. This issue becomes more apparent if we consider variations on the experiment that attempt to repeat the effect with a more recognisable expression of emotion. Alfred Hitchcock – who is also partly responsible for the mythologising of the Kuleshov effect – presents us one such example (fig. 12). Intending to illustrate what he conceives as 'pure cinematics', Hitchcock shows two sequences consecutively.<sup>80</sup> In the first sequence, the glance shot shows a man (Hitchcock himself) in close-up looking towards something off-screen. The subsequent object shot shows a mother playing with her young child. It cuts back to the man who slowly begins to smile. Hitchcock suggests we would view this character as 'sympathetic' and a 'kindly man'. In the second sequence, the same

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<sup>80</sup> Hitchcock does not elaborate what he means by 'pure cinematics' but it can be assumed he means that this effect is only achievable in the medium of film through editing. *Rear Window* (1954) offers perhaps the most notable example of Hitchcock employing this effect.

close-up glance shots of the man are used, but the object shot in between is of a woman in a bikini. ‘What is he now?’ asks Hitchcock, ‘He’s a dirty old man’.

The neurocultural view of facial expression would suggest to us here that the face of Hitchcock’s character alone is sufficient to determine his emotional state. Certainly, in both of Hitchcock’s sequences, it is unlikely that we would mistake the facial expression of the man in response to the object shot as expressing anything other than his pleasure or happiness. But there is no question that the different object shot modifies our construal of the exact nature of this smile and this has a corresponding impact on our understanding of his thoughts, feelings, or attitudes. The object shots afford a more detailed understanding that might involve more complex affective states or feelings beyond our basic understanding that the man is happy. In the first sequence, we might additionally infer affection or love from the man’s smile, whilst from the now lecherous seeming smile of the latter sequence we might instead infer desire or sexual arousal. If we consider the appraisal theory of emotion – which holds that emotions are elicited by spontaneous and intuitive appraisal of internal or external stimuli – then the mere fact that a character reacts with an emotion to a specific event/object signals to



Fig. 12. Stills taken from Alfred Hitchcock’s demonstration of what he calls ‘pure cinematics’ in an episode of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) television series *Telescope* (1963-1973).

the viewer that the event/object is salient or relevant to that character in some regard.<sup>81</sup> In turn, this provides vital information about that character's goals and values.

To suggest, then, that facial expressions are immune to contextual elements is just as problematic as suggesting that context is the overriding determinant of facial expression. In Hitchcock's example, we can come to possess a basic understanding of the man's thoughts, feelings, or attitudes but without the contextual shots, we are deprived of any significant nuance. This is where we may see that a middle ground approach (like that of Green's strategic readout view) can assist our conceptualisation of filmic facial expressions. Scepticism towards the notion that facial expression can be *wholly* determined by contextual elements and scepticism towards the claim that faces in isolation are self-sufficient for us to decode the meaning of an expression can largely be resolved by occupying the middle-ground between these positions. Facial expressions can make an emotion directly perceptible, but precisely what we take them to express is also informed by situational and social contexts in which facial expressions appear as well as the behaviours that they are intended to elicit. Context can exert a strong influence on facial displays and how they are perceived and recognised, but it remains the case that certain expressions are understood to convey certain meanings and these meanings limit the extent to which context can make an impact.

In recent years, many other film theorists and psychologists have also begun to question the Kuleshov effect and the findings of the experiment, some arriving at similar conclusions to what has been put forward here. For instance, Noël Carroll holds that 'the character's face is not, as standard versions of the Kuleshov experiment claim, emotionally amorphous, merely awaiting emotive shaping from ensuing shots' (130). Carroll offers some terminology to explain his conceptualisation of the effect. The first shot of the performer can be referred to as the 'range finder', which sets out the broad range of emotion or affective states that the character is plausibly experiencing. The subsequent object shot is the 'focuser', which further hones our initial response as suggested through the range finder (132). In a similar vein, Smith argues against what he terms the 'Kuleshov fallacy', a mistaken holism

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<sup>81</sup> See Jenefer Robinson's *Deeper than Reason* (2005) for an account of the appraisal theory of emotion.

which overstates the force of contextual factors, such as editing and music, over the role of the face. Smith offers a similar conceptualisation to Carroll: '*basic facial expressions play a crucial role in giving us an initial orientation towards a situation, on the basis of which we then apply our contextual knowledge*' (137 emphasis in original).

There are also now an increasing number of experimental studies on the Kuleshov effect. In one of the earlier attempts to replicate the original experiment, Prince and Hensley did not find any evidence for the existence of the Kuleshov effect. In another, Mobbs et al. found some support for the Kuleshov effect, but the experimental design deviated significantly from the original Kuleshov experiment: the object shot was shown *before* the glance shot and there was a time gap between the object shot and the glance shot, reducing the likelihood the two shots will be seen as connected temporally or possibly even spatially. Most recently, Barratt et al. attempted to address the shortcomings of these earlier studies and found some support for the Kuleshov effect; participants tended to choose the emotional category appropriate to a given contextualising shot more frequently than the other alternatives. However, even if further evidence is found in favour of the Kuleshov effect, there remain some big questions. Let us imagine that we do perceive some affective state in the characters in spite of their neutral expression. As Barrett et al. rightly note, it still remains rather unclear what is actually going on: does the viewer actually perceive the emotion in the character's face (i.e. do they have a phenomenological experience of seeing a facial expression of sadness, say)? Or does the viewer infer and cognise the emotional state of the character (i.e. theory of mind)? Or does the viewer actually experience the target person's emotional state in some attenuated form (i.e. affective empathy)? (866)

The relation between formal elements of film and the face has largely been discussed in terms of techniques such as editing and the close-up. Thinking about the Kuleshov effect prompts us to consider other contextual factors in relation to the perception of facial expression in film. The elements of film that may shape our perception of expression and faces are not going to be limited to editing; a whole host of other 'Kuleshov effects' could be proposed. For starters, how exactly might differences of colour or lighting influence viewer perception of facial expression? Equally, we may also address the structural relationship between shot distance and shot duration in terms of intelligibility and

recognition of expression. James Cutting and Kacie Armstrong have investigated the intersection between shot duration, shot distance, and ‘visual clutter,’ exploring how these bear upon the recognition and interpretation of facial expression (‘Facial Expression, size, and clutter’). Unsurprisingly, this research found that facial expressions are harder to read as distance increases. The results, nonetheless, are of interest because they form an empirical basis for one aspect of contemporary cinema, that as shots increase the size of a character within the frame, they become shorter in duration. Cutting and Armstrong suggest that filmmakers have already intuitively and tacitly identified this fact: two other studies cited by the authors showed that contemporary films lengthen shots that show smaller faces. Going beyond recognition, shot duration, and shot distance will also prove to be key to more complex responses to facial expression such as empathy. As Plantinga suggests in his discussion of the human face in the scene of empathy, these moments rely on certain spatial and temporal strategies to increase the likelihood of empathetic response, such as ‘attention’ (that is, the face will likely be in focus, with a close shot distance and without much visual clutter) and ‘duration’ (that is, the shot must be of sufficient length to elicit empathetic responses and for contagion to occur).

Film is not merely a visual medium too. Practitioners have long exploited the expressive potential of film score and soundtracking in narrative filmmaking; there is a long and rich history of narrative moments that make use of scoring to emphasise the face and the emotional contents of a scene. Smith suggests that the ‘Kuleshov fallacy’ extends to discussions of scoring in cinema. Smith critiques Howard Goodall’s interpretation of the sequence in *Psycho* (1960) where Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) drives into the night with the money she has stolen from her employer. Goodall claims that all the expressive work in this scene is carried out by Bernard Herrmann’s score. For Smith, the implication of Goodall’s interpretation is that the face is thought of as ‘sufficiently inert or open to interpretation that any role it might play in conveying expressive information is overridden by contextual features, like Herrmann’s score in this case’ (‘The Kuleshov Fallacy’). Smith shows through his analysis of this scene that the force of Leigh’s facial and bodily expressions instead serve as a ‘counterpoint’ to Herrmann’s score. This, in turn, is only possible ‘because facial and bodily expression are powerful, independent sources of expression in films’ (‘The Kuleshov Fallacy’).

In general, there is relatively little research on the nature of the relationship between sound and the face. There is one recent study that is worth noting, however. Andreas M Baranowski and H Hecht sought to assess the role of music in the evaluation of facial expressions in film and address whether the emotions elicited by a soundtrack are able to influence the perceived expression of a face. In other words, is there an auditory Kuleshov effect? In Baranowski and Hecht's experiment, participants were shown clips of faces that were intercut with neutral object shots, 15-second clips of neutrally valenced scenes such as a man walking down a hallway or a woman grocery shopping (627). The images were accompanied with either happy music, sad music, or no music. Deviating from Kuleshov's original experiment design, this was edited with not just neutral facial expressions, but also happiness and sadness. The most telling result is that the largest impact of the music was on the neutral expression: happy music made neutral faces seem significantly happier and sad music made neutral faces significantly sadder. We can draw a connection between this and my hypothesis regarding Kuleshov's editing experiment. That is, the ambiguity of a neutral facial expression compels a greater reliance upon contextual elements. Likewise, although participants did not misidentify the emotional expression of happiness or sadness, if the music clashed with the facial expression (e.g. a happy facial expression with sad music) it diminished the perceived intensity of the expressions i.e. sad faces were rated as less sad when accompanied by happy music.

Just like the effect with regards to editing, the mechanisms through which the auditory Kuleshov effect works remains unclear. Do the visual or auditory stimuli induce emotions in the viewers, who proceed to project this emotional state onto the actor? Or, perhaps more likely, is it that we see the observed face within the context of the object shot or sound and then adapt our perception? The latter explanation appears to mesh well with what Michel Chion identifies as the 'added value' of sound: whatever qualities sound brings to cinema are perceived largely in visual terms and as naturally coming from what is seen. Added value thus contributes to the impression that sound is secondary or subordinate to the image and merely duplicates a meaning when, in fact, it brings this meaning about either entirely by itself or by discrepancies between it and the image. The findings from Baranowski and Hecht's experiment support Chion's added value; happy music made the happy faces seem even

happier and sad music made the sad faces seem even sadder. Though an in-depth exploration of the relationship between film music and the face is beyond the remit of this thesis, this is a topic ripe for exploration.

### GENRE, CONVENTION, AND EXPRESSION

Thus far, we have touched upon a few ways in which we might ‘learn’ specific conventions and forms of expression. In chapter one, we considered how both conventionalised and idiosyncratic expressions require learning and knowledge to be understood. In chapter two, we considered the ‘dialect theory’ of expression, which is intended to account for cultural differences in recognising expression and suggests that these differences may be overcome through learning. As I suggested then, we might also think of the ‘dialects’ of film to encompass not only cinema from different cultures, but also genres and individual actors and directors. Certainly, among the most significant things that we must learn for proper comprehension of film are the norms for expressive displays in specific genres. Different genres will manifest quite different forms of expression. Different genres will also presume or invite varying



Fig. 13. Images from ‘Mnemoires / Samples (Series 2)’ in *Global Soap* (2000-2001) by Julian Rosefeldt.

levels and types of psychological observation and introspection in viewers and, correspondingly, viewers will have different assumptions and intuitive beliefs about how to recognise and respond to the expressive behaviour of characters. Many of these generic assumptions are, likewise, going to be culturally and historically contingent. So, genre will not only dictate how expressive behaviour is represented but also our perceptual activity. In chapter five, we will consider how films structured as ‘investigative narratives’ invite us to take a particular stance towards characters. That is, in watching police procedurals or detective films – genres that typically recruit the involvement of viewers to determine the veracity of a character’s outward appearance – we are often invited to engage with the practice of ‘reading’ faces, often to ascertain a character’s trustworthiness.

In many cases, the ways in which characters express themselves can be construed as among the defining features of the genre. If characters in a Hollywood melodrama were as expressively taciturn as characters in a Yakuza film, the result would not only be extremely confusing, but we would also be reluctant to label such a film a melodrama. Genres themselves may also propagate specific conventionalised expressions. In *Global Soap* (2000-2001), artist Julian Rosefeldt sifted through a massive collection of headshot stills taken from television soap operas from around the world and collated the expressions of the performers (fig. 13). Rosefeldt’s moving picture archive draws attention to the vocabulary of gestures and facial expressions recurring time and again in a specific genre of visual narrative. Many of these gestures and expressions might well look out of place in different generic contexts but they have become an integral conventionalised part of how characters express themselves in soaps. The sorts of expressions in Rosefeldt’s archive are a good demonstration of the conventionalised expressions we considered in chapter one. Furthermore, following from our discussion of Kuleshov effects, they show another way in which certain facial expressions may have meanings even when extracted from their context. Of course, without the relevant knowledge or context of how expression works in a particular genre and the particular conventions at play, we may be subject to

misinterpretations and misunderstandings. I have mentioned how this might occur in the case of Kore-eda's *Shoplifters* (2018) and we will consider this further when we look at anime in the next chapter.<sup>82</sup>

Appropriating a concept we have discussed already, we can call these expectations and conventions 'genre display rules'. That is, genre can dictate which characters can show which emotions and to what intensity. For most subgenres of comedy, for example, it is expected that we will have to understand the expressive behaviour of characters for the narrative and humour to be intelligible and have comic effect. Expressions will thus often be caricatured and exaggerated to ensure this. We saw a typical example of this in chapter two when we looked at a reaction shot in a *Carry On* film, an archetypal sex comedy. It would be unusual if a sex comedy expected us to develop a complex or true-to-life psychological understanding of its characters' emotional lives. If we are sitting down to watch a comedy, we will therefore accept a greater degree of exaggeration of facial expressions in order to ensure that there is sufficient clarity. As Carroll notes, theorists often claim that audiences suspend their ordinary modes of moral thinking when watching comedies and take pleasure in all manner of 'sadistic spectacles' (*Theorizing* 109). This suspension of moral reasoning hews closely to our suspension of attempting to understand the psychology of characters in comedy films; we are not meant to take seriously the extreme contortions of pain expressed in Hardy's face after being smacked by Laurel.

Expressive conventions and genre display rules of a specific genre also correlate with cultural stereotypes. Genres historically and traditionally perceived as 'masculine' – such as the Western, the Gangster film, or the War film – will on average have lower levels of expressivity compared to historically and traditionally 'feminine' genres – such as melodramas and musicals. There is not space here to fully develop this, but a future direction for this would be comparative research on how different cultures 'code' certain genres according to gender stereotypes and how this corresponds to expressivity and genre display rules. Consider the distinctions between Japanese Shōnen and Shōjo manga or anime. Shōnen is aimed primarily at teenage boys whilst Shōjo is aimed chiefly teenage girls (although, no doubt, both attract readers outside these demographics). Shōnen and Shōjo are intended demographics

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<sup>82</sup> To be clear, I am not suggesting anime is a genre. I will say more on this matter in chapter four.

and not necessarily genres or styles, however, they both house genres that are traditionally gendered. For instance, the 'Mecha' genre is chiefly aimed at boys and men whilst much romance fictions are aimed at girls and women. Shōnen and Shōjo manga and anime feature different visual styles and tend to represent expressions and emotions in different ways from each other. In any case, we will come to look at anime more closely in the next chapter.

## Part Two

### Face Studies

This concludes the first half of the thesis. To recap, chapter one argued that our understanding of representations of faces and facial expression needs to be informed, in part, by the contemporary science of facial expression. To this end we considered the two most dominant views of facial expression: the neurocultural view and the behavioural ecology view. I argued that both of these theories of expression present certain problems and suggest that we can coherently follow a middle-ground approach. Chapter two showed ways in which there is cultural variation in the recognition and production of facial expression. We also considered what the wider implications of cultural differences are for our understanding of film. Finally, I suggested some ways in which cognitivist approaches might gain from considering evidence from the field of cultural psychology.

In chapter three, I have argued that narrative films typically embody a *romantic view* of expression. This involves a basic set of assumptions about what faces typically reveal in narrative cinema. Upon these basic assumptions, there is wide scope for variation in *how* to express different cognitive, affective, and qualitative states; films may represent highly prototypical expressions or isolate and select components that are expressive of interior states. This process of selection can be shaped by both cultural variation and aesthetic-cultural conventions. We also looked at a number of issues that impact upon representations of the face and facial expression, namely, how cinema exploits ‘physiognomic’ readings of characters’ faces, various ‘Kuleshov effects’, and the impact of genre.

With this groundwork in place, we will now move onto three different case studies, each exploring a specific different facet or tradition of narrative cinema. Chapter four will look at animation and, in particular, anime. We will focus on how simplification and amplification of facial expression can both enhance recognition and perceived emotional intensity. In chapter five, we will consider how cinema reworks other aspects of facial expression beyond just basic emotions. Finally, chapter six will consider how films exploit our tendency to act as ‘naïve physiognomists’ through looking at representations of antipathetic characters’ faces.

## Chapter 4

### **Animation and Facial Expression: Amplification Plus Simplification in Anime**

If we wish to explore facial expressions and their representation in narrative cinema, there are few better ways of doing this than looking at animated filmmaking. Indeed, facial expressions are arguably the most important ingredient necessary to create the ‘illusion of life’ for characters in animation. Coming to terms with the representations of faces within animated narrative filmmaking can help us better understand the very fundamentals of facial recognition as well as some of the unique pleasures and aesthetic effects afforded by representations of the face. As the title of the chapter indicates, we will focus here on ‘amplification’ and ‘simplification’, two terms derived from comics theorist and cartoonist Scott McCloud.<sup>83</sup> I argue that amplification and simplification are key to how animation enables recognition of facial expressions but, more significantly, an understanding of amplification and simplification in relation to the represented face can also (in part) account for animation’s distinct appeal.

At the same time, looking at animation gets us to the heart of the matter of universality and cultural specificity in relation to faces and facial expression. McCloud has argued that the more ‘cartoony’ an image is, the more universal it becomes. Indeed, the notion that cartoons and animation have some sort of universal appeal has been around since at least Disney’s early feature-length films in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1944, Sergei Eisenstein famously declared that Disney animations were ‘the most omni-appealing’ works he had come across (41). But this ‘omni-appeal’ that Eisenstein describes does not give us the whole picture; though it is surely the case that animation has certain qualities which appeal cross-culturally, belief in animation’s universality belies the complex ways in which artistic conventions and culture shape depiction and representation in cartooning and animation. As Carl Plantinga notes, ‘the difficulty of extricating culture from nature in relation to representations of the face is apparent in the case of facial caricature and animation’ (‘Facing Others’ 294-295).

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<sup>83</sup> For the most part, I use the terms ‘exaggerated’ and ‘caricatured’ synonymously with ‘amplified’.

Despite this, within film studies at least, the complex blend of the universal and the culturally specific within animation is underexplored. This is an oversight because, like it or not, animation has become a very significant part of global popular film culture in recent years. One need look no further than the box office to see evidence for this; as of May 2020, around 25% of the top two hundred highest grossing films of all time globally are animated.<sup>84</sup> As noted in the introduction, Hollywood is making increasingly concerted efforts to appeal to a global audience, and we see this reflected in the fact that the vast majority of these globally successful animated films are from the US. Indeed, overseas box office takings from South America and East Asia (China in particular) now represent a large proportion of ticket sales for US animated films. A more cynical person might also argue that big-budget live-action films have virtually become animations. That is, this cynic would say that the heavy reliance on computer-generated imagery (CGI) in modern franchise filmmaking means that the majority of what viewers are seeing in popular cinema nowadays is a form of animation.

In this global age of cinema, the dominance of animation coming from Hollywood comes as little surprise. A more curious trend has emerged in the past thirty years, however. Japanese animation, or anime, now reaches audiences far beyond the borders of Japan. Popular and lucrative multi-media franchises such as *Pokémon* and *Dragon Ball*, as well as the internationally renowned filmmaking from Studio Ghibli have secured the Japanese animation industry's position as a noteworthy commercial and cultural force outside of Japan. Through a focus on anime, we will look in this chapter at how culture and cultural-aesthetic conventions shape what is amplified and what is simplified in animated filmmaking. We will begin by considering some general principles of abstraction and caricaturing of facial expression and then turn to think about these principles through anime. This analysis will aim to further the position that cognition and culture are inadequately understood as diametrically opposed forces working against each other but are, instead, better characterised by their interlocking and symbiotic relationship. As will be shown, an approach that is attentive to both culturally specific nuances and universal human propensities can say a lot not only about why animated filmmaking has

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<sup>84</sup> This includes both traditional animation (e.g. *The Lion King* (1994)) and computer-generated animation (e.g. *Frozen* (2013)). Information from *Box Office Mojo*.

proven capable of widespread, cross-cultural appeal, but also speculate on the appeal and popularity of more culturally idiosyncratic examples of filmmaking.

### **ANIMATION AND REALISM**

To this point, I have been using the word animation in a catch-all fashion. The word animation is itself incredibly vague and encompassing. It can include stop-motion, rotoscoping, ‘traditional’ hand-drawn animation, or puppetry; something as complex as 3D CGI to something as simple as a flipbook of drawings. Admittedly, to a certain extent it is a fallacy to speak of ‘animation’ as though it were one thing. To make things worse, the advent of digital imagery has made defining animation a far more complex affair in recent years.<sup>85</sup> This said, although I fully acknowledge the myriad distinctions between the different techniques and styles we typically house under the term ‘animation’, they are unified by a shared artistic and aesthetic kinship. As a consequence, I believe various types of animation present a common set of issues and questions with regards to the representation of faces and facial expression. This said, there are some boundaries to what I will discuss in this chapter. Though the scope of this chapter is inclusive of different animation forms, techniques, and styles, the analysis will be limited to specifically *non-photorealistic* animated representations. Some clarification is in order here because there may be some confusion in terminology. Although photorealism and, more recently, hyper-realism refer to artistic styles in painting and drawing, when it comes to animation these terms are used in different ways. For CG animation, ‘photorealism’ refers to using digital techniques to create moving images that are visually indistinguishable from live-action moving images. Thus, the focus here on non-photorealistic animation simply refers to looking at animation which does not seek to visually emulate live action. This is a necessary move because the closer animation approaches photorealism, the further it deviates from many of the general principles that have historically and conventionally defined animation and cartooning. Animated narrative films that strive towards imitating live action

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<sup>85</sup> I will not proffer or strictly follow a definition of animation in this chapter. For discussions of this, see David Davies’ chapter on animation in the *Palgrave Handbook of the Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures* (2019) and Omar O Linares Martinez’s ‘Criteria for Defining Animation: A Revision of the Definition of Animation in the Advent of Digital Moving Images’ (2015).

and reality invoke a different set of issues regarding facial expression in contrast to animation that does not aim for photorealism. Given that the face is frequently highlighted as the main obstacle to achieving convincing photorealistic animation, this matter would deserve much more specific attention. Instead, the topic of this chapter is more generally the question of what happens to the representation and perception of faces and facial expressions when they are transferred from one level of realism to another.

Alongside photorealism, which deals with the visual appearance of animation, we will also deal with another type of realism in this chapter. In recent years, there has been a clear trend towards what Paul Wells refers to as the ‘hyper-realist’ aesthetic in contemporary Western animation (25).<sup>86</sup> For Wells, hyper-realism characterises the films of Disney and those who have emulated and continue to emulate the studio’s style. Wells suggests several key codes and conventions to define hyper-realism:

- i. The design, context and action within the hyper-realist animated film approximates with, and corresponds to the design, context and action within the live-action film’s representation of reality.
- ii. The characters, objects and environment within the hyper-realist animated film are subject to the conventional physical laws of the ‘real’ world.
- iii. The ‘sound’ deployed in the hyper-realist animated film will demonstrate diegetic appropriateness and correspond directly to the context from which it emerges (e.g. a person, object or place must be represented by the sound it actually makes at the moment of utterance, at the appropriate volume etc.).
- iv. The construction, movement and behavioural tendencies of ‘the body’ in the hyper-realist animated film will correspond to the orthodox physical aspects of human beings and creatures in the ‘real’ world. (25-26)

Wells’s hyper-realism offers a useful analytical tool but, more importantly, it allows us to distinguish between realism in the design of an animated world from *visual* photorealism. Although in the visual arts they share some similarities, in this chapter hyper-realism needs to be pried apart from

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<sup>86</sup> Wells adapts this term from Umberto Eco, as outlined in his *Travels in Hyper-reality* (1986).

photorealism; an animation can be hyper-realistic without being photorealistic, but most animations which are photorealistic are also likely to be hyper-realistic.

Wells identified the movement towards hyper-realism in animated films over twenty years ago when CGI was still in its infancy. Since then, we have seen hyper-realism becoming even more pervasive in Western animation. At the same time, photorealism has become a clearly dominant norm in mainstream animated films.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, using CGI in animation by no means mandates photorealism. CG animation can still be non-photorealistic and used in highly expressive ways. For instance, Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001) and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) were originally shot using digital video with human actors. Using a technique called interpolated rotoscoping, the live-action footage was digitally traced over frame-by-frame into an animation in which the motion of the characters is matched to the original live-action film (Materna). The result is a non-photorealistic CG film that is cartoonish in its appearance, whilst being hyper-realistic due to the use of live-action film as its basis (see fig. 14). The digital process utilised to create these films falls under the broad umbrella of computer graphics referred to as 'non-photorealistic rendering' (known as NPR). The label NPR



Fig. 14. Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy reprise their characters from *Before Sunrise* (1995) in Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001).

<sup>87</sup> Pat Power remarks that 'realism ... [is] currently the primary ethos of 3D animation culture and technology' (108).

makes evident the different use in terminology for ‘photorealism’ in animation. In this instance, it is used to distinguish this style of CG animation from the widespread obsession with photorealism seen elsewhere in computer graphics.

### **CHARACTER ENGAGEMENT IN LIVE ACTION & ANIMATION**

There is one more point to clarify. I am proceeding from an assumption in this chapter that we understand characters as embodied by humans in live-action filmmaking in much the same way we understand characters in animated, non-photorealistic filmmaking. Though there are clear differences between live action and animation, our engagement with animated characters, and their bodily and facial expressions, is comparable to how we respond to live-action human characters. I am happy to accept that there may be a few important differences in this regard. For instance, brain imaging evidence has suggested that there may be neural differences between how viewers respond to live-action representations versus animated representations of characters. One particular study proposed that whilst live-action footage evokes brain responses that characterised recognition and mindreading, animation is more likely to activate areas associated with emotional reward (Mar et al.). This study used a scene from the aforementioned *Waking Life*, comparing how viewers responded to the original digital film recordings in comparison to the rotoscoped animated footage. Of course, brain imaging tells only a part of the story, but these findings appear to mesh well both with other evidence and with certain conceptions of cartoons and animation. The notion that cartoons can bypass our critical faculties and appeal directly to our emotions is a familiar concern. As Gombrich noted, the cartoonist creates representations that prove ‘so convincing to the emotional mind’ (139).

Despite some differences, it would be wrong to claim that animation has a totally arbitrary relation or no relation to either reality or live-action filmmaking. This is not merely a theoretical position but is something that has been recognised, at least by the US animation industry, for some time. Walt Disney avowed the strong relationship between live-action filmmaking and his studio’s animated filmmaking: ‘we are in the motion picture business, only we are drawing them instead of photographing them’ (qtd. in Johnston and Thomas 119). Of course, in saying this Disney is partly seeking to legitimise his studio’s products, but it is also true that Disney Studios have a long tradition of looking towards

live-action and screen performances to understand how to create engaging and believable animated characters.<sup>88</sup> More recently, acting coach Ed Hooks argues that animators benefit from an understanding of performance theory.<sup>89</sup> Hooks' approach is by no means an unconventional or fringe one either; his work has been endorsed by several mainstream, contemporary animation directors in the US industry.

The fact that animated characters are conventionally not photographic representations of real humans is not a significant barrier to engagement either. There is a long history of research (across different disciplines) that suggests humans have developed a propensity to view automatically and spontaneously a wide variety of agents as holding goals and mental states (Mar and Macrae). Put in different terms, we possess an incredibly low threshold for triggering what Daniel Dennett calls the 'intentional stance' – a human bias toward viewing agents as having goals, beliefs, and desires (13-34). This propensity, it is argued, provides us with an adaptive understanding our world and all its inhabitants. This is by no means a novel claim either; psychological research investigating this phenomenon dates back to the 1940s. In Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel's well-known and influential experiment, participants were shown a short, silent, stop-motion animated film of simple geometric shapes: a large triangle, a small triangle, and a solid circle were shown moving in different directions and speeds. The only other figure in the field was a rectangle, a section of which could be opened and closed like a door (fig. 15). Heider and Simmel found that – even without common social cues like body language, facial expressions, or speech – when prompted to explain the short film, most viewers attributed intentional movement and goal-directed interactions to the geometric shapes. Viewers thus make sense of the movements of these highly simplified geometric shapes in terms of a narrative containing characters with emotions, motivations, and goals.

Though we are predisposed to view even basic objects as in possession of agency and goals, let us be more exact and ask, what specific conditions are necessary for us to engage with fictional animated characters? Peter Sillett has similarly argued that there is a strong relationship between responding to

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<sup>88</sup> Disney's practice of turning to live-action cinema is discussed at some length in *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (1981).

<sup>89</sup> This claim is most fully realised in Hooks' *Acting for Animators* (2000).

live performers and animated characters. For Sillett, viewers can engage with both human and non-human (e.g. animals or objects) animated characters if two conditions are met: first, they display a consistent set of internal characteristics such as personality, goals, motivations, and so forth and, second, they demonstrate a reasonable level of external solidity and consistency in their physical dimensions and attributes. Moreover, external solidity is a necessary condition to infer internal consistency. Even something as basic as the animated ‘characters’ of Heider and Simmel’s film fulfil these conditions: each shape moves and acts in a seemingly consistent manner (the large triangle typically moves slower than the small triangle), their physical properties remain consistent (e.g. the circle does not suddenly morph into a square), and they appear to have solidity through their visual design and their interactions (the shapes are coloured a solid black and when they collide with each other, they react and behave in a manner that suggests each shape possesses some weight).

Of course, even though traits and goals can be inferred from watching these simple geometric shapes move and interact, they are not particularly engaging characters. As Heider and Simmel’s research suggested though, they possess the necessary minimum conditions for viewers to be able to recognise them as characters with personality, goals, and motivations. Such an experiment also tells us

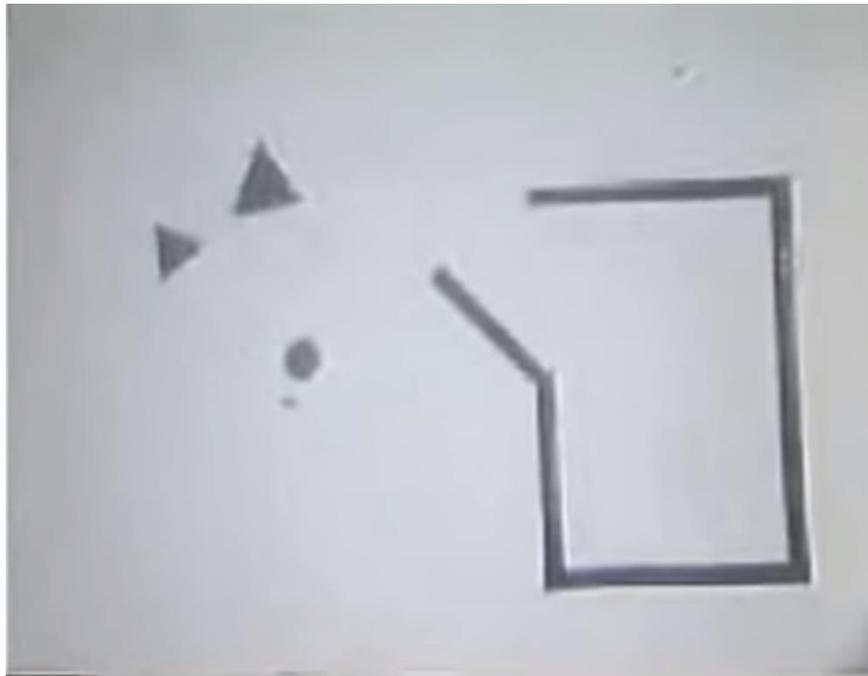


Fig. 15. A still from the short film used in Heider and Simmel’s ‘An Experimental Study of Apparent Behaviour’ (1944).

that attributing emotions, intentions, and goals are key to how we make sense of the world around us. From this, faces are evidently not necessary for us to recognise an entity as a character but representing a character's face will function as a strong precursor to more significant levels of engagement and for us to understand better a character. That is, the represented face of an animated character, when demonstrating a reasonable level of external solidity and consistency in its physical dimensions and attributes, will ordinarily provide access to a character's personality, goals, motivations, internal states, and so forth. We may find examples that challenge these two conditions, but such cases are rather likely to be the exception rather than the rule. Without question, in virtually all mainstream animated films, there will be little problem meeting these minimum conditions for recognition and engagement.<sup>90</sup>

### AMPLIFICATION THROUGH SIMPLIFICATION

We have established thus far that there are some important similarities between live action and animation. First, in contemporary animation's movement towards photorealism and hyper-realism (both of which aim to approximate live action) and, second, in how fictional characters are represented (and correspondingly how we, as viewers, engage). But animated filmmaking is still not *identical* to live-action filmmaking and, moreover, live-action filmmaking is not identical to reality. What, then, is it that specifically distinguishes how faces are represented when they are represented non-photorealistically in animation? A good starting point to get at this issue would be to turn to cartooning and cartoons in order to grasp a basic conception of animated representations.<sup>91</sup> Comics theorist and cartoonist Scott McCloud has defined cartooning as the process of *amplification through simplification* (30). For McCloud, the process of abstracting an image through cartooning is less about eliminating details as it is about focusing on specific details: 'by stripping down an image to its essential "meaning", an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't' (30). McCloud is referring specifically to cartoons in this case, but there are ample reasons to extend this definition of amplification through

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<sup>90</sup> *The Blue Umbrella* (2013), a short film produced by Pixar, offers an effective demonstration of several ideas discussed in this section, particularly the very minimal conditions required for us to recognise an entity as a character.

<sup>91</sup> We might consider the cartoon image is to the animated film what photography is to cinema.

simplification to non-photorealistic depiction more generally. Animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (both belonging to the so-called ‘Nine Old Men’, Disney’s core group of animators responsible for creating many of their most famous animations) express a similar claim to McCloud through comparable language:

[The animator’s] drawings can be closer to the true realism of an object because he can be *selective* and personal in what he chooses to show ... the animator chooses only those actions that relate to the point of his particular scene; then he *strengthens* those until they become the dominant action, with everything else either *eliminated* or subordinated. (323, emphasis added)

McCloud, the cartoonist, and Thomas and Johnston, the animators, proffer very similar characterisations; in both cases, they identify that *selecting*, *simplifying*, and *amplifying* are central to their respective crafts. McCloud takes this idea much further though. He claims that when an image of a character is iconically abstracted through cartooning (as shown by the faces in fig. 16), it actually increases our capacity to empathise with said character.<sup>92</sup> In other words, McCloud’s claim is that the more ‘cartoony’ a character’s face is, the more we can identify with that character. This, he suggests, is in part due to the universality invoked by less realistic images i.e. the more cartoony a face is the more people it could be said to describe and the more likely one will see oneself. One of the more popular

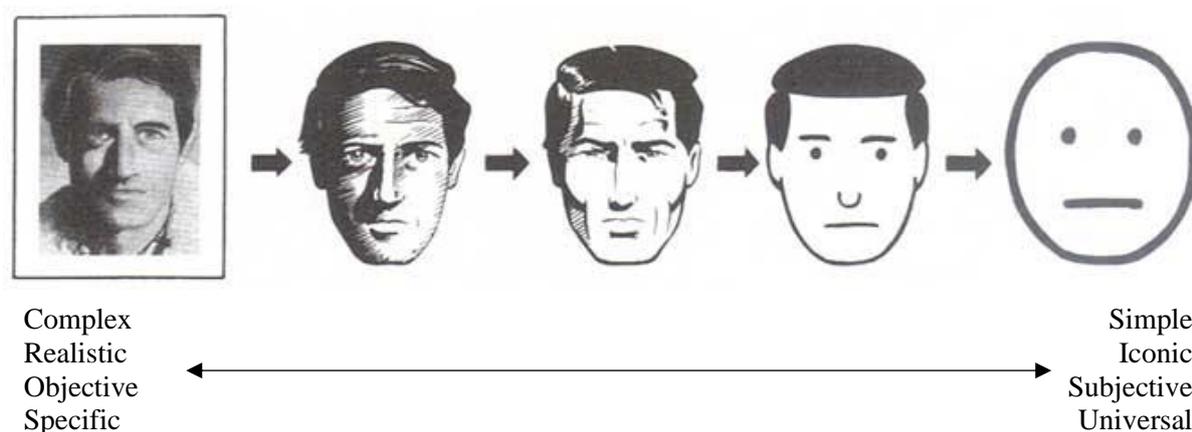


Fig. 16. Levels of realism in cartoon representations of the face from *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 31)

<sup>92</sup> McCloud notes there are several different kinds of abstraction. Fig. 16 represents ‘iconic abstraction’, which McCloud often uses synonymously with simplification.

explanations among personality and social psychologists for empathy is ‘perceived similarity’.<sup>93</sup> We are more likely to feel sympathy and compassion for others whom we perceive to be in some way like ourselves. As fig. 16 makes visible, the more iconically abstracted or cartoony faces appear more generic and are therefore more likely to be perceived by more people to resemble themselves. This reasoning at first glance appears plausible, if perhaps slightly insufficient by itself, to explain the appeal of simplified representations of characters

However, McCloud puts forward a more unusual explanation for the correlation between empathetic engagement and abstraction. In our day-to-day lives, he claims, we have direct perceptual contact with the faces of others, yet we are seldom aware of our own face directly. Instead, we possess a half-formed image of what our own face is doing at any given moment. Our ‘mind-picture’ is therefore not a vivid or accurate depiction of our own face but ‘just a sketchy arrangement, a sense of shape, a sense of general placement. Something as simple and basic as a cartoon’ (36). For McCloud then, our mentally encoded image of ourselves is effectively a cartoon. Simplified cartoon faces are hence an externalisation of our mentally encoded self-image. McCloud attributes this as one of the primary cause of children’s fascination with cartoons.<sup>94</sup> As a consequence of the cartoon’s abstraction of reality, viewers ‘fill in’ the image:

The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled - an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm. We don’t just observe the cartoon, we become it! (36)

On this view, the fictional cartoon character is a centripetal force, drawing the observer into another reality; we do not just observe, we are the cartoon character. We can very quickly point out to McCloud that it cannot be plausibly maintained that we misidentify ourselves to be a cartoon character. McCloud has elsewhere conceded that some of his claims are quite strident and accepts the academic criticism he has received as a result, noting ‘I was seemingly spouting these popularized, simplified versions of

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<sup>93</sup> See Batson et al. for an overview.

<sup>94</sup> McCloud does acknowledge other factors, such as the childlike features of many cartoon characters.

theories ... there were probably grumblings in academia early on because I was like a bull in a china shop ...' (McCloud Interview). Let us be more generous to McCloud than others have been. There is some value in what McCloud is suggesting and it would be remiss to discard his ideas solely on the basis that they are overly strident and simplified. We can instead consider a weaker version of McCloud's claim, that there is simply *some sort of a relationship between levels of realism with recognition and engagement*, without supporting his more radical (and absurd) propositions. Based off McCloud's argument, my hypothesis then is that through a process of caricaturing and exaggeration, animation selects, simplifies, and amplifies specific expressive features which can heighten the viewer's capacity to recognise, engage, and respond to a given character's facial expression or gesture.

How can this hypothesis be justified without, as McCloud would have it, an explanation that results in having our identity pulled into the 'empty shell' of the cartoon character? We can instead consider some psychological and neurological evidence. Recent research on facial caricature provides us with empirically established insights relating to how people respond to exaggerated or amplified representations of faces. As Susan Brennan defines it, caricature is a graphical coding of facial features that seeks paradoxically to be more like a face than the face itself (170). Caricature artists identify the most distinctive aspects of a person's physical appearance and exaggerate them.<sup>95</sup> In some cases, it has been shown that it is possible to obtain faster and more accurate recognition for a caricatured face than for a real face; a caricature of Richard Nixon looks more like Richard Nixon than the real Richard Nixon.<sup>96</sup> This seemingly paradoxical relationship between caricatures and veridical representations is referred to as the 'caricature effect' or 'caricature advantage'.

The notion that distorted images of the face are more recognisable than veridical, undistorted images of the face appears unintuitive at first glance. Robert Mauro and Michael Kubovy suggest that this occurs because 'faces are encoded as distinctive feature deviations from a prototype' (433). Put

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<sup>95</sup> This is analogous to the process for creating animated characters. Regarding Disney's practices, Johnston and Thomas recommend that 'if there is a human character in a story, it is wise to draw the person with as much caricature as the role will permit' (327).

<sup>96</sup> See Mauro and Kubovy for an overview of this research.

simply, we store faces of others in our memory and mind as caricatures, with our own personal degree of amplification. This is known as the ‘super-portrait’ hypothesis.<sup>97</sup> According to this hypothesis, caricatures are ‘super-portraits’ which exaggerate deviations, thereby enhancing recognition. This occurs because the caricature emphasises the features of the face that are mentally encoded. To explain with an example, if I were to meet Richard Nixon circa 1972 at a dinner party, upon reflection the next day at breakfast I might try and recall in my mind what he looked like in the flesh. It is likely I will recall his jowls and his long, sloping nose, individual features that stand out as deviations from the conception of an average face that I have built up. Upon opening the newspaper and seeing a scathing caricature of Nixon, which has enlarged his nose and jowls, I would be viewing a representation that emphasises the very facial features that I have mentally encoded to differentiate Nixon from not only the dozens of other faces I encountered at the dinner party the previous night, but the countless others that I have mentally encoded throughout my life. If we agree with the ‘super-portrait’ hypothesis, that our mental conception of the faces of others is akin to a caricature, then in the simplified and amplified depictions of cartooning and animation, we observe an external version of our mentally encoded perception of the world.

Even though this hypothesis is attractive for providing some justification for why caricatured representations of faces possess a particular saliency, it is quite controversial. Recent research has questioned the ‘super-portrait’ hypothesis. For example, Kaufmann and Schweinberger found no evidence for beneficial effects of caricaturing on recognition of familiar faces. However, they did find that caricaturing had clear positive effects on the acquisition of new face representations. If caricatured representations of faces are simply more memorable then it stands to reason that the characters of animated filmmaking will stand out to us to a greater degree against photorealistic and veridical faces of live-action filmmaking. At a minimum, it would seem that exaggerated representations (i.e. caricatures) of faces in some ways enhance recognition and learning of those faces.

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<sup>97</sup> Rhodes’ *Superportraits: Caricatures and Recognition* (1996) provides the most comprehensive case for this hypothesis.

Through looking at caricature, we are for the most part addressing identification, recognition, and learning of simplified and/or exaggerated faces. But what of more complex aesthetic effects? Neuroscientist V S Ramachandran has, controversially, argued that the *peak shift effect* ‘holds the key for understanding the evocativeness of much of visual art’ (Ramachandran and Hirstein 18). Indeed, Ramachandran claims that peak shift explains precisely why caricatures are so appealing (206). In its technical usage, peak shift refers to a behavioural response bias in which animals display a directional, but limited, preference towards ultra-normal or exaggerated stimuli. Ramachandran uses an example from the study of animal behaviour to explain this concept: imagine an experiment training a rat to discriminate a square from a rectangle by rewarding it a piece of cheese every time it sees a rectangle. When it sees a square, it receives nothing. The rat will quickly understand that the rectangle means food and will start preferring the rectangle to the square. However, if the rat is shown a longer, thinner rectangle, it will prefer the *second* rectangle to the first rectangle. The rat in this context is learning a rule – rectangularity; the second longer and thinner shape is ‘more rectangular’ than the first shape. As far as this rat is concerned, the more rectangular the better.

The effect is referred to as peak shift because ordinarily when you teach an animal something, its peak response is to the stimulus towards which it has been trained. However, if you train an animal to distinguish something (here, the rectangle) from something else (the square), the peak response is to a totally new rectangle, shifted even further away from the square in its rectangularity. Ramachandran uses a looser definition of the peak shift effect than its more restrictive technical usage in animal behaviour (Ramachandran and Hirstein 18). Peak shift, he argues, is not limited to rats and other non-human animals. Ramachandran claims that humans are liable to respond mentally more emphatically to an exaggeration than to the genuine article. That is, the neural mechanisms activated through perception of an object is intensified when we perceive an exaggerated version of that object, thus deliberate distortions of a stimulus are more mentally exciting than the stimulus itself.

Ramachandran’s assertion that the peak shift effect is fundamental to our understanding of the ‘pleasing effects’ and aesthetic appeal of *all* visual art does not stand up to much scrutiny. Ramachandran often uses the example of representations of the female figure in Indian sculpture to

illustrate how he envisages peak shift functioning in relation to art. Female bodies in Indian sculpture frequently possess exaggerated features such as prominent breasts and narrow waists and therefore, Ramachandran claims, they ‘amplify the “very essence” of being feminine’ (Ramachandran and Hirstein 18). As philosopher John Hyman puts forward in his sceptical critique of Ramachandran’s neuro-aesthetic theory of art, there is simply no evidence that viewers who find these Indian sculptures beautiful have innate or learned stereotypes that interact to produce a peak shift in their response to female body shapes. Moreover, the body shape of these sculptures deviates too far from the norm to function as an example of peak shift and is simply the wrong mechanism to explain what is happening (Hyman 250). There are grounds to heed Hyman’s objections: in cases where the peak shift phenomenon has been observed in animals, the reward stimulus and the non-reward stimulus have been exceptionally alike. For example, if a rat is trained to respond to a tone at 1000Hz frequency and not to respond to a tone at 500Hz, no peak shift will be observed. However, if the rat is trained to respond to a tone at 1000Hz and not to respond to a tone at 950Hz a peak shift stimulus will be observed at approximately 1010Hz. In spite of this, Hyman is ungenerous in outright rejecting Ramachandran’s peak shift argument on the grounds that it is unlikely to be exactly the effect that is occurring. Ramachandran evidently acknowledges the more precise meaning of peak shift in relation to animal learning (as in the rat example above), whereas he admits to using peak shift in a looser sense (206).

Nevertheless, we would benefit from being more circumspect than Ramachandran and less dismissive than Hyman. ‘All art is caricature’ for Ramachandran (Ramachandran and Hirstein 18), but we ought to consider applying concepts such as peak shift in a more judicious, smaller-scale fashion and by combining it with other evidence. Even if not *all* visual art is caricature, cartooning and animation *are* based to a significant extent on simplifying and caricaturing. From this, there are several reasons why peak shift can plausibly tell us something about our response to representations of the face in the specific case of animation and cartoons. In particular, when it comes to facial representations, we are likely to be particularly sensitive to any kind of deviation or exaggeration in how faces appear given the pervasiveness and importance of faces to our everyday existence. Furthermore, as we have seen through the research of the neurocultural view, people familiar with Western culture can, with a high

degree of consensus, associate specific emotion terms with specific prototypical facial expressions. A representation which exaggerates the components expressive of certain facial expressions seems likely to not only enhance recognition but also result in an intensified response (as in a peak shift effect as per Ramachandran's usage) because of a marked deviation from a widely encoded norm.

### **SQUASH AND STRETCH**

Even if one remains sceptical that peak shift or caricature effects are literally the mechanisms at work, they generate a useful starting point to discuss what makes the amplified or exaggerated artistic features of cartooning and animation appealing and salient. We can examine some of the questions raised by peak shift and the caricature effect in a different light by looking towards practical techniques that have been developed by animators over time. In *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (1981), aforementioned Disney veterans Thomas and Johnston codified the 'Twelve Basic Principles of Animation'. Thomas and Johnston based this book on the work of the leading Disney animators from the 1930s onwards and the industry's collective efforts to produce more engaging animations. On a fundamental level, the twelve principles are intended to create the impression that animated characters adhere to basic laws of physics, but they also deal with more complex principles such as emotional timing and character appeal.<sup>98</sup>

For now, we will turn to just one of these twelve principles and the one which is arguably the most important: 'squash and stretch'. Squash and stretch (or stretch and squash) is based on the principle that most objects change shape when they are in motion. This is often demonstrated through looking at how a tennis ball responds to being bounced off the ground. When a tennis ball hits the ground, the impact will cause it to momentarily flatten horizontally. As it begins to bounce off the ground, the ball will then stretch vertically before it returns to its original round shape. Squash and stretch aims to demonstrate this mutability of objects in motion. If an animated tennis ball retained its round shape as

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<sup>98</sup> The twelve principles are: 1) Squash and Stretch; 2) Anticipation; 3) Staging; 4) Straight Ahead Action and Pose to Pose; 5) Follow Through and Overlapping Action; 6) Slow In and Slow Out; 7) Arcs; 8) Secondary Action; 9) Timing; 10) Exaggeration; 11) Solid Drawing; and 12) Appeal (47).

it bounced from the floor, it would not appear a convincing depiction of a tennis ball in motion. Through squash and stretch, animation will manipulate the dimensions or volume of objects in order to exaggerate motion. Thomas and Johnston refer to it as ‘by far the most important discovery’ (47) whilst veteran animator Walt Stanchfield notes that ‘stretch and squash is one of the most used principles in animation. The lack of it can make a scene seem lifeless. The over use of it has not yet occurred’ (14). As Stanchfield notes, sometimes its use will be broad and obvious and sometimes it will be subtle enough that it is felt rather than noticed. This technique is not limited merely to traditional animation either, but sees usage in more photorealistic animation styles and in CGI animation.

Squash and stretch is not used just for inanimate objects like tennis balls, but is absolutely vital to facial animation to demonstrate the flexibility of skin and muscle, to show relations between the individual parts of the face, and to emphasise emotional expression. In chapters one and three, we considered the notion that artistic representations of facial expressions can exaggerate individual components that are expressive of certain emotions in order to enhance their interpretability. Squash and stretch demonstrates this in action. Stanchfield identifies specific strategies for this technique in relation to facial expression:

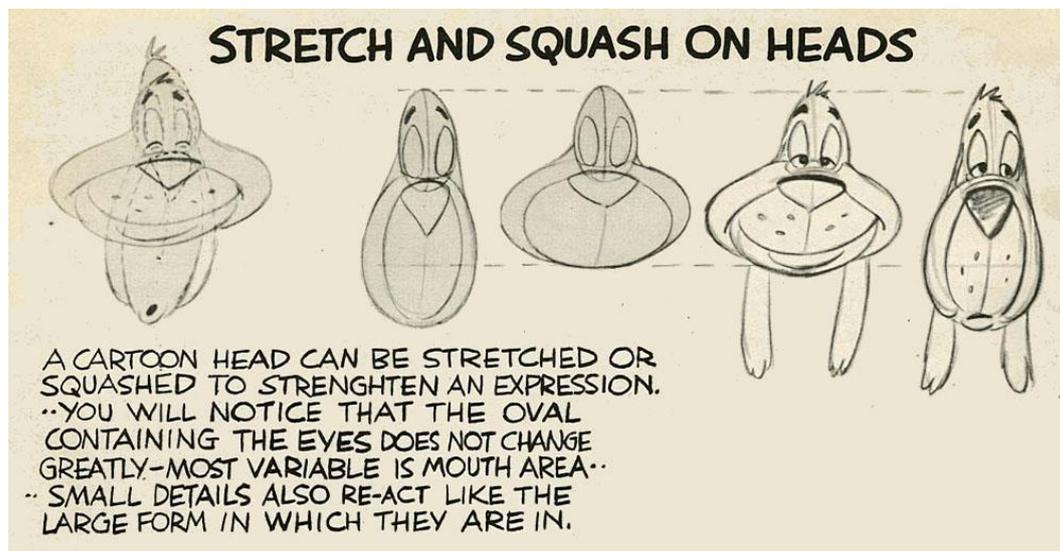


Fig. 17. Animator Preston Blair’s demonstration of squash and stretch on heads: ‘A cartoon head can be stretched or squashed to strengthen an expression. You will notice that the oval containing the eyes does not change greatly – most variable is mouth area - small details also re-act like the large form in which they are in.’ (3)

We capitalize on the use of squash and stretch in the face. For instance, the eyes, opening wide for surprise or fear (stretch), partly closed from the cheek action during a smile (slight squash), or squeezed into slits from anger or suspicion, or strain (squash) ... nothing moves independently in full animation. (13)

On Stanchfield's account, manipulating the geometric dimensions of the eyes through squash and stretch serves (at least) two purposes. First, it can emphasise naturalised facial expressions of emotion, such as surprise, fear, and anger. Second, its usage opens up the possibility of representing conventionalised expressions, which (as per their definition in chapter one) can communicate more complex subjective information (such as the suspicion or exertion Stanchfield suggests). Indeed, animators very typically endorse the claim that the use of squash and stretch for facial expression amplifies or intensifies their appearance. As Preston Blair's example of squash and stretch on heads shows (fig. 17), 'a cartoon head can be stretched or squashed to strengthen an expression'. As we will come onto, the exaggeration involved in squash and stretch may even be *necessary* for the emotional intensity of animated faces to match live-action faces.

Although this technique is intended to make the faces of animated characters seem more 'real', the level of exaggeration typically involved in squashing and stretching facial features goes beyond a mimetic reproduction of reality. This technique does more than create a facsimile or simulation of how faces appear and move in reality. When utilised for facial expression, the squash and stretch technique functions as a dynamic version of the caricature effect version (i.e. the effect occurs for moving images not static images). Just like in the case of caricature, the exaggeration involved in squash and stretch works to enhance recognition and the perceived intensity of non-photorealistic faces. Several studies using photographs (i.e. representations with high levels of realism) have shown that the perceived intensity of emotional expressions increases when the exaggeration of the expression increases (Benson et al. and Calder et al.). This is also the case for cartoon faces (i.e. representations with low levels of realism): increasing geometric intensity or exaggeration increases the perceived emotional intensity (Bartneck and Reichenbach). If we understand squash and stretch as a modification of geometric

intensity, then we can see that a regularly utilised animation technique functions to enhance viewer responses to the represented faces of fictional characters.

### **AMPLIFICATION *PLUS* SIMPLIFICATION**

Thus far, we have considered evidence for the claim that there is a relationship between abstraction, caricaturing, simplification, and amplification with the viewer's capacity to recognise, engage, and respond to representations of faces and facial expression. Peak shift and the caricature effect, I have argued, can inform part of our understanding of the salience and pleasure afforded by animation. This should at least be more convincing than being psychologically subsumed by the cartoon image as in McCloud's view. This chapter began with McCloud's premise of 'amplification through simplification' and the relationship between levels of exaggeration and aspects of recognition and engagement. As phenomena like peak shift and the caricature effect make apparent, amplification of visual stimuli has the capacity to involve heightened mental responses. In McCloud's sense, simplification is synonymous with reduced levels of realism, his own example demonstrating this specifically with the human face. On the basis that amplification is achieved *through* simplification, it follows for McCloud that for facial representation realism is inversely correlated with engagement: the less realistic a face is, the more its meaning or intensity is heightened. However, I propose that, at least in the case of facial expression, McCloud's concept of 'amplification through simplification' requires some refinement.

Before offering my revision, let us first consider what grounds there are to modify McCloud's claim. In a study analysing the relationships between realism, emotional intensity, exaggeration, and uncanniness, Mäkäräinen et al. found that less realistic (or more cartoony) faces required *more* exaggeration to reach the same levels of emotional intensity as a real human face. Their results demonstrated that when a facial expression is simplified, its emotional intensity decreases (fig. 18). The researchers explicitly intended to test McCloud's amplification through simplification as a hypothesis for how realism bears on our response to cartoon images. On this measure, their 'results do not support the idea of "amplification through simplification", but rather they indicate that all realism levels have the same potential' (718). Although facial expressions lost emotional intensity when the level of realism was reduced, exaggeration can compensate for this reduction. This study thus supports the claim that

stylised non-photorealistic representations are capable of communicating emotions that are (at least) equally as recognisable and intense as photorealistically rendered characters or real humans.

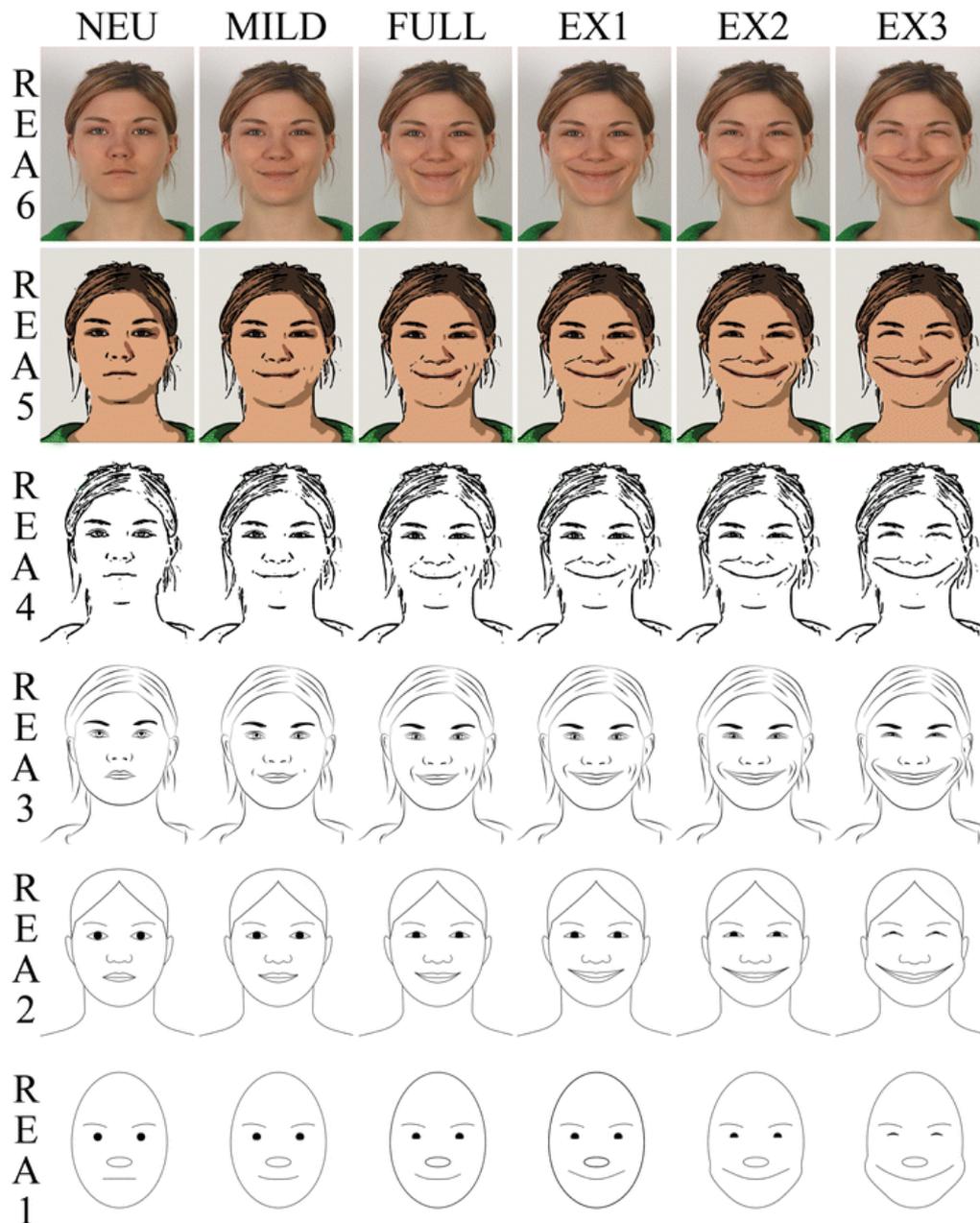


Fig. 18. Stimulus images for the expression of happiness (Mäkäräinen et al. 712). Each row shows one level of realism, ranging from the lowest level of realism (REA1), bottom row, to the highest level of realism (REA6), top row. Each column shows one magnitude of the facial expression, ranging from neutral (NEU) to a full expression of happiness (FULL) up to an extremely exaggerated expression of happiness (EX3).

The findings of Mäkäräinen et al. agree with Wallraven et al. who came to similar conclusions with computer-generated imagery (as opposed to the two-dimensional photographs and cartoons used by Mäkäräinen et al.). Wallraven et al. found that although expression recognition is robust across a range of styles, higher amounts of ‘stylisation’ of images of a human face was linked to reduced perceived emotional intensity. This held true across a range of several different stylisation techniques. Both these studies (looking at both two-dimensional and three-dimensional stylised and non-photorealistic representations) support the claim that reducing realism (i.e. simplification) *alone* has a negative impact on recognition and perceived intensity of emotion. If we accept this claim, then something other than amplification *through* simplification is conceivably taking place. Simplification alone is seemingly insufficient to amplify the expressiveness of, at the very least, faces and facial expression. Again, we need not take McCloud too literally and hold him to high academic standards when he is, so to speak, firing from the hip by claiming that amplification through simplification is central to cartooning. Instead, I will reconfigure McCloud’s claim, and argue that simplification provides greater accommodation to enhance expression. There is undoubtedly a relationship between amplification and simplification, but it is not necessarily a causal relationship – that simplifying something also amplifies something. More exactly, simplifying permits *more* amplification to take place. I propose that, as the basis through which to conceptualise cartoon and animated representations, ‘amplification through simplification’ is better understood as ‘amplification *plus* simplification’.

Why is this distinction worth making? As we will see in the following case study on anime, this revision provides a more accurate description of what is occurring in animation. More importantly though, referring to amplification plus simplification draws attention to the fact that amplification and exaggeration are not mere by-products that emerge from representing something less realistically, but are instead necessary for cartoons and animation to create effects that are equal, if not perhaps greater than, photographic representations. As Mäkäräinen et al.’s findings suggest, less realistic depictions of the face are fully capable of an emotional intensity at least equal to that of photographic depictions, but some level of exaggeration is in fact required. Understood in this way, exaggerating, amplifying, or

caricaturing becomes an important component of artistic representation and suggest essential aesthetic choices in animation.

To demonstrate the revised notion of amplification plus simplification more concretely, we can return to the squash and stretch technique. Mäkäräinen et al.'s findings from their study offers evidence for why principles such as squash and stretch are necessary for animation's illusion of life. As they recommend,

When the geometric properties of a face are the same, a facial expression looks emotionally less intense when presented on a less realistic face. Therefore, if a robot or animated character is intended to communicate emotions with an intensity that is comparable to that of a real human, then human facial expressions should not be mimicked exactly, but should be exaggerated to communicate the same emotional content. (719)

It has been established, first, that squash and stretch can be thought as one means of amplification and, second, that it is used across a range of animation styles. However, even though squash and stretch is used at all levels of animated realism, we are more likely to see this technique deployed to a far greater extent in, say, Disney's traditional non-photorealistic animation style of the 1940s than contemporary Disney's more realistic computer-generated animation. The greater levels of simplification in Disney's traditional animation allows more amplification through squash and stretch to take place whilst the lower levels of simplification in Disney's CG animation decreases the extent to which squash and stretch can be utilised without compromising the visual integrity of its animated representations. In Mäkäräinen et al.'s recommendation, we also find support for the claim that squash and stretch is less about mimetic representation, but more about intentional exaggeration in order to communicate emotion.

As is often the case in psychological studies of this nature, these empirical findings corroborate and enhance our understanding of the knowledge developed by practitioners. Over time, Disney animators likewise came to the realisation that they needed to exaggerate their representations of facial expression to make them compelling and believable. In the studio's earlier years, animators assumed it

would be significantly easier to use photographic images or footage of facial expressions as reference material for their animation of character's facial expressions. The animators used what they called 'photostats', images printed from a single frame of 35mm film. Photostats of actors' faces portraying various expressions were taken and traced directly in the desire to create a 'true to life' image of human expression. However, the animators quickly discovered that these rotoscoped animations that they had produced from photographic images of facial expression often appeared strange, mechanical, and inhuman. But when these animations were exaggerated and reproduced with more traditional cartooning techniques, the animators saw a marked improvement (Thomas and Johnston 319-323). We have a range of evidence here (both empirical studies and practical know-how) that tells us that simplification alone is insufficient to produce positive effects when it comes to recognition and perceived intensity of expressions. Faces that are in some ways simplified or abstracted must also be amplified to generate such effects.

#### **UNCANNINESS IN THE FACE**

To this point, we have considered how amplification, exaggeration, simplification, and abstraction can generate positive effects in relation to representations of the face in animation. What about the obverse of the coin? Despite the ostensibly limitless possibilities of animation, if the goals of an animated film are broadly in line with that of traditional narrative filmmaking norms (such as recognisable characters with whom viewers engage) there are limits that determine how faces and facial expressions can be represented. It is very typical for animation to flout or stretch certain laws of reality. In particular, animated characters and storyworlds may violate our intuitive psychological, biological, physical and ontological expectations whilst still generally conforming to other default assumptions. By way of example, we accept the notion that toys (which are inanimate objects in reality) can walk and talk in *Toy Story* (1995) because these characters otherwise abide by our understanding of human psychology and real-world physics whilst maintaining their essential properties as toys (i.e. although Woody can think and express himself as a human would, his voice-box still spouts catchphrases when his pull-string is operated). The counterintuitive elements of the film (talking toys) are outweighed by the

fictional world and its characters otherwise adhering to our default ontological beliefs and understanding.<sup>99</sup>

This leads us towards something particular about representing facial expressions. If we reflect on which psychological, biological, physical, and ontological expectations are violated in animation, we will find that it is normal for beliefs about physics and the biological potential of bodies to be flouted. For instance, real-world assumptions of physics are often violated by so-called ‘cartoon physics’. Consider an exaggerated example popularised by Warner Bros. animations: when a character runs off a cliff, gravity has no effect until the character notices and reacts. But even in a more hyper-realistic and visually realistic animation like *Toy Story*, we can accept some clear violations of physics. In the film’s climactic set-piece, Woody and Buzz are propelled into the sky by a toy rocket. Utilising Buzz’s plastic wings, they glide through the air for quite some distance and time. In reality, both toys would simply plummet directly to the ground after detaching from the toy rocket, but we are more than happy to accept some bending of the laws of physics for a dramatic denouement. Likewise, violations of biological properties are often fundamental to the fictional worlds of animated narratives; anthropomorphic animals or inanimate objects and super-powered humans are standard features of animations. These are violations of very basic understandings that underpin how the world around us works. Yet, even with all the violations we see in animated films, the basic intuitive assumption that the human face (and body) expresses thoughts, feelings, and attitudes is upheld. Hence, in animation there are many basic assumptions which can be contravened, but the face has a seemingly sacrosanct position in terms of what is violable.

When it comes to representing faces and expressions, I propose that two constants are typically maintained in animated films.<sup>100</sup> First, the ordinary dimensions of the face must maintain an overall physical consistency. As we have seen through the squash and stretch technique, the shape of the face, head, and its individual parts can be exaggerated to emphasise expression. There is often said to be a

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<sup>99</sup> The concept of ‘counterintuitiveness’ is derived from the work of Pascal Boyer and Justin L Barrett’s work in cognitive religious studies.

<sup>100</sup> This is assuming that the film adheres to traditional narrative filmmaking norms.

golden rule for this technique, however: the volume of the head or face must remain roughly constant. For instance, if a face is squashed down vertically, it should be stretched horizontally by approximately the same degree to prevent it appearing strange. Therefore, when the face is exaggerated through animation techniques, certain principles dictate that this manipulation is restricted and within certain loosely defined boundaries. The images used in Mäkäräinen et al.'s study (fig. 18) demonstrate quite clearly the upper limits of the positive effects of exaggeration or amplification. Faces represented at almost all levels of realism under the extremely exaggerated EX3 variable are strange or discomfiting. It should be noted that the extent to which the face can be exaggerated or contorted correlates with the realism of the animation style. That is, the more realistic a representation is, the less potential there is for manipulation that stays within acceptable boundaries. We can again see this demonstrated by fig. 18: the less realistic face renderings (REA1) appear less strange when they are exaggerated compared to photographic representations (REA6).

Evidently, the impact of excessively violating the dimensions and features of a face can produce representations that are alienating, strange, or uncanny. Some violations of facial expression and design are still entirely permissible providing that they are momentary and do not form the basis of the character's regular design. By way of example, animator and cartoonist Tex Avery is generally considered to have originated, or at the very least popularised, the 'eye pop' facial expression (fig. 19). The eye pop involves a character's eyes expanding and stretching out of their eye sockets to



Fig. 19. Examples of 'eye pop' and 'dollar signs in eyes' in Warner Bros. animations. (Left: TV Tropes, Right: Tiny Toons Wiki)

communicate surprise. Clearly, this would constitute a violation of the squash and stretch's principle to maintain consistent volume of the face and its features, but given that eye pop is only a facial expression that appears temporarily for an over-exaggerated expressive comic effect, it is unlikely to prove too unsettling or be said to violate this constant. Certainly, part of the humour in these facial expressions is derived from their over-the-top absurdity and physical impossibility.

The second constant I propose is that the face must maintain its capacity to express attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. This might seem an obvious or straightforward condition, but, given how frequently other physical and biological limitations are violated in the visual, physical, and biological design of animated characters, it is important. Superman is an otherworldly alien who possesses the powers of flight, superhuman strength, x-ray vision, heat vision, cold breath, super-speed, enhanced hearing, and nigh invulnerability, yet he still smiles when he is happy. In animation, it is rare then that characters' faces are not reflective of their thoughts, emotions, and attitudes. This appears to be true for characters even in less realistic animated representations. Whilst animated characters are capable of expressions beyond ordinary human capabilities, these expressions are still contingent on our ordinary understanding of expression. In the case of the eye pop example, this expression, with its outrageously widened eyes, is intended to be understood as an extreme exaggeration of a prototypical expression of surprise; it selects a specific component of surprise (widened eyes) and exaggerates it to a comical degree.

The expressions of animated characters can of course function in far more unusual, conventionalised ways, but these are still rooted in how we ordinarily understand faces to function. Consider an animated character's pupils turning into dollar signs which signals something akin to greed or a desire to make copious amounts of money (fig. 19). This expression is easily legible by virtue of the fact that eyes are ordinarily the means through which humans can interpret intentions, desires, and goals of others. We can see how this extends our discussion of 'conventionalised expressions' in chapter one. Animated characters are not bound by the same human biological limits of expression, thus we are

likely to see forms of expression which are more conventionalised or idiosyncratic in animations.<sup>101</sup> In chapter three, I proposed that films tend toward a romantic view of expression. This is perhaps even more important when it comes to animation. Our intuitive understanding of human psychology – namely that faces typically function as readouts of emotional states or to communicate specific thoughts, feelings, and attitudes – is upheld across a range of animation styles.

Nonetheless, violating these two constants is not uncommon and is done so even in mainstream animated films, however, the result of doing so, sometimes unintentionally, creates an uncanny, disturbing, or even laughable representation. *Toy Story*, by all means a mainstream, popular, and family-oriented film, offers a particularly vivid example of how this can be horrifying. The main toy characters express themselves in similar ways to humans: facial expressions for these characters communicate emotions such as fear and happiness. The characters are likewise rendered in enough detail to make these expressions vivid and recognisable. This is in contrast to the ‘mutant toys’ which, though we later learn are not hostile to the protagonists or deserving of antipathy, are for the most part unable to express to the same extent as the main characters. One particularly unnerving example of these mutant toys is constructed from a baby doll’s head mounted atop a mechanised spider-like body (though unnamed in



Fig. 20. The unsettling Babyface and Woody’s reaction of fear in *Toy Story* (John Lasseter, 1995).

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<sup>101</sup> We will see a way in which ‘greed’ might be represented through the face in live action when we look at *Strike* (1925) in chapter six.

the film, this character is often referred to as ‘Babyface’). Babyface violates both of the constants I have proposed, and the result is appropriately uncanny and unsettling in its violation of several ontological assumptions. First, in terms of the physical appearance of the face, Babyface is missing an eye and has spiked hair that is incongruous for a baby doll. The plastic smooth skin of the doll’s face is likewise at odds with the appearance and movement of its arachnid-like, mechanical lower half. Second, in terms of the face’s expressive capacity, Babyface’s expression is permanently fixed on a grin and is incapable of any other expression. Fig. 20 is particularly evocative of how the mutant toys differ from the main characters; Babyface’s fixed expression greatly contrasts with Woody’s highly prototypical expression of fear.<sup>102</sup> The fact that the mutant toys cannot express either facially or verbally not only leads viewers to the initial hypothesis that these mutant toys are monstrous but also blocks any substantial kind of engagement, even when we learn subsequently that they are not hostile to the protagonist toys.

*Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) presents another example of how contravening these two constants can prove unsettling. In the film’s conclusion, Judge Doom (Christopher Lloyd) is revealed to be a cartoon in disguise. When this is disclosed, he undergoes a transformation: his face remains recognisably human, but his eyes fall out of his eye sockets and are replaced by animated cartoon ones. Again, the result is particularly horrifying. Doom defies a straightforward ontological categorisation: his face appears neither fully human nor fully cartoon; he has a human body that does not seem to abide by physics; and there is a staggering gulf in the levels of realism between his eyes and the rest of his



Fig. 21. Judge Doom’s (Christopher Lloyd) true identity and Eddie Valiant’s (Bob Hoskins) fearful response in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (Robert Zemeckis, 1988).

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<sup>102</sup> Also note the use of underlighting, something we will return to in chapter six.

face. Doom's exaggerated, crazed, blood-red, cartoony eyes are significantly more exaggerated and expressive than the rest of his human face. Akin to the *Toy Story* example, Eddie Valiant's (Bob Hoskins) prototypical expression of fear in response to Doom's transformation directs our response and makes Doom appear all the more disturbing and threatening (fig. 21). Doom's eyes also, peculiarly, appear to possess an expressive agency of their own. At one point, they very literally turn into daggers as he approaches Eddie with murderous intent, the effect of which seems akin to an animal baring its teeth as a sign of aggression or threat. But it remains unclear whether it is an intentional communicative act from Doom (to threaten Eddie) or whether his eyes somehow have an expressive will of their own. The latter interpretation would be a contravention of the second constant I have suggested, in that Doom's eyes do not in fact express his thoughts, feelings, or attitudes but instead are an expressive agent unto themselves, a strange and discomfiting prospect.

The limits to representing faces I have described here can be understood in terms of uncanniness and, in particular, in relation to the 'uncanny valley'. The uncanny valley is a much-discussed concept derived from a hypothetical graph proposed by Masahiro Mori (fig. 22). It refers to the fall off in

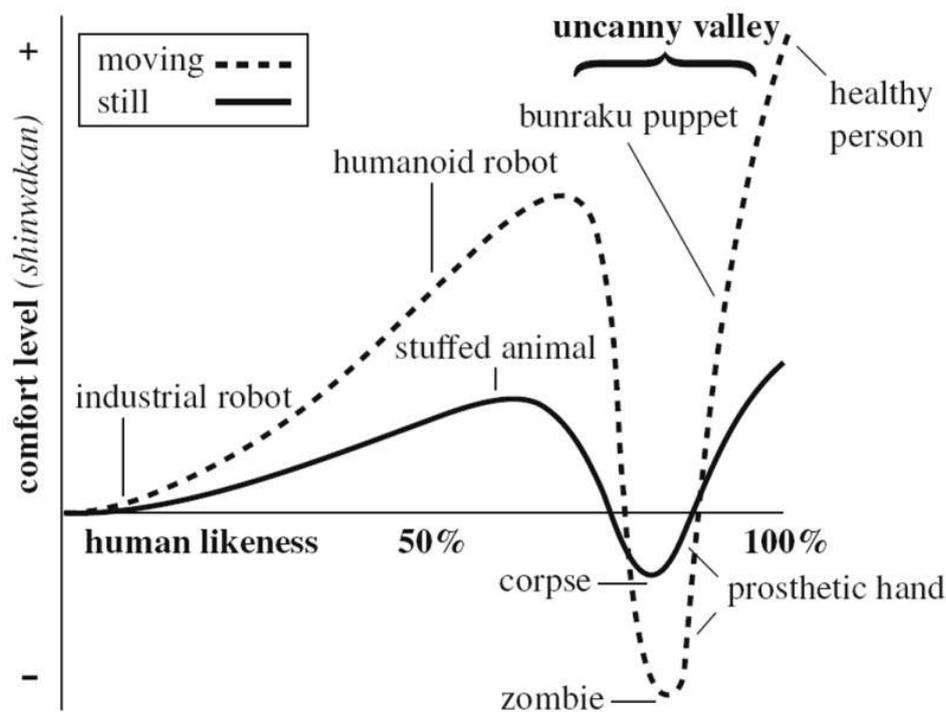


Fig. 22. Masahiro Mori's proposed relation between human likeness and shinwakan, which can be roughly translated as rapport or comfort level (MacDorman et al. 696).

emotional response that happens when we encounter something that is almost, but not quite, human. The graph predicts that as something looks more and more human, it also looks more familiar or agreeable, until it comes to look so human that we start to find any nonhuman imperfections unsettling, at which point its familiarity plummets sharply. This sudden drop in familiarity forms a valley, from which the name of the concept is derived. In terms of the previous example, Judge Doom appears *almost* fully human apart from his menacing, cartoon eyes, and hence can be thought of as uncanny.

Although it would seem appropriate to draw in the uncanny valley here, it remains a fairly ambiguous concept that is often employed to account for any sort of uncomfortable response. As Gray and Wegner describe, the uncanny valley is a well-known concept that has captured many imaginations, but it remains little understood and has not been subject to much empirical research. The few studies there are find only mixed support for its existence and there are conflicting accounts of why it occurs (125). This term has proliferated in recent years following the advancement of CGI and the many animated films that have attempted to create photorealistic characters. The characters of films such as *The Polar Express* (2004) and *Beowulf* (2007) are close in appearance to humans but have been criticised for falling just short and ending up stuck in the uncanny valley. However, clearly it is not just enhanced realism that can produce an uncanny effect; even abstract faces may look strange as the examples from Mäkäräinen et al. make evident (fig. 18). In any case, the uncanny valley directs our attention to the fact that humans are highly sensitive to precisely how non-real human and humanoid representations appear. In light of this fact, I have suggested two constants for facial representation in animated narrative films, the violation of which can produce something akin to uncanniness or, in some cases, disengagement, or repulsion.<sup>103</sup>

### **FACES IN ANIME: THE EYES HAVE IT**

Let us briefly evaluate what we have covered so far. I have put forward the hypothesis that amplification plus simplification is central to representations of the face in non-photorealistic animation. Peak shift

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<sup>103</sup> Such violations could also be for comic purposes (in the vein of what Carroll proposes about norm violations in 'Horror and Humor' (1999)). *The Mask* (1994) serves as a possible example of this.

and the caricature effect demonstrate the positive effects of exaggeration on recognition, perceived intensity, and aesthetic appeal. We have also considered how faces might give rise to uncanniness in animation. From this, I have suggested that there are two constants that are generally not violated when it comes to representing faces in animation. We are now in a position to consider these claims in relation to some examples. To this end, Japanese animation or anime presents a particularly rich case study. In recent years, anime has become commercially successful and crossed over into the mainstream in Western countries. Unlike the contemporary trend towards hyper-realism and the monomania for photorealism in Western animation, anime has followed a completely different path, developing its own visually idiosyncratic style which more often than not eschews many kinds of realism. For the purposes of this chapter, anime provides an illustration of amplification plus simplification in relation to facial features and expression. In anime, facial features are highly streamlined and simplified down to specific evocative elements, especially eyes, and these elements are exaggerated or amplified. As I will explain, it also presents us with a compelling example of how cultural differences can shape the representation of faces and expression.

So far, I have referred to ‘anime’ as if it were one uniform thing. However, anime is an ambiguous and occasionally controversial label. Outside of Japan, the term is ordinarily used in a restrictive sense to refer specifically to animation from Japan or as a Japanese-influenced animation style. Sheuo Hui Gan observes two main definitions, each with their own patterns of usage: ‘(A) anime as a simple abbreviation of “animation” and (B) anime as a culturally specific type of Japanese animation that excludes some forms of animation made in Japan’. I will follow definition B. Though anime has a diverse array of genres, styles, methods of animation, and production methods, there are several unifying conventions of its animation technique and character design. Through some illustrative examples, I will show how some of these shared stylisations and visual designs can be utilised to different ends and to produce different effects. The films that will be discussed here are ones that have enjoyed some amount of critical or commercial success and popularity beyond Japan. Perhaps somewhat tellingly of Western taste, such films have typically tended towards greater realism in comparison to the average anime film, and they are (arguably) less culturally idiosyncratic. For instance,

certainly the best known anime director outside of Japan, Hayao Miyazaki is the co-founder of animation film studio Ghibli and is highly and widely acclaimed for films such as *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), and *Spirited Away* (2001). Miyazaki's characters generally have more realistic faces, with more proportioned eyes and less extravagant hairstyles. However, though the visual style of Miyazaki's films may be slightly more realistic when judged against other anime films or television series, it is evident that they are still considerably less realistic in comparison to the average Western animated narrative film.

As we have seen, in recent years mainstream American animated filmmaking has trended towards a photorealistic and hyper-realistic style and made increasingly conscious efforts to appeal to its global audience; in most cases, both its style of visual depiction and its narrative elements are intended to appeal to as broad a demographic as possible. Japanese anime, by contrast, appears to offer a greater challenge for explaining its widespread appeal. Visually, it is highly distinctive. Anime is often less concerned with creating the 'illusion of life' that has been virtually codified into the fluid style of Western animation. Anime films also often deal with themes and narrative elements that are in some ways particular to Japanese culture. For many scholars, anime's success outside of Japan is a puzzling case given its oft-noted cultural specificity and idiosyncrasy. This fact is made very apparent by looking at the veritable smorgasbord of arguments that have been put forward to attempt to make sense of anime's increase in popularity outside of Japan: for instance, Ian Condry suggests that anime's 'creative collaboration' with global audiences is the key to its proliferation; Susan J Napier emphasises anime's fantastical escapism and explicitly non-referential nature as the main contributors to its success; and Roland Kelts views it as part of a wider 'invasion' of Japanese Pop Culture into Western cultures. These various explanations for the global popularity of anime tend to overlook the particular visual appeal and aesthetic qualities in different styles of anime. Furthermore, as Lars-Martin Sorensen notes, while there is an abundance of scholarship that details the culture specific 'peculiarities' of anime, universalistic explanations are much less common, despite the constant acknowledgement that viewing anime has now become a worldwide phenomenon (16).

It is worth first outlining how anime differs from Western animation in relation to emotion and expression. There are two key ways in which anime sets itself apart from Western animation in this regard. First, and perhaps most significantly, anime characters typically emote far more emphatically than characters in Western animation; and second, as we will look at later, manga and anime have developed their own visual language and iconography for expressing emotion and internal character states.<sup>104</sup> As Sorensen notes, there are no doubt particular features of anime that appeal to audiences because of perceived differences. That is, for viewers outside of Japan, anime often relates novel stories through a distinct and unique visual style. However, the story gets a bit more complex when it comes to character design. Anime characters are generally drawn to look *Mukokuseki* (literally, stateless). As such, they often appear fair-skinned and typically lack features that would, at least stereotypically, denote that they are Japanese.<sup>105</sup> As we saw earlier in the chapter, it may be argued that the less realistic or simpler the design of a cartoon character, the more people it could be said to describe and, consequently, the more likely the viewer will perceive similarity. Yet, I would suggest that the most striking design feature of many anime characters is not their perceived sameness. The most striking design feature of anime characters is their disproportionately large eyes.<sup>106</sup> By contrast to the large and expressive eyes of anime, mouths and noses are often represented with only a single line. The eyes are consequently highly salient and stand out amongst the greatly simplified depictions of characters' faces. Due to the simplified details of characters' faces, the larger and more detailed eyes bear the brunt of communicating and expressing a character's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Put in terms of the

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<sup>104</sup> Generally speaking, manga refers to comics or graphic novels from Japan.

<sup>105</sup> There is not space to discuss this here, but this is a controversial matter. Westerners often perceive anime characters as looking Caucasian. However, Japanese people ordinarily see them as Japanese. Some consider this as a Western form of cultural imperialism, that the 'default' race is white unless clearly demarcated otherwise. The matter is much more complex than this. There is a history in Japan of appropriating whiteness whilst the Japanese practice of rendering themselves with Caucasian features in representational art predates anime. See John G Russell for an overview.

<sup>106</sup> Liu et al. selected fifty characters each from popular Japanese and American animation and found that American animation characters have eyes that are twice as large compared with human faces, whereas Japanese animation characters' eyes are 3.4 times as large.

overarching argument of this chapter, we can say that the overall visual design of anime characters faces has been *simplified* plus the eyes have been selectively *amplified*, thereby strengthening their effect.

In Sorensen's 'Natural Explanation of the Global Success of Anime' (2008), he claims that the enlarged eyes of anime

bestows them with an expressive appearance that helps convey emotional shifts, and serves to communicate and evoke emotions in an amplified manner ... due to the enhanced and simplified facial features of anime characters, there is nothing sadder to watch than the sobbing doll face of a disenchanted anime figure. (20)

On this view, the facial expressions of anime characters are emotionally intensified as a consequence of both simplifying and amplifying facial features. Sorensen overstates his point in claiming that the pinnacle of sadness is a weeping anime character, but he is certainly right to identify that anime and its representation of faces can produce distinctively intense emotional episodes. We will turn to look at *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) as an example of how the enlarged eyes of anime may produce intensified representations of facial expressions of emotion which, in turn, may intensify viewer's responses. However, there is more to faces than emotion. Though emotion is frequently central to anime narratives, I will suggest here alternative effects of anime's stylised representation of the faces that are not limited to just their expressive capacity and the elicitation of emotion. We will also consider *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) as an example of how simplification can generate unreal, distancing, or alienating effects, akin to the uncanniness discussed earlier in this chapter.

### **GRAVE OF THE FIREFLIES: A WAY TO EMOTIONAL INTENSITY**

To this point, we have identified some stylistic tendencies of anime that are relevant to the representation of faces: first, the faces of characters are highly simplified; second, the eyes of characters are large in relation to the head and face; third, emotion is conventionally central to anime narratives; and fourth, characters tend to be highly expressive. Isao Takahata's *Grave of the Fireflies* exemplifies these four tendencies well and is a powerful show of the ways in which anime's stylised and simplified character design bears upon the representation of facial expressions of emotion. The film tells the story

of a teenage boy, Seita, his little sister, Setsuko, and their struggle to survive during the US firebombing of Japan in World War II. As a Studio Ghibli film, *Grave of the Fireflies* is certainly a more realistic example of Japanese animation in terms of its visual design. Regardless, the film is without question distinct in comparison to the dominant norm of Western animation. In several ways, it is visually and stylistically characteristic of anime: the animation is ‘limited’ (at least in contrast to many Western animated films)<sup>107</sup> and the characters have amplified and simplified features.

*Grave of the Fireflies* makes a strong case for the capacity of simplified and exaggerated faces to possess an emotional intensity equal to, if not greater than, photorealistic representations. One of its most vocal champions, Roger Ebert referred to it as ‘an emotional experience so powerful that it forces a rethinking of animation’ (‘Great Movie’). Indeed, its reputation borders on infamy for its ‘tear-jerking’ capacity and has the dubious accolade of being considered amongst the most depressing films ever made.<sup>108</sup> This view does a slight disservice to the film, though. *Grave of the Fireflies* is not merely ‘misery porn’; it is filled with moments of beauty and levity (which, admittedly, are perhaps responsible for heightening its tragic elements). An entire spectrum of emotional tones is presented throughout the film: fear and misery are counterbalanced with happiness and child-like playfulness. These emotional tones are vividly and evocatively played out across the faces of the film’s young protagonists. Throughout, we are exposed to Seita and Setsuko’s facial expressions of grief, pain, fear, and joy. I have argued in this chapter that simplifying faces and facial features means they can accommodate amplified and intense representations of emotional expression. We see this on full display in *Grave of the Fireflies*: tears roll down Seita’s face the size of pebbles whilst Setsuko’s unadulterated joy is writ large through her expressive eyes. The emotional expressions of the main characters have been exaggerated to a large degree which has the effect of enhancing both their interpretability and also their perceived intensity. Takahata, the director, stresses that exaggeration is intrinsic to animation and that

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<sup>107</sup> ‘Limited animation’ is a process of making animation that does not redraw entire frames but reuses common parts between frames. Although initially used in the interest of saving time and money, it has become a stylistic feature of anime.

<sup>108</sup> For instance, it was ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in *Empire* magazine’s ‘The Top 10 Depressing Movies’ (Braund).

this exaggeration typically entails a perceived intensification of emotional expression. As he explains, in animation ‘expressions are always exaggerated... an animated laugh is the happiest thing in the world, and a crying face is an all-out tear fest’ (8).

In this quotation, we also see Takahata juxtaposing happiness and sadness, two ostensibly contrasting emotions. This is a juxtaposition that is likewise apparent in the stark emotional contrasts of *Grave of the Fireflies*, wherein moments that feel like the ‘happiest thing in the world’ jostle up against moments that are ‘all-out tear fests’. There are two sequences in the film that demonstrate this contrast: first, Seita and Setsuko releasing fireflies into the abandoned bomb shelter in which they come to live, and second, Setsuko’s death from malnutrition in the very same place. Before this, some brief description is necessary to clarify how the emotional tone of the film is established. The narrative begins with the conclusion of the story: Seita dying alone from starvation in a train station. In death, his spirit is then reunited with his sister, Setsuko. The remainder of the film is told through flashback. This opening generates some amount of narrative intrigue (at the outset, it remains unclear precisely how Setsuko died or what events unfurled for Seita to reach this level of destitution) but, more significantly, immediately showing that both protagonists die in the opening colours the film’s emotional tone. We watch with dread knowing of Seita and Setsuko’s eventual demise and we know that each of Seita’s decisions dooms them closer to their death. As I have said, there are moments of beauty and joy in the film, but they are rendered bittersweet by the narrative structure of the film.

Coming back to the two sequences in question, the first of these occurs a little over halfway through the film. With their mother dead, their home destroyed and having decided to leave their aunt’s house due to her hostile treatment, Setsuko and Seita are living alone in an abandoned bomb shelter. One night, Seita releases hundreds of fireflies into the darkened shelter to illuminate their makeshift home and bring some pleasure to their hard lives. This sequence stands out as one of several moments of joy in the film and is visually striking. We see the siblings as silhouettes entering the dark shelter. Seita releases but a few fireflies cupped in his hand, and the shelter lights up slightly, much to the delight of Setsuko. Seita then reveals an entire bucket containing hundreds of fireflies. He releases them. As he does this, Setsuko reacts with awe and wonder, which shifts into an exuberant expression of happiness

as the shelter becomes aglow with the bioluminescence of the fireflies (fig. 23). The shifting lighting generated by the fireflies visually accentuates Seita and Setsuko's faces and expressions, which dominate the image. Their eyes and cheeks glisten with the light of the fireflies. Likewise, the engulfing darkness of the shelter and the fireflies' lack of visual detail (as fig. 23 shows, many are represented simply by an orb of light) further isolates and pushes our attention towards the characters and their reaction to the situation.

After this initial excitement, the siblings lie down and gaze at the fireflies dancing. For Seita, the impression of the fireflies leads him to reminisce about his father at a military ceremony; the dots of light from the fireflies begin to merge into new images, becoming spotlights, city lights, and fireworks representing Seita's remembrance of a happier time. Seita relates to Setsuko his memories of a naval ceremony of which their father was a part. Seita starts to sing a military anthem, then springs up and simulates the firing of an assault rifle. Holding up his imaginary gun to the darkness and dancing fireflies, his body slumps and his face becomes downcast as he wonders aloud whereabouts his father is fighting. This is a frequent strategy of *Grave of the Fireflies*: to introduce a moment of childish play and happiness then proceed to undercut it with a reminder of the reality of the sibling's situation. This scene is one of a number of sequences in which we see Seita and Setsuko engaging in and deriving pleasure from simple and child-like activities. It was Takahata's intention to show that, despite their dire situation, the characters were genuinely having fun: 'It's not only that their lives were substantial,



Fig. 23. Setsuko's elation watching fireflies in *Grave of the Fireflies* (Isao Takahata, 1988).

but that they were *enjoying* their days' (10). In this sequence – seeing Seita and Setsuko's joy evocatively depicted through their facial expressions – this genuine enjoyment is made clearly perceivable. The fact that Seita and Setsuko are able to experience, and visibly so, this happiness in spite of their terrible circumstances heightens the emotional significance of what is a relatively simple act. The joyfulness of the scene is thus heightened by its relief with the moments of struggle and despair throughout the film.

Setsuko's death stands in sharp relief to the enjoyable days depicted in the film. Leading up to this, both children have been suffering greatly from malnutrition. Seita has resorted to theft and looting in order to feed himself and his sister. In desperation, Seita decides to withdraw all his mother's savings, spending it on a large quantity of food. On his way home, he discovers that his father, a captain in the Imperial Japanese Navy, is likely dead after hearing news of the decimation of Japan's navy. Distraught, Seita rushes back to their makeshift home in the bomb shelter with his bundle of food, but it is already too late; he finds Setsuko lying still on the ground with her eyes closed. He notices that Setsuko is sucking on marbles in the delirious belief that they are fruit drops. In a bleak twist of the childish playing of make-believe and object substitution, Setsuko is hallucinating inedible items to be food. Her voice strained and weak, she offers her brother rice balls, which are in reality small stones. Seita realises the severity of his sister's condition (fig. 24); in close-up, his face turns to fear (A), which gives way to sorrow (B). This realisation launches him into action, he hurriedly prepares some watermelon to feed



Fig. 24. Seita processes Setsuko's waning health in *Grave of the Fireflies* (Isao Takahata, 1988).

his sister. Having fed her a small amount, he appears momentarily hopeful (C). Setsuko thanks her brother before he rushes off to cook something more substantial. He leaves and the shot lingers on Setsuko's motionless body; Seita's voice-over states matter-of-factly: 'She never woke up.'

The inexpressiveness and lifelessness of Setsuko's face in this sequence stands in stark contrast to her exaggerated emotional expressions that have been front and centre in the film to this point. As in the previous scene, the simplified facial features that are the locus of her highly intense emotional expressions – her eyes and mouth in particular – are drawn significantly smaller in her dying moments (compare fig. 23 with fig. 25). Seita's vivid expression of fear and sadness in response to Setsuko's fatal condition is important too in this sequence in directing our concern and identifying the severity of the situation. When combined with our knowledge from the beginning of the film that Setsuko will likely die at some time, our concern for Setsuko is appropriately elevated. The lingering image of Setsuko lying motionless holds us on emotional tenterhooks before Seita's voice-over delivers the final sucker punch.

Together, these scenes demonstrate different facets of *Grave of the Fireflies*' intense emotional experience. Part of this emotional intensity is also surely attributable to the fact that both its protagonists are young: Seita is fourteen years old whilst Setsuko is just four years old. In this regard, the simplified and amplified design of these characters is once again important. The childishness of the main



Fig. 25. Setsuko on her deathbed in *Grave of the Fireflies* (Isao Takahata, 1988).

characters, especially Setsuko, is greatly emphasised through their visual design. In reference to animated children's films, Torben Grodal has argued the salience or appeal of certain characters in such films relies upon our strong innate emotional disposition to care for neonates. This is achieved by exaggerating aspects of childishness in the visual design of particular characters (29). Thus, some characters are designed to trigger emotional responses of caring through the possession of features such as heads that are large in relation to the body, big eyes, and a lack of motor skill. *Grave of the Fireflies* is by no means a film aimed at children, but Grodal's argument is apt for understanding some of the emotional resonance of *Grave of the Fireflies*. Setsuko's visual design undoubtedly emphasises her need for care: she has a head that is proportionately larger than her body, she has large eyes, and she physically moves in an exaggeratedly childish manner. With Setsuko's – arguably avoidable – death from malnutrition, an evolutionary account à la Grodal would say that the film denies the fulfilment of these nurturing instincts elicited through her visual design.

Some of the film's success in eliciting emotional responses through care and concern is also because Setsuko's physical and expressive behaviour is highly believable. As a young child, it is made clear that Setsuko is still developing regulation for emotional behaviours and the expression thereof. 'Emotion regulation' refers to ways in which individuals moderate the intensity, duration, and type of emotions they experience; the situations under which they experience a given emotion; and how and whether they eventually express those emotions (Niedenthal and Ric 199). Setsuko does not conceal her emotions and, as a result, there is a manifestly strong relationship between her outward expression and inner state; she smiles vividly when she is happy whilst her sadness is unfiltered and intense. This said, she is evidently cognisant of the ways in which her emotional behaviour and expression can influence the behaviour of others. In one moment, Setsuko expresses her hunger by refusing to walk and crying in the street. To placate her, Seita hands over to her a tin of fruit drops. She stops crying temporarily but resumes even louder as soon as she believes that there are no fruit drops actually left in

the tin. Seita hits the can, several fruit drops that were stuck to the bottom of the tin tumble out and, sure enough, Setsuko immediately stops crying.<sup>109</sup>

*Grave of the Fireflies'* well-deserved reputation for producing intense emotional responses I have argued is in part attributable to its simplified and amplified visual representation of characters' faces, as well as the visually exaggerated means by which they express themselves. I would not be the first to speculate that it is plausible that the film succeeds precisely *because* it is animated. There have been several live-action television and film adaptations of the source novel on which the animation is based, none of which have enjoyed the same level of critical or commercial success as the animated version. Without mimetically reproducing reality, the animation is capable of representing not just emotions, but also ideas and images in a refined and amplified manner.

#### ***GHOST IN THE SHELL: A WAY TO UNCANNINESS***

Through *Grave of the Fireflies*, we have seen how the simplified and amplified designs of the film's characters enhances the recognisability and intensity of characters' expressions. Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* provides a striking counterpoint to this case. As an anime film, character designs in *Ghost in the Shell* are both simplified and exaggerated, but the effect is far removed from the emotional intensity of *Grave of the Fireflies*. As I will show, the particular way in which anime simplifies and amplifies faces and facial expressions can be used to radically different ends. Instead, the represented face in *Ghost in the Shell* produces an alienating or uncanny effect as well as serving some of the thematic and philosophical elements at the heart of the film.

Peter Suderman succinctly summarises *Ghost in the Shell* as 'part futuristic action movie and part philosophy lecture, in which artfully constructed animated action sequences serve as vehicles for investigations into the nature of consciousness'. Set in the year 2029, cyborgs – humans augmented with mechanical or electronic components – are commonplace. Human brains are able to connect to the

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<sup>109</sup> This sort of episode, familiar to many who have spent time around young children, is perhaps a good demonstration of Fridlund's claim that expressions are chiefly directed towards influencing the behaviour of others.

internet directly whilst bodies are augmented to the extent that, for some, the only remaining recognisably human body part is the brain. One such cyborg, Major Motoko Kusanagi, is an officer in Section 9, an elite, secretive public-security agency that deals with special operations, including counter terrorism and cyber-crime. The plot follows Kusanagi and the operatives of Section 9's investigation into the Puppet Master, a prolific and mysterious cyber-criminal. In the world of the film, although the physical human body can be supplanted by an artificial cybernetic body, referred to as a 'shell', technology is still not advanced enough to fully digitise the mind, consciousness or, as the film sometimes gestures towards, the soul. This inimitable mark of humanity is referred to as a person's 'ghost'. A ghost is the individual's self, which remains intact even as one's physical body becomes more and more replaced or integrated with machines and computers. Kusanagi barely exists in her original human form; she retains only a fragment of her original organic grey matter, which is housed inside her artificial and cybernetic body. The philosophical overtones are readily apparent. The English translation of the film's title signals this particularly overtly with its reference to Gilbert Ryle's derogatory description of Descartes' mind-body dualism, what Ryle referred to 'with deliberate abusiveness, as the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine' (5). *Ghost in the Shell* seeks to offer reflections on mind-body dualism and broadly looks at the question of what it is to be human and what it is to have

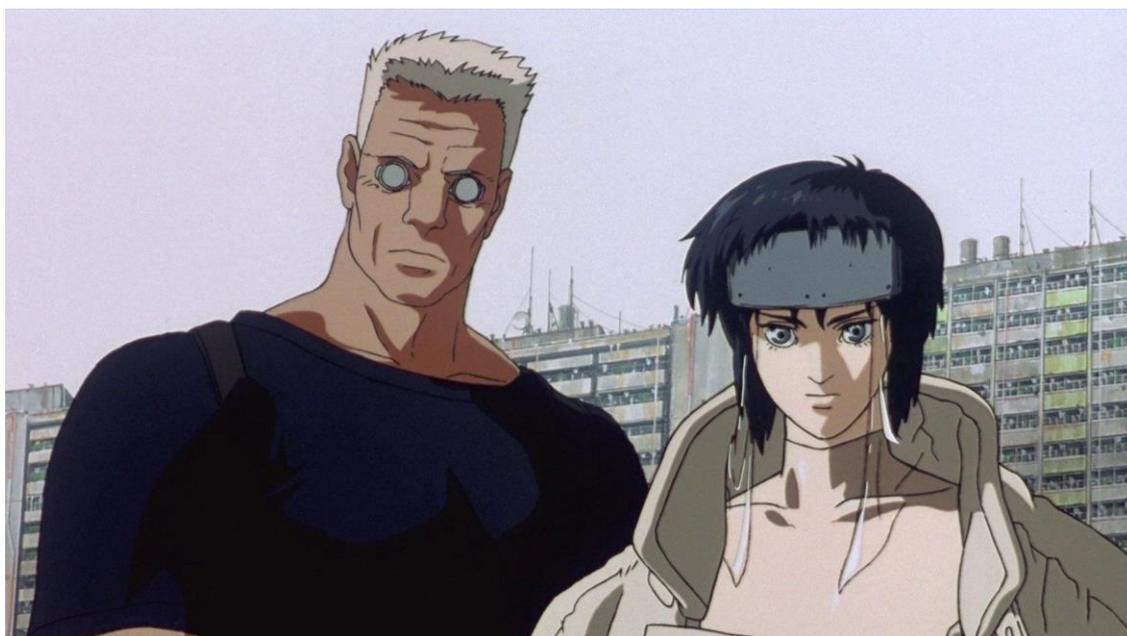


Fig. 26. Batou and Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995).

consciousness. Though I will offer no further contribution to the ever-growing mass of philosophical treatments of *Ghost in the Shell*'s themes and ideas, I will propose that the exaggerated visual design and (in)expressive behaviour of the central character brings to the surface some of the film's themes and ideas. As opposed to intensifying emotion, the simplified and exaggerated designs of the film's characters emphasise the non-humanness of the cyborg characters.

As is typical of anime characters, and especially female characters, Kusanagi has relatively large eyes. However, unlike most anime characters, Kusanagi's eyes are devoid of emotion and expressivity for the duration of the film (fig. 26). The fact that Kusanagi rarely either blinks or emotes is made all the more striking and noticeable as a consequence of her large eyes. Nevertheless, the film leads us to understand that Kusanagi is fully capable of emotion. When asked by her partner Batou why she goes diving in the ocean in spite of the risks to her artificial body, Kusanagi explains that she does so in order to feel emotions, the implication being that she does so in order to feel human: 'I feel fear. Anxiety. Loneliness. Darkness. And perhaps, even hope.' Kusanagi speaks in an articulate way of her inner experience. Throughout the film, she appears to have an awareness of her feelings in response to her environment and she has a strong sense of her self. Yet, despite this emotional self-knowledge, her emotions are not typically expressed through her physical body. The lack of expressivity of her eyes and face underlines the disconnect between her mind and body. This, in part, thus violates the second constant about faces that I suggested: her face often does not seem to reliably tell us anything about her attitudes, emotions, and thoughts.

This detachment between mind and body is further reinforced by the film's action sequences, wherein Kusanagi's physical movements and actions create the impression that she views her body merely as a functional tool to achieve her goals as opposed to integrated part of her self. In the film's climatic action scene, she intentionally tears her entire body apart in her efforts to destroy a tank. The fundamental assumption that faces and bodies ordinarily express inner attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts is not only made ambiguous in *Ghost in the Shell*, but this ambiguity is emphasised by the visual design of its characters. The 'doll-face' look characteristic of anime is here utilised to create a distance between viewers and Kusanagi. In this way, the visual design of Kusanagi and her face serves

as a vehicle through which the film develops specific themes and questions. The simplified design of her character but the lack of any emphatic displays of emotion seems then to demonstrate an outcome of simplification *without* amplification when it comes to representing facial expressions. I initially suggested that the separation of simplification from amplification can lead us to consider key creative or aesthetic decisions. It is cases like *Ghost in the Shell* where we find some benefit to this distinction. There is no amplification of facial expression or movement to accompany the simplified facial designs of *Ghost in the Shell*. As the range of research we looked at earlier in this chapter suggested, increasing simplicity alone results in a reduction in perceived intensity, thus, in the case of *Ghost in the Shell*, creating the impression of a distanced and muted emotional tone.

### **WHY EYES?**

These two contrasting examples show the importance of the visual design of character's faces in anime. In particular, they exemplify the prominence of eyes in the visual design of anime. But *why* is it the case that Japanese animation emphasises the eyes to such an extent? The standard answer to this question is to attribute it to the pervasive influence of the 'Japanese Walt Disney', Osamu Tezuka. This story goes that Tezuka was greatly inspired by Disney and other popular US animation characters; the likes of Betty Boop, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck were all drawn with disproportionately large eyes in their earlier designs (Brenner 7). Tezuka's art style and character designs were subsequently emulated by other Japanese animators, thereby forming the basis for anime facial design as it is seen today. However, this answer, though partly true, is an overly simplistic account. Artistic conventions that become this widespread often proliferate and survive for a reason, whether it is due to a specific salience or because they 'mesh' well with people's perceptual make-up. I believe we can get a more complete answer to the question of the particular design of faces in anime. In recent years, there has been increasing evidence that, rather than distributing their fixations evenly across the face as Westerners do, Eastern observers fixate upon the eye region to determine facial expression.<sup>110</sup> This means that Easterners have more difficulty distinguishing facial expressions that look similar around the eye

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<sup>110</sup> See Haensel et al., Jack et al. and Senju et al. for studies in support of this.

region. In light of this, supposing that Tezuka had instead drawn all his characters with proportionate eyes or with less exaggerated eyes, it seems less likely that this stylisation would have caught on.

If we go beyond psychological literature and the representation of eyes in animation, we can find some further evidence for this claim. For instance, we can see this cultural difference in face perception clearly in the appearance of ‘emoticons’ that have been typically favoured by Eastern and Western internet users. Emoticons – typographic displays of facial expression that are used to convey emotions or subjective states in writing – can be understood as an extreme form of simplification or, as McCloud would call it, iconic abstraction of facial expression. Indeed, the name is a portmanteau of the words ‘emotion’ and ‘icon’. They effectively function as nonverbal cues that facilitate understanding in online chat, forums, and social media, much like how facial expressions work in face-to-face interaction. Western emoticons are written in the horizontal style and primarily use the *mouth* to convey emotional states, e.g. :) to represent ‘happy’ and :O to represent ‘surprise’. Eastern emoticons, on the other hand, are written in the vertical style and use the *eyes* to communicate emotional states, e.g. ^^ to represent ‘happy’ and O.O to represent ‘surprise’. We might recognise these cultural differences of facial perception, and the corresponding impact on how emoticons are represented, as a manifestation of the ‘dialect theory’ put forward in chapter two. That is, Eastern emoticons emphasise different features of facial expression than Western emoticons. As I have said, cultural differences can shape what expressive *components* are selected and exaggerated for communication and expression. These sorts of cultural differences in representing facial expression might result in errors in translation or a lack of nuance, but they do not render communication through emoticons across cultures impossible. An emoticon like this :) may be a less intuitive way of representing happiness to a Japanese person, but it does not erect an insurmountable barrier to understanding.

For online communication, emoticons have been more or less superseded by ‘emoji’. Similar in purpose to emoticons, emoji are pictographs of faces, objects, and symbols. The large body of research on emoticons has yet to be replicated for emoji but early studies suggest that they are utilised by users very similarly: to convey and modify the meaning and emotional valence of text-based communication (Miller et al. 260). The origins of emoji emphasise a central tenet of anime and manga,

namely, the Japanese tendency towards conventionalised symbolic and iconic images to represent emotional and subjective states. Emoji were invented in 1990 by Shigetaka Kurita, who was inspired by manga art and kanji characters, and intended for a Japanese user base. The word is derived from the Japanese *e* ('picture') and *moji* ('character') (hence the resemblance to the word 'emoticon' is a happy coincidence). It is apparent that a number of emoticons and emoji, particularly those that are favoured by Eastern Asian internet users, were in fact derived or inspired from the visual iconography of anime and manga, something we will turn to momentarily.

Of course, though the use of emoticons and emoji might tell us something about contemporary cultural differences in facial expression, when facial expressions are represented artistically (and not just for communication) something more complex is happening. Some caution should be exercised if we are to draw direct links between 'everyday' perception and art. Just because a behaviour exists in ordinary scenarios, does not mean that it necessarily translates to artistic representation. As David Bordwell has shown with regards to eye behaviour in live-action narrative films, even though East Asian cultural norms typically requires flexible use of eye contact and eye aversion in comparison to Western cultures, this is for the most part simply not reflected in filmmaking from such cultures (334). For example, Japanese etiquette usually discourages people from looking fixedly at their conversational partner, but in Japanese live-action filmmaking, characters in conversation maintain eye contact with comparable frequency to characters in American live-action filmmaking. This is where I believe that a cognitive culturalist approach provides a more nuanced response to questions of representing facial expression. There are cultural differences in the production and recognition of facial expression as well as expressive behaviour, but the process of representing something artistically can transform or erode said differences. In the case of animation, it is possible that amplification plus simplification can erase certain cultural differences and 'dialects'. Thus, the by-product of creating exaggerated depictions of the bodies, faces, and emotions of human – or indeed animal – characters is that it enhances their universal appeal.

Nonetheless, as we will see, the complete picture is slightly more complicated than this. It too would be an oversimplification to say that anime can be exclusively characterised as appealing to

universal proclivities. Anime possesses its own vocabulary of conventionalised facial expressions to express many thoughts, feelings, and attitudes which have no natural form of expression. Equally, some facial expressions which do have a prototypical or naturalised form of expression, such as anger, are often represented in atypical ways.

### **CONVENTIONALISED EXPRESSIONS IN ANIME AND MANGA**

Despite the putative universality of anime filmmaking and television, its reliance upon numerous conventionalised visual cues is one clear way in which it is culturally idiosyncratic. Arguably, the two films that we have looked at thus far have made an impact outside of Japan in part because they do not feature many of anime and manga's highly conventionalised expressive features and instead skew towards representing more universally recognisable elements.<sup>111</sup> The reliance on conventionalised visual symbols in anime is especially apparent through the ways in which many emotions and specific subjective states are communicated. Contemporary Japanese animation and cartooning relies upon a number of generic and exaggerated facial symbols to convey the emotions or subjective states of characters. As a consequence, there are some clearly identifiable barriers to recognising and understanding the expressions of anime characters for uninitiated viewers. As Brenner notes of anime and manga, 'one of the most common stumbling blocks in understanding ... is the cultural short hand found in every story' (51). We have seen how amplification and simplification bears upon naturalised emotional expression, but how might it bear upon conventionalised expressions? Just as the simplified facial designs of anime amplifies clarity and intensity in naturalised expressions of emotion, the wide breadth of anime's conventionalised expressions can be attributed to the visual designs of its characters, which, due to their simplicity, are able to accommodate an incredibly large variety of exaggerations and distortions.

In chapter one, we considered ways in which expressions of cognitive, affective, or qualitative states may become conventionalised. I suggested that (audio)visual mass art is particularly well-suited

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<sup>111</sup> Recall my claim in chapter one that films which rely to a greater extent on naturalised expressions (as opposed to conventionalised) will likely have wider appeal.

to support the regularity and normativity required to support the conventionalisation of expression. Indeed, manga and anime offer an excellent demonstration of this. Many common conventionalised facial gestures were developed for the black and white manga format, which required concise and quick communication of emotions in a limited space. We will focus our attention here towards a select few. A short descriptive list, adapted from Brenner, will offer some insight into the range of these expressions:

- Sweat drop(s) near forehead = Embarrassment or anxiety
- Pulsing vein near forehead = Anger
- Dark red blush under eyes = Embarrassed
- Prominent canine tooth = Animalistic behaviour / losing control
- Dog ears/tail = Begging
- Ghost drifting away from the body = Fainting
- Snot bubble emanating from nose = Asleep
- Shadow over face = Extreme anger
- Nosebleed = Sexual arousal
- Ice/snow = On the receiving end or cruel behaviour

For those with no prior knowledge, the relationship between the visual appearance of some of these expressions and what they express is reasonably straightforward and intuitive whilst others are more unusual and complex. For anime and manga, symbolic conventionalised expressions inform us of the subjective or emotional state of the character through referential knowledge, generated by previous learning. The fact that they are used with high regularity across different art works likewise strongly supports their ability to express specific thoughts, feelings, and attitudes quickly. Let us start with two simpler examples.

- i. Large sweat drops drawn on the forehead ordinarily indicate states of emotional discomfort such as embarrassment, nervousness, or anxiety. Some of the more obvious conventionalised expressions are so because they select and amplify specific components of human physiological responses. In this case, emotional stress – such as being nervous – can involve the triggering of physiological processes such as the acute stress response (popularly referred to as the ‘flight-or-fight response’) and part of this response can involve the production of sweat.

- ii. Anger in anime is signified by a ‘cruciform popping vein’ on the forehead (often in a similar location as where the bead of sweat would be drawn). Again, we see a parallel in physiological reactions to emotional states: an angered individual may experience a rise in blood pressure and a building of muscle tension which forces veins to the surface. More simply though, the cruciform vein can also be accompanied with a prototypical expression of anger, rendering its meaning quite apparent.

This is a good example of what I said in chapter two about the Componential Approach to facial expression, and how artistic representations of emotion may take particular components of an emotion and exaggerate them. For both of these conventionalised expressions, specific components that are characteristic of physiological responses that we understand to be related to subjective states are isolated and then exaggerated. We are thus able to recognise the emotion through perception of individual components of that emotion. Because these expressions are rooted in human physiological responses, an uninitiated viewer could intuitively and, without any prior knowledge, understand what they signify. Let us move on to some more complex examples.

- iii. A snot bubble emanating from a character’s nose, which often inflates and deflates in synchronisation with their breathing or snoring, is typically used to communicate that a character is sleeping. This finds an almost direct equivalence in Western cartoons and animation with ‘Zzz’, an onomatopoeic representation of snoring. Both of these originate in comics and attempt to resolve the difficulty in communicating that a character is sleeping in a still image.
- iv. Staying with the nasal theme, characters will at times experience nosebleeds, which range from small trickles to gushing streams. These nosebleeds, which predominantly but not exclusively afflict male characters, are meant to signal sexual arousal. Although the notion that sexual arousal causes the heart rate and blood pressure to rise is well-documented, there is no medically established connection between nosebleeds and arousal.

For these two conventionalised expressions, the link between the expression and that which is expressed is more complex. As such, for one unfamiliar with these expressions, it would not be immediately

apparent what is being expressed. The uninitiated viewer would naturally be forced in these cases to turn towards the context in which these expressions appear in order to discern their meaning.

Even though these conventionalised expressions or visual symbols are often cited as distinctive and unusual features of anime and manga, it is overly simplistic to suggest that this is a particular quirk unique to Japanese comic art and animation. Western cartooning and animation utilise conventionalised expressions which would equally prove to be a barrier to understanding for a Japanese viewer. Cartoonist Mort Walker's *The Lexicon of Comicana* (1980) names and catalogues the graphic emblems and symbols used in Western-style comics, what he refers to as 'symbolia'. Though his dictionary is partly facetious and satirical, it has proven instructive for many practitioners for providing a virtually encyclopaedic collection of vocabulary, giving definition to previously unnamed and ill-defined iconic symbols. The breadth of symbolia in Walker's *Lexicon* emphasises that the heavy reliance on conventionalised forms of expression is equally endemic in Western cartooning and animation.

Consider another example that is a common convention in Western animation. To communicate that a character is dazed, normally from a blunt head trauma, a halo of twittering birds or twinkling stars will orbit over a character's head. How do we make sense of this? The circling stars are likely derived from the experience of what is referred to as 'seeing stars'. That is, a blow to the head can place pressure on the tissues responsible for translating nerve impulses from the eyes into images, which in turn causes the cells to discharge, scattering electrical impulses across the cortex in a random manner. Our visual system interprets this as seeing lights in a twinkling disorganised pattern. Like the conventionalised expressions in anime and manga we have considered, circling stars is a conventionalised expression of a subjective state grounded in a metaphorical representation of human biology, in this case a neuronal response to being hit on the head. This explanation accounts well enough for the stars, but what of circling birds? The line of relation between being struck on the head and orbiting birds is far less clear for a viewer unfamiliar with this convention. Just as an American viewer might be confused seeing a fountain of blood spontaneously erupt from an anime character's nose, a Japanese viewer would, at first, also find it unusual when birds start flying over a character's head.

The impact of these cultural differences in conventionalised artistic expressions can be overstated; as I suggested in chapter one, viewers are capable of quite easily learning conventionalised and idiosyncratic expressive behaviour based on the contexts and situations in which these expressions occur. Although, by necessity, some learning is involved, an average viewer would be able to interpret what is being signalled in these displays if exposed at least more than once to the contexts in which these expressions appear. Circling birds may be an unusual expression, but given the specific context in which it appears it would take little exposure for a viewer to understand fully the meaning of this expression. For example, *Pluto's Fledgling* (1948) is a Disney animated short film in which there is a twice repeated gag of Pluto falling from atop a house. Both times, Pluto falls and hurts himself in an identical manner (the very same frames are re-used), and then we see birds circle over his head. Given the over-the-top portrayal of Pluto's tumble (accompanied with his pained facial expressions) the link between circling birds and Pluto's dazed, injured state is readily apparent. If this short film were a viewer's first encounter with the halo of twittering birds, this alone would likely be sufficient for the viewer to grasp what is being signalled by circling birds. Further exposure beyond this short film would very quickly confirm this understanding. It is also probable that the amplification and simplification that I have argued are intrinsic to cartooning and animation means that expressive acts in these art forms often appear in very clear and exaggerated ways. This, in turn, is likely to insure against any vagueness of meaning.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have considered how faces and facial expression are represented in animated narrative filmmaking and some of the effects of these representations. I have argued that 'amplification plus simplification' is central to representation in cartooning and animation. This hypothesis claims that animation selects, simplifies, and amplifies specific expressive features or components that are expressive of emotion. This, in turn, can enhance recognition and the perceived emotional intensity of a given character's facial expression or gesture. To justify this claim we have considered a range of evidence that links caricaturing and exaggeration of visual stimuli to heightened mental responses. To show amplification plus simplification in action, we have looked at a particular popular type of animated

filmmaking (namely, anime) which frequently features highly simplified representations of faces with large and expressive eyes. Through *Grave of the Fireflies* and *Ghost in the Shell*, it has been argued how character design in anime can be utilised to various ends. In *Grave of the Fireflies*, the emotional intensity of the film is enhanced by the simplified and exaggerated designs of its characters. In *Ghost in the Shell*, the simplified design of its central character emphasises her inexpressivity which, in turn, feeds into the film's thematic and philosophical concerns. We have also seen the extent to which anime utilises conventionalised expressions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these conventionalised expressions are significantly less common in anime films that have been popular globally, but they nonetheless remain a significant part of manga and anime cinema and television.

How exactly does this chapter fit into the broader picture? Central to the cognitive cultural approach is the integration of knowledge between human cognition, affect, and embodied spectatorship, on the one hand, and cultural and historical factors, on the other. There are few better ways to explore this than through considering caricature, cartooning, and animation, all of which demonstrate the difficulty in straightforwardly sifting apart culture from nature. Looking at anime, it is clear that one of its defining visual features – i.e. large eyes – in likelihood arose from a complex intersection of cultural, art historical, industrial, and biological factors. Considering how these strands interweave is, in some ways, challenging but one that is conceivably more productive than a hard-line stance that either derides the import of culture or neglects an understanding of human biological, psychological, and neurological proclivities.

With an eye to the coming chapters, I will note at this point that amplification plus simplification is by no means limited to animation and remains a useful concept looking towards the representation of faces in live-action filmmaking. The notion of selection and amplification plus simplification recurs throughout this thesis in thinking about how filmmaking, and indeed some other art forms, represents facial expression. As will be explored in the coming chapters, exactly what is selectively simplified and selectively amplified can represent important choices in the artistic representation of facial expression and is one of the key ways in which culture exerts an influence on the creative processes involved in filmmaking. Though live-action filmmaking often does not – or rather

cannot – equal non-photorealistic animation in its levels of simplification and amplification, live action remains capable of these processes. Indeed, other cognitive film theorists have conceptualised live-action narrative filmmaking in somewhat similar terms: Michael Z Newman notes that ‘cinema is a streamlined and amplified version of reality’ (53); Bordwell says that ‘cinematic style often streamlines ordinary human activity, smoothing the rough edges, and reweighting its features in order to create representations that are densely informative and emotionally arousing’ (‘Who Blinked’ 335); and Ed S Tan has hypothesised that traditional narrative films exaggerate facial expression for recognition and amusement (‘Three Views’ 111). Given the strong historical relationship between animation and live-action as well as our propensity to engage with a wide variety of agents, there are clear grounds to propose that there is some continuity in the creation and effects of facial representations between cartooning, animated filmmaking, and live-action filmmaking.

## Chapter 5

### **Beyond Emotion: Towards An Understanding of Nonverbal Cues and Gestures in Cinema**

When we talk about facial expression, we are often also talking about emotion. The majority of philosophical and psychological literature on facial expressions focuses on the role that the human face plays in expressing emotional and affective states as well as humans' capacity to recognise and respond to such expressions. Likewise, emotions are particularly central to art, artistic representations, and, perhaps above all, narratives and fiction. It is an exceptionally widespread norm for fictional narratives to engage our emotions. Understandably then, much scholarship that has discussed facial expression in narrative cinema has looked at how films represent expressions of human emotion and the corresponding impact of such representations on viewers. As we have seen throughout the thesis, aspects of emotional recognition, emotional contagion, affective mimicry, and other empathic phenomena have usually been the subject of interest within the cognitivist tradition. It makes sense that scholarship would prioritise understanding how these emotions which are so integral to our experience of film are represented through the faces of characters as embodied by actors and performers. In this chapter, however, I will make a case for going beyond emotion when we talk about facial expression in film. We will explore here the ways in which facial expressions represented in narrative films convey significant information which goes beyond emotions, feelings, and affective states. As in our daily lives, faces in film are informative on several levels, providing information not only about mental and emotional states but about attention, intention, goals, desires, attitudes, and interest.

The bread and butter of narrative cinema is characters engaging in conversation with each other. When showing a conversation between characters, filmmakers are faced with a number of choices. One of the most important of these choices is how to represent the expressive behaviour of characters in these conversations in such a way that viewers are able to understand the contents and nature of the conversation. In this regard, narrative films typically rely on our fast, intuitive, and often reliable ability to grasp nonverbal cues and gestures in order to make sense of exchanges between characters. David Bordwell has demonstrated the value in closely examining the choices involved in filmmaking and shows the benefit of taking a magnifying glass to specific aspects of human behaviour and how they

are represented in cinema. In ‘Who Blinked First?’ (2008), Bordwell considers the eye behaviour of characters in mainstream narrative films; in ‘*The Social Network: Faces behind Facebook*’ (2011) he follows a similar approach analysing how characters’ eyes and eyebrows function in David Fincher’s *The Social Network* (2010); and in the more ambitious ‘Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision’ he analyses the functions, sources and effects of shot/reverse-shot editing. Bordwell concludes that

Conventions are constructed, yes; but they’re constructed out of preexisting regularities of human action. Some of those regularities are social, and some aren’t limited to a single time or place. Historically, filmmakers have taken as material ordinary social behaviors, often of sorts that are readable across many cultures. But the filmmakers have reworked those behaviors, usually for the sake of greater clarity and force. (335 ‘Who Blinked’)

Bordwell’s work in this area highlights how narrative filmmaking alters, reworks, and utilises ordinary human activity to create representations that are ‘densely informative and emotionally arousing’ (335 ‘Who Blinked’). His analysis involves looking closely at minutiae of human behaviour represented in films such as brow movements, eye contact, and blinking. At first glance, one may find this approach to be emphasising the obvious but, as Bordwell points out, sometimes ‘going obvious’ can get us to notice things (*The Social Network*). Bordwell calls for more studies of this nature, suggesting that we consider not just eyes, but hands, mouth movements, and eyebrows. In response to this, I intend to demonstrate in this chapter that there is indeed value in thinking about facial expression beyond emotions and that a broader understanding of the functions of facial expression is fruitful.

This chapter will first examine some ways of understanding nonverbal or conversational gestures and cues. We will then move ahead to an analysis of these cues in investigative narratives, with a particular focus on Joel and Ethan Coen’s *Fargo* (1996). Investigative narratives are defined here very generally as films in which the principal narrative driving force is an investigation carried out by one or more protagonists (with whom we are closely aligned) of a crime or transgression. This narrative form encompasses many genres: ‘Whodunits’, detective films, police procedurals, film noirs, neo-noirs can all be organised by the investigation of a crime. In these narratives, which typically deal in the

acquisition and exchange of knowledge for both characters and viewers, viewers are primed by generic trappings and narrative structure to pay close attention or ‘cross-examine’ the expressions and gestures of characters. I have chosen the investigative narrative form here not to make any grand claims about it, but rather because this particular form yields interesting examples united by common themes, similar situations, and shared conventions. For instance, investigative narratives almost invariably feature interview or interrogation scenes. On the basis that these films normally contain at least one high-stakes conversation which is marked by hostility, deception, or the exchange of vital information, investigative narratives offer scenes that can function as testing grounds for understanding how filmmakers select and represent nonverbal cues. As exemplified by *Fargo*, it is also common for investigative narratives to be situated within a specific time and/or a specific place: to name but a few, there is post-war Tokyo in *Stray Dog* (1949), Allied-occupied Vienna in *The Third Man* (1949), the corrupt urban milieu of Los Angeles in *Chinatown* (1974), rural villages in politically turbulent 1980s South Korea in *Memories of Murder* (2003), the paranoid atmosphere of 1970s San Francisco in *Zodiac* (2007), or a dark and rain-soaked vision of modern Seoul in *The Chaser* (2008). As a result, investigative narrative films frequently represent culturally specific expressive behaviour which can be understood to be evocative of the particular real-world locations and cultures in which these films are set.

Of course, this is by no means always the case: filmic representations of culturally specific behaviours are not necessarily an accurate reflection of reality. Narrative films will inevitably vary in how they select, amplify, or simplify components of expressive behaviour; facial expressions may be truncated, stylised, dramatised, or modified whilst performance styles can be more naturalistic or more stylised. Furthermore, we will also find that films often lean on stereotyping when it comes to depicting the expressive behaviour of specific groups. In chapter three, I proposed that film viewers typically employ ‘naïve psychology’ which encompasses an understanding of cultural stereotypes. This may result in pejorative or generally prejudicial depictions of specific cultural or ethnic groups in films (the depiction of African Americans in *The French Connection* (1971) springs to mind). However, this is not necessarily always the case. As we will see in the case of *Fargo* and its caricatured representation of ‘Minnesota Nice’ behaviour, filmmaking can select certain aspects of culturally specific expressive

behaviour and amplify these behaviours for various purposes. In discussing animated representations of facial expression in chapter four, I argued that animation is premised on selection, simplification, and amplification. In this chapter, I will suggest that this claim can be expanded to encompass live-action filmmaking to an extent. Naturally, the level of amplification and the level of simplification will not be the same in live action as in animation, but live-action narrative filmmaking can very similarly select, simplify, and amplify certain behaviours, forms of expression, and individual expressive components in order to achieve specific effects.

As I have stated, part of the motivation here is to move beyond the typical emphasis on emotion and its expression through the human face in film. Given the centrality of conversations to mainstream narrative films, the traditional focus on solely emotional expression seems to be painting only part of the picture. The overlooking of gesture and nonverbal cues appears to relate to a wider historical neglect of acting and performance in film studies. Film studies has generally privileged what we might think of as uniquely ‘cinematic’ elements of film (for instance, editing and cinematography). In *Reframing Screen Performance* (2008), Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke argue against this tendency and propose that ‘actors’ gestures and expressions are on a par with other filmic elements’ (1). Similarly, Aaron Taylor notes in his introduction to the edited collection *Theorizing Film Acting* (2012) that ‘A commonplace concern, articulated in nearly every scholarly monograph or anthology on [acting], is that acting has been either overlooked or misrepresented by the discipline’ (1).<sup>112</sup> Indeed, my suggestion that there is little scholarship on gesture and nonverbal cues in cinema may be somewhat misleading; performance studies in film has certainly heeded the importance of gesture and put forward detailed analyses and theories of film acting. However, I approach this subject from a different angle here. Performance studies largely leans on the methodology and critical vocabulary from studying performance and acting in theatre, but my concerns are of a different nature. In short, I ask here how films transform ordinary expressive behaviour and how it might represent culturally idiosyncratic

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<sup>112</sup> See also Johannes Riis and Aaron Taylor’s edited collection *Screening Characters: Theories of Character in Film, Television, and Interactive Media* (2019) which contains a few chapters on acting and performance.

behaviour. Although my line of inquiry is different, I share with screen performance studies the belief that we can glean useful insights about how a film is constructed and what impact this has from focusing on details of acting and performance. This said, we cannot entirely neglect the influence of theatrical traditions; as we saw by looking at the elements of Noh theatre in *Throne of Blood* in chapter three, screen performances typically emerge from against a backdrop of both real-world behaviour and theatrical performance traditions.

Through this case study, I aim to forward a wider argument about the ways in which ordinary expressive and communicative behaviour can be transposed and utilised in filmic representations. Nonetheless, although the focus here is chiefly on nonverbal cues, this does not mean the analysis will or even can easily omit emotional expression, the intensifying, de-intensifying, and performance of which often play a vital role in everyday human social interaction. In fact, if we heed the assertions of some of the psychologists we have considered thus far, then we cannot straightforwardly sift apart emotional facial expressions from non-emotional facial expressions at all. It should also be stressed that there are, without question, some challenges at hand in analysing conversational nonverbal cues in narrative filmmaking using psychological literature. What research that actually exists on various components of facial gesture is both moderately scant and has been carried out primarily in Western cultures. Janet Bavelas et al. note that the lack of experimental research on facial gestures really cannot be overemphasised: ‘there are literally thousands of published studies on facial expressions of emotion but only a handful of studies on conversational facial gestures. This topic is wide open for original research’ (122). Ultimately, they propose that ‘the study of facial gestures needs to emerge from the dominance of emotion theory in order to produce a body of research of its own’ (127).

There are some further methodological challenges that arise from the nature of facial gestures and nonverbal cues. Nonverbal gestures and cues are often precisely synchronised with speech, appearing and changing within a matter of seconds. This is both a boon and a curse for the overarching aims of the thesis. It is a boon because it means that nonverbal gestures, behaviour, and cues will typically vary in relation to language and culture which, in turn, provides the theorist interested in cultural difference with plenty of grist for his or her mill. It is a curse because the close synchronisation

between speech acts and facial gesture does raise some barriers for those not fluent or at least conversant in the language and culture of a given film. The close link between language and gesture might also mean that we cannot extrapolate empirical findings between different languages and cultures, or at least that it is difficult to do so. Furthermore, as psychological researchers of facial gesture have remarked, the rapidity of conversational facial gestures demands that analysis of it must be fine-grained. For the case of film, we will find that it is particularly hard to depict, explain, and capture successfully with written analysis and still imagery. Indeed, research in this domain has only just begun to take off in recent years as a consequence of the cheap availability of video recording equipment.

Of course, these noteworthy challenges should not preclude us from attempting to study this topic. This chapter will hence put forward a defence of Bordwell's conviction that there is something to be gained from considering the whole breadth of human expressive behaviour and how filmmaking selects, amplifies, and streamlines specific aspects of this behaviour. I have argued thus far that films typically embody a naïve and romantic psychological view of human expression. I will suggest here that this also extends to the function of nonverbal behaviour in film. By virtue of the fact that facial behaviour in film is ordinarily selected, simplified, and amplified, we understand that a film character's facial expressive behaviour in conversations is typically tailored towards enhancing our understanding of narrative and character. Unlike in reality, those nonverbal gestures, micro expressions, and facial tics will often *mean* something.

### **ABOUT BROWS**

Thus far, we have considered at some length the influential research of Paul Ekman, particularly in looking at the neurocultural view of facial expression which claims that there exist basic human emotions that are found pan-culturally and the expression of which is universally recognised. Ekman's work on the emotions and their expression represents only part of his voluminous research on facial expression. A significant amount of his research has been dedicated towards conceptualising facial action and social signals. Most notably, Ekman and his long-time collaborator Wallace V Friesen attempted to create a taxonomy of nonverbal gestures, which we will turn to momentarily. Aside from Ekman's work, the study of facial action in dialogue has, until relatively recently, been neglected;

twenty-five years ago there were little to no empirical or theoretical resources. The ‘kaleidoscopic’ nature of facial expression in day-to-day interaction has also been ill-served by the traditional methods of research on facial expression, which has depended upon still photography and typically taken place in non-naturalistic laboratory settings. As Janet Bavelas and Nicole Chovil note, one of the most striking features of the face when engaged in dialogue is its mobility and precision:

In conversation, a speaker can shift quickly from raising a single, quizzical eyebrow over a wry smile, to flashing both brows for emphasis on a particular word or phrase, to furrowing the brows and pursing the lips in disbelief or suspicion. (‘Faces in Dialogue’ 335)

In light of the speed and nuance with which faces move in conversation, it will become apparent, amongst some other reasons, why the fundamental premise of categorising these movements is problematic.

Despite its influence, Ekman and Friesen’s categorisation presents a number of issues and has many critics. Writing on gesture and visible body action, Adam Kendon is especially dismissive of their original article: ‘The more carefully one reads this famous paper, the more confused and confusing it seems to become’ (98). Kendon believes that a comprehensive and coherent taxonomy of body language as Ekman and Friesen conceive it is simply not viable. Instead of a category scheme or a typology, Kendon proposes that ‘behaviour in interaction is best analysed in terms of multiple set of scales or dimensions of comparison’ (99). Certainly, what makes it particularly difficult to apply Ekman and Friesen’s typology is that there are members of one category that could also be members of another category depending upon the point of view of the analyst (97). This said, Kendon’s criticisms are made in light of the fact that his focus is far broader than Ekman and Friesen; Kendon seeks to understand body language and gesture in its entirety, of which facial expressions are but one part. We should not feel that we need to commit ourselves to Ekman’s theoretical position on facial expression, for which, as should be clear by now, I have recommended that we reserve some scepticism. However, given the limited choices for understanding facial action in conversations, Ekman and Friesen’s taxonomy proves useful inasmuch as it offers a rough-and-ready vocabulary for talking about nonverbal cues and their functions in narrative films. It might be argued that we could do as screen performance studies does and

borrow language from studies of acting and performance in theatrical studies. However, I feel this vocabulary is ill-matched for the task at hand. The framework I am following is largely interested in how viewers come to recognise and understand certain things about characters from the representation of nonverbal behaviour. In order to get at this, I think we will be better served by research which takes as its subject precisely this everyday nonverbal behaviour.<sup>113</sup>

Let us hear out Ekman and Friesen's taxonomy then. In 'The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage and Coding' (1969), Ekman and Friesen attempt to characterise and distinguish 'conversational actions' of the face. They present a five-way classification informed by psychological, semiotic, and ethological perspectives with each category being distinguished by differences in function, origins, and coding. The taxonomy of this article has been revised by Ekman twice subsequently: first in 'About brows: emotional and conversational signals' (1979) and again in 'Emotional and Conversational Nonverbal Signals' (1999). We will turn to Ekman's revised and expanded claims from his 1999 article. Here, he puts forward a taxonomy of five types of conversational or nonverbal signals: *emblems*, *illustrators*, *manipulators*, *regulators*, and *emotional expression*.

i. *Emblems*, a term originally coined by David Efron, refer to actions with specific semantic meanings that are understood by all members of a culture or subculture. Examples of emblems displayed through the face are the facial shrug (as discussed in chapter one), the wink, and the tongue defiance display (i.e. sticking out one's tongue). Although they can, and often do, occur during conversation, the meaning of emblems is independent of speech. They are socially learned and culturally variable.<sup>114</sup> An emblem may represent one thing in one culture but have no corresponding emblem in another cultural setting. Equally, the same movement pattern may have quite different meanings in different cultural settings. For instance, whilst sticking out one's tongue in Western cultures typically signals defiance,

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<sup>113</sup> This is a pragmatic short-term solution; studies of this nature will benefit from developing their own vocabulary.

<sup>114</sup> See Matsumoto and Hwang for one of very few studies comparing emblems across different cultural groups. There are a small number of gestures which are recognised well cross-culturally e.g. head nods and shakes or forming a fist as a threat.

disgust, or contempt, in Tibet it is a form of greeting and a sign of respect. Though there are emblems that are cross-cultural, the likely reasons for this are varied and complex. Facial expressions can furthermore modify the meaning of certain emblems (providing they do not already use the face). As Ekman colourfully describes: ‘take the “finger,” an emblem for quite a severe insult. Accompanied by one type of smile, the “fuck-you” message is a joke; accompanied by another type of smile or used with an anger, disgust, or contempt face, it is likely to lead to a fight’ (‘Movements with Precise Meanings’ 24). We may note a number of similarities between emblems and what has been discussed in previous chapters about Mitchell Green’s concept of ‘conventionalised expression’. As seen in the previous chapter, many expressions in animation can also be understood in a similar way to emblems. Thus, though these expressions are specific to certain cultural settings, they require fairly minimal amounts of learning in order to recognise them.

**ii.** *Illustrators* refer to body movements that illustrate speech. Just like emblems, they are socially learned. Given their tight synchronisation with speech, this learning likely occurs at the same time as language itself is learned. Illustrators can be performed by many parts of the body, but they are typically performed with the hands and face. Ekman outlines seven different types of illustrators, the most relevant of which here is ‘batons’ and, in particular, ‘facial batons’. Facial batons time out, accent, or emphasise a particular word or phrase. For instance, raising the eyebrows to add emphasis to a specific word in a sentence. Virtually all facial batons involving either brow raising or brow lowering. Sometimes, a facial baton can appear to ‘contradict’ the speech it accompanies. For example, if someone were to lower their eyebrows to emphasise a word such as ‘good’ or ‘easy’. This effect can likely be attributed to the function of the eyebrows in emotional expression. Brow lowering is employed in a variety of negative emotional expressions (e.g. fear, sadness, anger) and thereby carries negative associations whereas brow raising is suggestive of positive emotions (e.g. happiness and interest). This matches up with the Componential Model we considered in chapter three, whereby individual components of emotional expressions can carry meaning.

Given that eyebrow raising is associated to a greater extent with positive emotions than negative emotions, the fact that raising eyebrows is more conventionally used to emphasise something positive

is not an arbitrary or random outcome. If I were to announce to a friend that ‘I have *great* news’, my (perhaps unconscious) decision to raise my eyebrows in order to emphasise ‘great’ is likewise not an arbitrary one either. Ekman’s research also suggests that high levels of illustrators often impress North Americans as a sign of sociability and friendliness (‘Nonverbal Signals’ 43). In other words, highly mobile faces are seen more positively, something we will return to in the next chapter.

**iii.** *Manipulators* refer to movements in which one part of the body or face manipulates (stroking, pressing, scratching, licking, biting, sucking etc.) another part of the body or face. As Ekman points out, when one becomes conscious of these actions, the frequency with which these movements occur in ordinary life is quite startling. Many manipulators occur on the edge of conscious awareness and, aside from personal grooming, appear to have no clear desired goal or effect. Compared to the other categories of conversational and nonverbal signals, it seems that manipulators are often not consciously selected by individuals. It is possible that someone might stroke their chin with their hand to signal to another that they are considering what has been said, but manipulators more typically seem to be used below the level of awareness to a greater extent than other nonverbal gestures. This fact does not impair their ability to function as signals. I might unknowingly scratch my head when I am confused or baffled by something but even though the head scratch is not intentional it still functions as an expression of my confusion. Ekman’s research found that there is a tendency to distrust people who exhibit high levels of manipulators, as they are often interpreted as signs someone is lying. In truth though, they are not a reliable or accurate sign of deceit for most people.

**iv.** *Regulators* are actions which maintain and regulate the back-and-forth nature of conversation and speaking between two or more individuals. To speakers, they function as requests to continue, repeat, elaborate, or hurry up, while to listeners they signal requests to pay attention, wait a moment, to talk, and so forth. These include head-nods, agreement-smiles, forward leans, brow raises, and lip movements to indicate the desire to speak and so forth.

**v.** Although the concern here is not in overt displays of emotion, the fifth category that Ekman proposes of *emotional expression* does require some elaboration for two reasons: first, the relevance of cultural modifiers which moderate the expression of emotion in different conversational and social

situations, and, second, the display of ‘referential expressions’ in conversation. To remind ourselves, for Ekman, facial emotional expressions are involuntary signals which provide vital information to others. Unlike most conversational signals, although emotional expressions are not learned, what we *do* learn, Ekman argues, are display rules to manage these expressions. Display rules specify who can show which emotion to whom and when. They are to an extent both individually and culturally variable; individuals differ in their success in inhibiting, substituting, masking, or magnifying their expressions whilst cultures differ in the what is deemed socially acceptable to display at any given time and place. On Ekman’s view, the largely involuntary nature of many facial expressions in conjunction with the existence of display rules support the existence of ‘micro expressions’. As we saw in chapter one, micro expressions refer to very rapid and involuntary movements of the facial musculature which reflect an underlying emotion. When someone conceals emotions, either as a result of display rules or in order to dissemble, some form of ‘leakage’ of that emotion can often be found on that person’s face. This leakage may be seen on one specific region of the face or flashed in but a millisecond across the whole face.

As I suggested in chapter one, the evidence supporting the existence of micro expressions remains unconvincing. What is more, believing in their existence as Ekman characterises them also requires us to endorse some of the stronger claims of the neurocultural view. However, we return again to the argument I have been forwarding throughout: to a certain extent, it does not matter what the reality of facial expression is, but rather what individuals believe the case to be. Thus, in order for a film to cue the viewer into understanding that a character is lying or being deceptive, this might involve the performance of small fleeting micro expressions of incongruous emotions. This is also where cultural difference will enter the picture: filmmakers in different cultures will assume that viewers have a different set of assumptions and beliefs about facial expression based upon their own culturally-shaped beliefs about emotion and facial expression. For example, even if Ekman’s theory of micro-expressions turns out to be quite mistaken, many directors and actors will have absorbed the idea and will incorporate it into their practices. We saw such an example of this in chapter three through looking at *Ex Machina* (2014). In chapter two we considered Richard E Nisbett’s claim that East Asians are more likely to believe that a person may be simultaneously feeling positive and negative emotions at the same

time and without contradiction. Under this dialectical understanding of emotions, micro expressions – depending as they do on emotions being discrete and their expression differing from each other – make less sense.<sup>115</sup>

Making a distinction between emotional and non-emotional facial expressions seems to pose a few problems for Ekman's attempt to integrate his taxonomy of facial action with his theory of emotions. The difference between the two to an observer is frequently not always clear cut. Ekman notes that dividing facial movements into conversational signals and emotional expressions might appear to be an artificial and potentially muddling distinction, but, he argues, such a distinction is necessary because there are fundamental differences between them ('About Brows' 191). This too has been stressed by other researchers. Bavelas et al. make a similar point about conversational facial gestures:

If you've previously read a lot about facial expressions you might assume that these are facial expressions of emotions. However, some caution is in order because ... conversational facial gestures are not likely to be facial expressions of emotion. (121)

They proceed to stress several core differences between conversational and emotional expressions. First, conversational facial actions are integrated messages that are precisely synchronised with speech, appearing and changing within a matter of seconds. An emotional expression, by contrast, would not appear and disappear with a single word or phrase (Ekman, 'Expression or Communication?'). Second, theories of emotional facial expressions usually limit them to a set of stereotypic forms relating to a handful of basic emotions (typically happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust). On the other hand, conversational facial gestures have countless forms, none of which are fixed or stereotypic, because

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<sup>115</sup> Ekman notes that we sometimes experience emotional 'blending', whereby we experience the co-occurrence of two or more basic emotional states. Ekman is bound by his theory to claim that we also therefore *express* these emotions simultaneously through the face (see *Emotions Revealed*). Smith (*FATC* 200-204) offers a more coherent interpretation of emotional blending in relation to film wherein he suggests ways in which films may elicit complex blends of emotions in viewers (e.g. our experience of horror films is one in which fascination is integrated with disgust).

they are part of whatever a person is saying in a given instance. Third, facial gestures include more aspects of the face than facial expressions of emotion, often incorporating features of the facial area such as eye movements and head positions.

There are some other possible distinctions between conversational facial gestures and prototypical expressions of emotion. Conversational gestures are far more culturally malleable, sharing a kinship with language in their cultural and geographic variability. In many scenarios, conversational facial gestures rely upon language to function. That is, they are paralinguistic and thus do not have any meaning independent of the particular words and language that they accompany. Emotional expression, on the other hand, by some accounts prefigures language and the emergence of symbolic processes. At the very least, it may be said that emotional expression can be *context* and *situation* dependent, but not necessarily dependent on language to function. Emblematic conversational facial signals are in some ways more intricate than emotional expressions due to their capacity to refer to both simple and complex matters. Many of them function symbolically or metaphorically and are not constrained to the more delimited package of information often signified by emotional expression. However, even though conversational gestures are not necessarily universally recognisable or consistent cross-culturally, in many cases these signals can be very rapidly understood – either through social interaction or through contact with mass-media – in relation to the context in which they appear.

Just because many of these expressions are understood easily cross-culturally though does not mean that they are innate or universal.<sup>116</sup> For instance, in chapter one we looked at ‘sophisticated scepticism’ as a conventionalised expression, that is, someone may raise the corner of one of their eyebrows in response to something deemed questionable or dubious. In terms of Ekman’s classification we would also understand this as expression as an emblem. If we are to believe Ekman’s claims about this, ‘sophisticated scepticism’ was purportedly disseminated by Hollywood films in the 1930s and 1940s (Ekman, ‘About brows’ 189). Given its consciously mannered appearance (i.e. the asymmetrical action of the eyebrows for many requires some amount of effort and/or practice), it is evidently an

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. chapter two’s discussion of universals.

expression that does not occur naturally within any given culture. But even those totally unfamiliar with this expression would with relatively little effort be able to intuit the meaning of this emblem if the communication is embedded in a situation where the context is explicit enough to make meaning apparent. A Hollywood film, which often makes characters psychologically transparent, is without question one of those contexts in which the meaning would be made readily apparent. Nonetheless, our ability to recognise intuitively culturally variable expressions should not be confused with the universality of such an expression.

We ought to ask, by exactly what principles do we distinguish between a non-emotional and emotional facial expression then? And what is the nature of the relationship between the two? It is here where we can see another possible strength of Alan Fridlund's behavioural ecology view of facial expression that we looked at in chapter one. The behavioural ecology view argues that facial expressions are tools for social influence and do not necessarily express emotional states. We would therefore not need to posit a distinction between conversational signals and facial expressions of emotion at all because we could say that they function in the same capacity, that is, to communicate our intentions and point of view and to influence the behaviour of others. However, I have argued that it is useful to hold onto the position that emotions *can* be revealed through the face. This is where we see another benefit of a middle-ground approach wherein facial movements are understood as instances of both emotional expression and social communication. Likewise, as the Componential Model shows, individual components of emotional expressions are inherently meaningful. If we accept this, then we do not need to trip over ourselves by positing a sharp divide between the function of facial expressions of emotion and nonverbal gestures and cues.

There is a major drawback to a lot of this research which raises some questions for a cognitive cultural approach: what little research that has been carried out on conversational signals and the study of facial action in dialogue has almost exclusively been carried out on Western cultures. Casual observation and extant scholarship make it clear that there are some cultural differences in nonverbal gestures and cues. If filmmaking alters, reworks, and utilises ordinary human activity then it would stand to reason that cultural differences of human activity will be reflected in artworks emanating from

different cultures. There are, though, two reasons to be sceptical of strong versions of this view. First, even if there are noteworthy distances between cultures, it may be the case that these distances remain reasonably easy to traverse. The biological limitations of the human body will produce outcomes of behaviour that are either consistent or comparable across cultures. Due to the limited number of configurations, the ‘vocabulary’ of the body and the face is plausibly a lot easier to learn than language itself. Second, if there are cultural differences of facial behaviour, they might simply not be represented to a significant extent in narrative filmmaking. The process of selection, simplification, and amplification in filmic representations of faces means that cultural nuances and differences are potentially lost. This occurs either through *elimination* (that is, in simplifying a representation, certain features or nuances removed altogether) or through *exaggeration* (that is, cultural nuances that are represented are amplified to the extent that they are more cross-culturally recognisable and interpretable). All this said, as I argued in chapter two, although they are attractive for researchers, there is a risk to immediately latching onto universalist answers.

#### INVESTIGATING NONVERBAL GESTURES AND CUES

So far in this chapter we have considered the nature of nonverbal gestures as they occur in dialogue or conversation. We have looked at Ekman’s five-part categorisation of conversational gestures: emblems, illustrators, manipulators, regulators, and emotional expression. This categorisation is far from ideal, but it does offer some useful vocabulary. Let us now turn to consider the ways in which these nonverbal cues and gestures are represented in and transposed to film.

*Fargo* presents a particularly rich case due to the culturally specific ‘Minnesota Nice’ behaviour of its main characters. Minnesota Nice refers to the stereotypical behaviour of Minnesotans as courteous, reserved, and mild-mannered. As historian Annette Atkins writes, the Minnesota Nice is a ‘vaguely defined set of cultural characteristics’ which usually includes ‘a polite friendliness, an aversion to confrontation, a tendency toward understatement, a disinclination to make a fuss or stand out, emotional restraint, and self-deprecation’ (242). In *Fargo*, Jerry Lundegaard (William H Macy) works in his father-in-law’s car dealership and has gotten himself in a financial jam. Out of desperation, he conceives a scheme to hire two criminals to kidnap his wife and demand ransom from her wealthy

father. The money is to be split between Jerry and the kidnappers. However, the kidnap attempt quickly spirals out of control as the criminals murder a state trooper and two passing motorists. This prompts a homicide investigation lead by the seven-months pregnant Police Chief Marge Gunderson (Frances McDormand). The narrative follows the inept criminals, Jerry's bungling attempts to control the situation and Marge's investigation of the murder.

Right from the start, *Fargo* establishes differences in behaviour and language between Minnesotan characters and non-Minnesotan characters. The first dialogue scene of the film has Jerry going to a bar to meet Carl Showalter (Steve Buscemi) and Gaear Grimsrud (Peter Stormare), the two out-of-town criminals who he has recruited to kidnap his wife. Jerry is clearly nervous, but we see that he tries to maintain a certain level of Minnesota Nice politeness towards the two criminals whom he is meeting for the first time: he flashes small smiles, his eyebrows are raised throughout the conversation, and his head bounces along with whatever he is saying (we could think of these movements as illustrators). In stark contrast to this, Gaear says one line in the entire scene and scarcely moves from the dead-eyed stare seen in fig. 27. Carl does most of the talking with Jerry and we see that he has little interest in niceties and politeness. He speaks curtly to Jerry and makes it very clear to him that he thinks that his scheme to kidnap his own wife is hare-brained.



Fig. 27. Meeting Carl Showalter (Steve Buscemi) and Gaear Grimsrud (Peter Stormare) in *Fargo* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 1996).

Over the course of the film, *Fargo* proceeds to show us various social situations which provide a sense of what the Minnesotan social norms are and how they play out in different social scenarios: we see interactions between co-workers, a confrontation between a customer and a salesman, the home lives and family dynamics of different characters, police interviews, and meeting an old acquaintance for a drink. All of these establish the (stereotypically) defined set of cultural characteristics of Minnesota Nice within the film. *Fargo* follows two strategies to establish what Minnesota Nice looks like then: first, the film makes the contrast between Minnesotans and non-Minnesotans apparent from the start and, second, it contains various scenes which demonstrate to viewers how different Minnesotans behave in all sorts of social situations. In these different situations, we see all the stereotypical hallmarks: a discomfort with overt confrontation, emotional restraint, polite friendliness, and extreme understatement.

We could look much closer at any one of these scenes. We shall instead focus on a scene towards the climax of the film wherein Marge conducts a second interview with Jerry. This scene illustrates a comic tension between the demands of the culturally specific social rules and norms of Minnesota Nice with the two character's goals: Jerry is attempting (poorly) to avoid suspicion and mask his increasingly unhinged state of mind whilst Marge is tenaciously focused on interrogating Jerry. Both characters struggle to maintain a level of polite civility characteristic of the Minnesota Nice attitude despite the narrative situation. In this scene, we are fully aware of Jerry's guilt, making his weak attempts to deceive Marge decidedly comical. The brief scene presents a veritable catalogue of micro expressions, 'social smiles', and nonverbal cues. We can identify three distinct 'movements' to the conversation.

The first movement begins with Jerry writing frantically at his desk at the car dealership. Marge walks in, Jerry appears visibly startled with a prototypical expression of surprise (fig. 28 A). The screenplay emphasises Jerry's expression here as he 'looks up and freezes, mouth hanging open, brow knit with worry'. Marge, already in the office, asks if she can come in. Jerry, masking his surprise, automatically replies positively and politely with a flicker of a smile as he says 'Yah' to her request. He immediately corrects himself, following with 'no I'm kinda – I'm kinda busy here' (fig. 28 B). Marge ignores Jerry's attempt to refuse her entry into his office, she continues talking and proceeds to sit down regardless. Realising his half-hearted attempt to shut her out has failed, he musters a weak social smile (fig. 28 C). As was briefly discussed in chapter one, Ekman proposes that social smiles like this are intended to communicate politeness and reassurance. This form of smile, he argues, typically involves only the zygomatic major muscle (which raises the corners of the mouth). This is in contrast to the spontaneous smile expressive of a person's happiness, known as a 'Duchenne smile', which involves both the zygomatic major and the orbicularis oculi muscle (which forms wrinkles of skin around the eyes) (Ekman et al., 'Smiles When Lying'). Put crudely, you can discern a social smile because the eyes do not smile. Of course, in truth it is easy to fake a Duchenne smile, but there is an understanding in several cultures that certain forms of smiling are merely to be polite. Jerry, and indeed many other



Fig. 28. Jerry (William H Macy) displaying surprise (A), negation (B) and a social smile (C) in *Fargo* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 1996).

characters in the film, display the polite social smile with high frequency. In this particular scene, however, Jerry's facial expressions appear inconsistent if not erratic; he seems unable to sustain the customary social smile. This contrasts greatly with Marge's expressive behaviour: Marge smiles fixedly, she uses many positive illustrators (that is, raising of the eyebrows on specific words), and she poses questions in a cheerful voice to Jerry, all of which soften her probing queries (fig. 29 D).

Marge's persistent questioning begins to wear down Jerry and he impatiently snaps back at her: 'Ma'am, I answered your question!' As he says this, he continues to exhibit the social smile, but his tone of voice contradicts his face (fig. 30 F). The clear discrepancy between his polite facial gesture and aggravated voice is typical of how *Fargo* generates comedy: frequently, what characters say and what characters express are at odds with each other. Jerry's snap begins the second movement of the scene which is marked by Jerry's increasingly stilted responses and twitching face and Marge neutralising her friendly expression and chatty tone (fig. 29 E). Jerry starts blinking very rapidly contrasting to his more fixed gaze in the first movement of the scene. His smiles become even more inconstant, flashing for barely a second at time before being interrupted by flickering micro expressions of what appears at times to be anger and at times to be sadness. The rhythm of the dialogue is totally



Fig. 29. Marge (Frances McDormand) before (D) and after (E) Jerry (William H. Macy) 'gets snippy' with her in *Fargo* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 1996).

transformed. What was a brisk back-and-forth with only minor gaps of silence between the characters is replaced by uncomfortable dead silences in between lines of dialogue. Shots linger on Jerry and Marge's faces after they have finished talking, reinforcing this effect. The screenplay, too, stresses the rhythmic change, referring to a 'silent beat' after Jerry's snappy reply. As he attempts to respond to Marge's questions, Jerry, stuttering over his words, insists that he is cooperating, not being 'snippy' and doing all he can to help. His speech merely trails off into silence, he covers his mouth and then rubs his lips with his hands, the first notable facial manipulator displayed by either character (fig. 30 G). The significance of this stands out all the more due to the absence of any manipulators to this point in the scene and the way in which the shot dwells on this physical action. The covering of his face shows Jerry at his most defensive and uncomfortable as well as clearly signalling that his protestations are hollow to Marge, who immediately changes tack in response.

Much like Bordwell identifying differences in eye behaviour in film and in reality, Jerry touching his face in this scene leads us to a good example of how the expressive behaviour of film characters might diverge from ordinary behaviour, and become more 'loaded' with meaning. As noted earlier in the chapter, it is quite striking how often people touch their face, head, and body in conversations. By contrast, characters in films on the whole infrequently touch their face or head in



F

G

H

Fig. 30. Jerry (William H Macy) displaying a social smile (F), facial manipulator (G) and anger (H) in *Fargo* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 1996).

conversation and when they do, it invariably carries some significance or import. In many scenarios, it is often to signal explicitly the fact that a character is either lying, uncertain, or uncomfortable. As mentioned previously, some studies have found that we tend to distrust people who show many manipulators even though they are an unreliable sign that someone is lying. Films often seem to tap into this naïve understanding of manipulators and represent them to signpost when a character is lying, uncertain, or uncomfortable. In this case, Jerry's nervous use of a manipulator is not necessarily to signal to the viewer that he is lying (for we already know that he is lying) but rather to very visibly reveal his unstuck state of mind and lack of control at this point. Marge clearly identifies this too; she pauses for several seconds in response, stands up, and asks to speak to Jerry's boss, and father-in-law, Mr Gustafson. Both we and Jerry know that fulfilling this request is utterly impossible because Wade Gustafson is now dead. The shot focuses on Jerry staring straight-faced, intensely, and fixedly at Marge for five seconds – before he explodes out 'Well heck!'

This begins the third movement. The anger and discomfort that was straining beneath a thin veneer of politeness and civility in the second movement erupts into an overt display of anger and confrontation (fig. 30 H). Jerry's outburst strongly contrasts with the emotionally muted and inexpressive behaviour of the regular Minnesotan characters of *Fargo*. The polite irritation and impotent rage we have seen rising in Jerry to this point finally boils over in this clearly recognisable display of anger, a violation of the Minnesotan expressive rules that have been established in the film thus far. He finally concedes to Marge's questions and states that he is going to do a lot count of the cars at the dealership. He puts on his hat, coat, and scarf with indignant rage and storms out the office to the look of a surprised and affronted Marge.

Presenting individual frame grabs as I have above fails to capture fully the constant fluctuations in Jerry's face in this scene, but the erratic breadth of his expressive behaviour, which oscillates between polite smiles, surprise, anger, negation, and concern, should be clear. The Minnesota Nice social behaviour bears heavily on the nonverbal cues and expressions of these characters, constructing a comic scenario in which Jerry is wholly unable to sustain polite conversational signals and adhere to the social rules that have been established as normative behaviour up to this point in the storyworld of the film.

Moreover, we can see here how certain nonverbal behaviours, such as blinking, facial manipulators, and illustrators, are selected and amplified to convey important information about a character's subjectivity at specific points in the conversation. It should be stressed that *Fargo* by no means relies on a prior knowledge of Minnesotan social mores. Rather, these expressive behaviours are established very clearly by the film itself which, as we see even in the first scene, demonstrates to us how Minnesotan characters behave and is presented in clear contrast to the expressive behaviour of 'out-of-town' characters. *Fargo* is also without doubt playing with conventions associated with investigative narratives and crime films. Jerry is far from a criminal mastermind and the interrogation scene we have looked at is by no means a battle of equally matched wits. This scene also shows well the complex nature of facial expressions as signals. Jerry's expressions here are not only conscious attempts to signal politeness and to appease Marge but also one of the very things which broadcasts his unstable disposition and arouses Marge's suspicion. Jerry's character and his incompetence as a criminal is shown to us through this incapacity to keep his expressive behaviour below suspicion. This is partly responsible for the comedy and humour in both this scene and the film as a whole; as a crime film, we would expect some level of competence from the film's criminals and perpetrators. This would of course include the capacity to deceive others. Yet, as shown in this scene and throughout, the criminals in the world of *Fargo* are mostly bumbling, inept, and far from competent.

Although Jerry's behaviour fails to be above suspicion, *Fargo* is nonetheless keen to highlight that people are very capable of completely deceiving others. In a superficially unrelated subplot, Marge reconnects with Mike Yanagita (Steve Park), an old classmate who takes her to dinner. They make small talk and Mike mentions that he married a common acquaintance. Mike then starts to make an awkward attempt to seduce Marge. She rebuffs Mike and he has an emotional breakdown, revealing to Marge that his wife had, in fact, died. Mike's initial attempts to exhibit positive emotions, illustrators, and social smiles to Marge in order to mask his sadness encourages us to pity Mike. He seems to be a sympathetic character from this scene; we see his breakdown at losing his wife, his comically pathetic behaviour, and his admiration, which we too share, for Marge. However, a sympathetic reading of Mike is undermined when, one scene later, Marge and the viewer learn that Mike's reportedly dead wife is

neither dead nor was she ever his wife; Mike was lying and has had a history of ‘psychiatric problems’. Lying and deception and the ability to perceive lying and deception are vital and recurring elements to investigative narratives. This interaction with Mike in *Fargo* appears to make Marge realise that even those who outwardly appear trustworthy can be deceptive and leads us to the issue of whether facial expressions can be accurately simulated or faked or whether they are wholly involuntary and therefore discernibly genuine.

As we saw in chapters one and two, the average person is not particularly adept at accurately discriminating between real and simulated expressions of emotion (Gosselin et al.). If this is the case, then it seems probable that films would have developed a conventionalised way of making it clear that a character is lying. By way of comparison to our *Fargo* example, Kurosawa’s *Stray Dog* (1949) follows Detective Murakami (Toshiro Mifune) and Satō (Takashi Shimura) investigation into an underground gun racket. Over the course of the film, they interrogate a string of small-time criminals and potential suspects. Both viewers and the detectives have to make rapid assessments as to whether the interviewees are to be trusted, and whether the information that they provide is reliable. In one of these interview scenes, the detectives speak to Sei-san, a hotel porter. In this scene, the film makes it very clear that Sei-san is reluctant to tell the whole truth. The expressive behaviour displayed to imply that he is lying bears a few similarities to the examples from *Fargo*: Sei-san uses manipulators regularly, often touching his face and rubbing the back of his head, he displays social smiles with inconstant regularity, he avoids regular eye-contact, and expressions flit across his face (fig. 31).



Fig. 31. The interrogation of Sei-San, the lying bellhop, in *Stray Dog* (Akira Kurosawa, 1949)

How might we account for the similarities between these two films? I have suggested in previous chapters that responses to these sorts of questions are likely going to be complex, involving cultural difference, universal frameworks, and artistic convention. It could well be the case that this ‘lying behaviour’ is merely an established convention of performance made necessary by the limitations of narrative cinema (i.e. we cannot access interiority in film in the same way as, say, literature). So, this creates the need for a sort of artistic shorthand: if you wish to depict a character lying, perform like this. At least part of this similarity could be attributable to the fact that there is some congruence in global attitudes towards lying. Studies surveying global attitudes to human behaviour when lying noted some cross-cultural consistencies, the most universally identified trait of which was a lack of eye contact and shifting eyes (Deception Research Team). I have referred a few times to Bordwell’s claim that eye behaviour in film tends to diverge from ordinary behaviour. That is, characters in films typically maintain eye contact with each other to a far greater extent than in real life. On this basis, the lack of eye contact or inconstant eye contact that is often used to express deception will clearly stand out as significant.

*Stray Dog*, as a non-English and non-Western film, also helps to highlight a few issues. Ordinarily, the timing and meaning of conversational signals and gestures is tightly bound with speech, so one would expect that some nuance in understanding is lost in translation for those without an in-depth understanding of the language or culture of a given film. The reality of this is slightly more complex. Conversational signals in ordinary scenarios may well differ between culture and language divides but if we believe that filmmaking selects and amplifies certain behaviours, this streamlining of behaviour may erode some of these distinctions. Both examples here of comparable narrative scenarios (criminal suspects trying to deceive) seem to present conventionalised behaviour that is grounded in a sort of naïve understanding of how people act when they are lying, i.e. sporadic social smiles, facial manipulators, micro expressions of incongruent emotions, and avoidance of eye contact. Given the higher degree of cultural variability involved in conversational expressions, it is instead plausible that films share an artistic code of behaviour in order to represent something such as a lying character. To be clear, these explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Despite this, we may still find that

even though expressive behaviour in films does not differ as much as real world expressive behaviour, viewers from different cultures uptake of this behaviour might differ.

So what has this analysis aimed to demonstrate? First, as the Minnesota Nice social behaviour represented in *Fargo* shows, culturally specific expressive behaviour can be transposed in narrative films to various ends. We also see here that cultural differences are not necessarily in strokes as broad as East versus West but, as is the case of *Fargo*, can be regionally delimited to a particular place within a particular country. Though the understanding and recognition of these culturally specific behaviours require some learning, this is not an insurmountable mountain to climb when it comes to cinema. Films are generally capable of establishing this on an individual basis; a person with no familiarity of Minnesota and the stereotypes of Minnesotan expressive behaviour would walk away from *Fargo* with a reasonable sense of what this behaviour (stereotypically) looks like. Second, conversational signals and facial gestures can guide us to understand the content of a given scene. As in reality, we often make fast, intuitive inferences and assessments based on conversational signals. These inferences may be confirmed or repudiated (as *Fargo* also shows us), but they are key to our ability to make sense of interactions between characters in cinema. Third, nonverbal facial cues are frequently selected and emphasised in order to communicate specific things; they are an important way to communicate the subjectivity, intentions, and thoughts of character to viewers. I have chosen here a relatively easy example to analyse, because characters in the films of the Coen Brothers are typically quite vivid and expressive. As Michael Rabiger and Mick Hurbis-Cherrier suggest, the stock in trade of the Coen Brother's films is a 'hyperbolic style' (140). Films of this style, they suggest, exaggerate their visual and aural designs and performance style to the extent that they are highly vivid, but remain attached to the real world.

*Fargo's* hyperbolic performance style is precisely what makes it a good starting point for analysing nonverbal expression, but we can easily extend this type of analysis to films with more realistic, idiosyncratic, or inexpressive performance styles. I referred to Bresson's *Pickpocket* in chapter one. Baron and Carnicke also take the case of *Pickpocket* to argue that even films that minimise and de-emphasise overt expressive behaviour are still capable of highly expressive acting work. As they put it,

‘In the minimalist aesthetic, such a small performative gesture resonates largely’ (15). Representations of eye behaviour, eyebrows, micro expressions, illustrators, and social smiles to name a few have been discussed in this chapter, but the representation of manipulators is perhaps the most noteworthy discrepancy between reality and film. Given their ubiquity at least in English speaking cultures, the absence of facial manipulators in narrative film places significance on them when they *do* appear. Of course, part of their underrepresentation is down to a practical concern i.e. performers touching their face/head regularly will spoil costuming, make-up and hair, interfere with lighting and, in some instances, interfere with sound recording. In any case, a more systematic approach identifying how nonverbal cues are represented more generally would be a viable strategy going forward. For instance, it would be illuminating to find as many examples as possible in narratives, investigative or otherwise, in which a character is intended to be portrayed as lying and identify what regularities there are. In light of the lack of scholarship in this area, the avenues for research are, without question, incredibly varied.

## Chapter 6

### Faces of Antipathy: Judgements from Faces

In Bong Joon-Ho's *Memories of Murder* (2003), police detective Park Doo-man (Song Kang-ho) keeps a book of photographs of suspects. Park explains to his superior officer, Sgt Koo Hee-bong (Byun Hee-bong), that if he keeps staring at the faces of the suspects in these photographs, then the culprit will 'instinctively' come to him. Park brags that his 'eyes can read people'. Bemused by this, Koo draws Park's attention to two men in another corner of the police station. Koo says that one of these men is a rapist and the other is a brother of one of the victims (fig. 32). He asks Park, 'So tell me, which one is the rapist?' A close-up of Park shows him concentrating his gaze. The following shot cuts back to a closer framing of the rapist and the victim's brother, inviting us into Koo's challenge. Before an answer can be revealed though, the scene abruptly ends. This sequence serves as a dryly comic undermining of Park's cocksure self-belief in his ability to read others, but the film's withholding of the answer also plays with the notion that we can reliably discern someone's character from appearances alone. In a straightforward moral universe, we would easily be able to tell who the 'bad people' are, but, as Park is forced to confront in *Memories of Murder*, the real world is not like this. In watching this scene, we,



Fig. 32. A rapist and the victim's brother in *Memories of Murder* (Bong Joon-Ho, 2003)

as viewers, might make our guess about which one of these men is a rapist by relying on our quick-and-dirty habit of judging and inferring things from how someone looks. However, the film's withholding of this information mocks our ability to ever really 'know' others from mere appearances. Throughout the film, we see Park insisting that he can discern someone's guilty mind through his 'eye contact' technique, wherein he locks eyes with suspects and stares into them. Park, in several ways, represents an old way of thinking which is left baffled and frustrated by the modern world; his misplaced confidence and insistence that he can tell who the bad people are and read others through their face is derided throughout the film.

In chapter three, I introduced the role that 'physiognomy' plays in viewing narrative films. Though we are better off not judging others from outward appearances in everyday life, in fiction films we are frequently invited to assess someone's character through their appearance and, unlike Detective Park, most of the time our inferences and judgements are proven right in the context of the narrative. Narrative cinema's tendency to invite this sort of 'physiognomic' reading of characters is perhaps most evident when we consider the representation of 'antipathetic' characters. Although it is an overwhelmingly common norm for narrative films to contain at least one character with whom we are invited to sympathise, it is almost equally likely for films to have characters who invite varying levels of antipathetic responses. Typically – but by no means exclusively – antipathy towards a character is solicited through his or her opposition to sympathetic characters or through demonstrating relatively unlikeable dispositions, traits, and personality. Such characters are often essential to the classical narrative film, which conventionally features antagonistic characters who stand in opposition to the clearly defined goals and desires of the protagonist(s). We can find examples of antagonistic, antipathetic, or oppositional characters in a wide range of mainstream films, spanning time, culture, and virtually every genre: action films, comedies, dramas, musicals, epics, horrors, Sci-Fis, Westerns, and thrillers are all likely to feature villains, antagonists, and oppositional characters. These are clearly popular genres, but such characters are not limited to just mainstream fare. Characters inviting antipathetic responses can found in a diverse range of narrative films well beyond Hollywood filmmaking, across many different national cinemas, and different art movements: consider the

Cossacks of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), the clerical court of Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), the kangaroo court of criminals in Lang's *M* (1931), the Nazi officers of Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945), Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) of Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), Albert Spica (Michael Gambon) of Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989), Lee Woo-jin (Yoo Ji-tae) of Park's *Oldboy* (2003), or Crystal Thompson (Kristin Scott Thomas) in Winding Refn's *Only God Forgives* (2013).

Despite the fact that antagonistic characters are central and important features of many narrative films, there is significantly less scholarship that analyses the representation of and responses to these characters. Cognitive film theory, for instance, has traditionally focused on viewer responses such as sympathy and empathy.<sup>117</sup> This is not to suggest that the widespread theoretical focus upon sympathy and empathy instead of antipathy is some sort of gross oversight. After all, antipathy towards one character is very typically a product of our sympathy towards another character. What I do suggest though is that a full understanding of our engagement with film characters ought to include a full understanding of antipathy. As Noël Carroll has suggested, discussing sympathy alone fails to fully account for the entirety of our emotional response to characters. Carroll proposes that what he refers to as *solidarity* better characterises the totality of our response. For Carroll, solidarity is the 'complex emotive relation of sympathy-for-the-protagonists *plus* antipathy-for-the-antagonists' (184, emphasis in original). This psychological condition, he suggests, is one that most moving image narratives aspire to raise in audiences.

Although several, like Carroll, have commented upon the importance of antipathetic responses towards film characters, relatively few have developed any sustained explorations of the topic. Carl Plantinga similarly identifies that 'much more attention is paid to empathy and sympathy than to antipathy, indifference, and mixed feelings, as though viewers were prone to compassion and not to disdain and dislike' (*Moving Viewers* 101). Furthermore, the represented face and facial expression in

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<sup>117</sup> See Smith's *Engaging Characters* (1995); Plantinga's 'Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film' (1999) and *Moving Viewers* (2009); and Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film* (1995).

cinema have almost exclusively been discussed in relation to sympathy and empathy, but not antipathy. To address both of these gaps in scholarship, Plantinga has recently examined what he calls ‘faces of opposition’ in narrative filmmaking. As he notes, ‘The represented face has most often been discussed in relation to empathy; but what about its opposite?’ (‘Facing Others’ 293). Using *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) as a case study, Plantinga analyses the uses of represented faces for figures of narrative opposition (‘Facing Others’ 301). This chapter will expand upon Plantinga’s study of faces of opposition. Models of character engagement in cognitive film theory ordinarily talk of *sympathy* as one of the most significant ways in which viewers engage with film characters. Based off this, I suggest that it is apt to refer to the facial representations of antagonistic or oppositional characters in terms of sympathy’s antonym: this third case study, then, will examine the representation of *faces of antipathy* in narrative filmmaking.

#### **WHAT IS ANTIPATHY?**

Right off the bat, there are several points that need to be clarified: namely, what *is* a ‘face of antipathy’ and what does it mean to respond antipathetically to a character. The nature of sympathy and empathy in relation to fictional characters has been a subject of much discussion and debate; we would be right to expect that conceptualising antipathy to be an equally challenging endeavour. This chapter will hence not put forward a complete account of antipathetic engagement.<sup>118</sup> Instead, we will consider the diverse range of negative responses towards characters that film is capable of eliciting and how these are either solicited or complicated by the represented face. Plantinga has proposed a typology of eight different attitudes that viewers might adopt towards characters (see table 4). Following Plantinga, we can consider three possible ‘con stances’: opposition, antipathy, and dislike. These three con stances are differentiated in part by their strength and duration, but their causal genesis is the most significant difference. Whereas opposition depends upon moral judgement, disliking and antipathy may be elicited in ways that are not particularly related to moral judgements. Similarly, we may temporarily respond

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<sup>118</sup> For an account of antipathetic engagement, see Kjeldgaard-Christiansen’s ‘A Structure of Antipathy: Constructing the Villain in Narrative Film’.

with antipathy to a character with whom we are broadly in allegiance. That is, a character who we believe is ‘fundamentally good’ may commit an action that attracts our disapproval. It is also possible to have mixed or complex attitudes i.e. having opposition to, but also liking a character. As Plantinga suggests, it is conceivable to simultaneously have opposition to and like a particularly fascinating villain such as, his examples, Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) in *The Silence of the Lambs* or The Joker (Heath Ledger) in *The Dark Knight* (2008) (‘Moral Judgment’ 44).

Plantinga’s typology of stances towards fictional characters is a useful one. Proposing different stances beyond just sympathy and antipathy can account for more complex responses towards characters (such as how we can like a villain at the same time as being in opposition to them). As Plantinga himself remarks though, in many cases viewers are not particularly good at distinguishing moral from nonmoral judgements (*Screen Stories* 204). On this basis, it seems likely that there is a highly systematic relationship between the different stances of this typology. That is, we are considerably more likely to find a character antipathetic or oppositional (and thus disapprove of them morally) if we merely dislike them. To an extent then, this makes the boundaries between these stances somewhat fuzzy. Could opposition not just be said to be strong antipathy or, similarly, antipathy strong

<b>Opposition</b>	Strong con stance extended through large portions of the narrative. Often taken toward antagonists and villains who directly threaten the protagonist, and whose actions are judged to be morally evil.
<b>Antipathy</b>	Con stance that may be weaker in strength and shorter in duration than opposition. Often rooted in moral factors such as cruelty toward or unfair treatment of other people or animals. Often taken toward minor characters as well as central villains or antagonists.
<b>Dislike</b>	Negative affect directed toward any character for the character’s nonmoral characteristics, such as style, quirks of behavior, appearance, dissimilarity to the spectator, etc.
<b>Neutral Interest</b>	Interest in but lack of concern for, ironic amusement at, or mere cool fascination with a character.
<b>Liking</b>	Positive affect directed at a character for any number of reasons, from similarity to appearance.
<b>Sympathy</b>	Concern for a character rooted in the perception that the character is suffering or has been treated unfairly. Usually accompanied by congruent emotions. May be weaker and shorter in duration than allegiance.
<b>Allegiance</b>	Strong pro stance extended through large portions of a narrative. Often taken toward the protagonist and usually involving sympathies. Tends to be governed by moral judgment and/or the promise of moral improvement.
<b>Projection</b>	The desire to emulate a character, typically incorporating both strong sympathy and allegiance, but extending to cognitive and affective activities and responses beyond the viewing experience.

Table 4 Plantinga’s typology of stances toward fictional characters (‘Moral Judgment’ 43).

dislike? Plantinga has questioned the extent to which empathy and sympathy can be easily separated on the basis that though the distinctions ‘work well on paper’, they are not well instantiated in our actual responses to characters (‘Moral Judgment’ 40). One could perhaps level a similar criticism towards Plantinga’s finer-grained distinction between the different grades of pro and con stances; on paper they work well, but perhaps are less so reflected in our actual response towards fictional characters.

This said, for the present chapter, we do not need to get hung up on whether we can easily distinguish between dislike, antipathy, and opposition. What it means to respond antipathetically will be kept reasonably loose for the purposes of this chapter and will encompass a wide range of possible negative responses: being morally disgusted by a character’s actions, disliking a character’s mannerisms, being repulsed by a character’s physical appearance, feeling scared by a character, or merely finding a character boring are to name but a few possible negative responses we might have towards a character.<sup>119</sup> In this chapter, faces of antipathy refer to facial representations of characters which elicit *any* sort of con stance, attitude, or response. The categorisation of faces of antipathy put forward here is thus, by design, very inclusive.

We can begin by considering some common means of eliciting antipathy towards fictional characters. There are countless ways that a narrative film can cause us to adopt a negative stance or attitude towards a character. To name a few, a viewer may identify characters as antipathetic because,

- i. they oppose the goals, desires, beliefs, or intentions of a film’s protagonist(s);
- ii. they oppose the desired narrative outcome of a film;
- iii. they oppose the implicit or explicit rhetorical or ideological stance of the film;
- iv. or, they are presented, through personality traits, goals, beliefs, intentions, or behaviour, in a way in which makes them *relatively* unlikeable and undesirable (morally and otherwise).

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<sup>119</sup> Beyond the scope of the discussion here are negative responses to film as an artefact. That is, a viewer may dislike a particular actor or dislike creative decisions in relation to a character’s story.

These four routes to antipathy are in many ways interrelated. The desired outcome of a narrative is often intertwined with the goals and desires of protagonist characters. In narratives with characters lacking clear goals though, it is likely that we will still develop some preferred outcomes in accordance with the narrative information provided by the film. Equally, we are likely to perceive characters negatively if they stand in opposition to protagonists' goals or desirable narrative outcomes.

The third suggestion here requires a bit more explanation. This can broadly accommodate for films that lack clear-cut protagonists. There are a number of examples of, largely non-classical, films which undoubtedly feature oppositional and antipathetic characters, but these characters cannot strictly be said to be opposing the protagonist or the narrative progression. By way of example, the collectivist ideology of Eisenstein's films means that they often do not have individualised protagonists, but his films are nevertheless replete with antipathetic figures and faces. *Battleship Potemkin* was mentioned in passing at the start of this chapter, but the opening of *Strike* (1925) demonstrates this more effectively. *Strike* begins with a quotation from Lenin which extols the virtues of organised and unified action for the proletariat. Several images quickly follow the quotation: first, a pair of billowing factory chimneys; second, a cut to a close-up of a man stroking his chin and then licking his lips (fig. 33 A, he is unnamed here but later referred to as the Director); and third, the Director's face dissolves to a flurry of workers moving hurriedly through a corridor. The image of the Director's face quickly returns through a dissolve and he begins to laugh (fig. 33 B). Given the preceding quotation and this succession of images along



A



B

Fig. 33. The unacceptable face of capitalism in Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925).

with the Director's physical appearance (high body weight and well-dressed in a suit and top hat), it is a very reasonable inference that this man is the owner of the factory and is certainly *not* one of the proletariat that Lenin's quotation endorses. His appearance, facial expressions, and gestures here are highly caricatured and might be described schematically with words like 'capitalist', 'greedy', or 'scheming'. Likewise, the use of a dissolve from the close-up of the Director stroking his chin to the frantic movement of the factory workers is suggestive of ownership and/or that the Director has exploitative designs on what appears to be his workforce. So, from the combination of the quotation and the short montage sequence at the start of *Strike*, it is reasonable to assume that this character stands in direct opposition to the film's ideological position. As a result, we are not meant to laugh when the Director laughs here, and we are clearly meant to oppose this amplified, stereotypical, and schematic representation of a greedy capitalist.

As this case shows, if we focus exclusively on 'villains', this will exclude a number of interesting examples and skew the discussion towards mainstream filmmaking. For instance, part of the effect of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* relies upon the cumulative impact of representing ceaseless numbers of hostile, angry, male faces, the majority of which are unnamed and unindividuated. I wish to stress that antipathetic responses to character can be found across the entire gamut of film genres, modes, and styles. Just as we find antipathetic characters and faces represented in an expressionistic and impressionistic narrative film like *Joan of Arc*, so too will we find them in a social realist film like *Kes* (1969). Appraising characters as 'villains', 'bad', or 'evil' would appear to necessarily involve some form of moral evaluation or approval (akin to Plantinga's attitude of opposition). However, a character can invite antipathy without necessarily being villainous, bad, or evil. Imagine this hypothetical sports film: the protagonist enters into a wrestling tournament in which she has to defeat four other competitors in order to be the winner. Assuming we are sympathetic with the protagonist and her goals of supreme victory, we would want her to emerge victorious from this tournament and we would correctly identify that the other competitors are antagonists in relation to this goal. But we would be unlikely, and also mistaken, to believe that the other contestants are villains or morally bad, even though they may be antagonists. Indeed, there are countless examples of films where our dislike or our

opposition is nonmoral and even directed towards characters who are in fact morally preferable to the protagonist(s).

In many cases, the mere fact that a character opposes the protagonist is sufficient to lead to a negative evaluation or disapproval. That is, if a protagonist and their goals are supported by the viewer, then if another character works against these goals, it is likely we will view this character negatively. This negative evaluation could be mistaken as a *moral* evaluation though. In other words, viewers might make an intuitive negative moral evaluation of a character if they oppose the protagonist, even if there are not necessarily rational grounds to come to this conclusion. Alternatively, we may come to morally disapprove of a character simply because we dislike them. Hence, to identify a character as oppositional or antagonistic need not involve a moral evaluation of that specific character (though this may also be the case); film narratives can cue us into finding a character objectionable often just by the fact that they appear to oppose the protagonist, the progression of the narrative itself, or the film's rhetorical stance, or perhaps from being merely dislikeable. What is more, these responses may even clash with many of our ordinary beliefs; I would not exactly call myself an ardent communist, yet I nonetheless still find myself responding antipathetically to the capitalist figures of *Strike*.

This leads to another core claim of this chapter: many of the judgements we make about characters are neither conscious nor sophisticated and are instead informed by automatic, intuitive, or preconscious judgements. Some accounts of character engagement propose that a positive moral evaluation of a character is a precondition of sympathy (and the reverse holds true for antipathy).<sup>120</sup> In this chapter, I will instead show some ways in which at least part of our evaluation of character is based upon rapid, automatic, and largely nonmoral factors. Crucially, these inferences and judgements we make about characters are informed to an extent by the visual image of faces and facial expression as well as stylistic cues. In a number of ways, this expands upon the claims made by Margrethe Bruun Vaage in *The Antihero in American Television* (2015) as well as Plantinga's discussion of moral

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<sup>120</sup> For example, Smith's 'structure of sympathy' in *Engaging Characters* and, conversely, Kjeldgaard-Christiansen's 'A Structure of Antipathy: Constructing the Villain in Narrative Film'.

judgements and attitudes toward film characters (2010). Vaage offers a compelling account of how television series (and fiction more generally) exploit our tendency to make ‘quick-and-dirty and pre-reflective’ moral judgements that are more akin to intuitions and emotions as opposed to deliberate or reflective judgements (*Antihero* 1). Drawing on theories from media psychology and moral psychology, Vaage thus argues against a tradition in film and media studies which claims that our liking and disliking of characters is informed by constant ‘moral monitoring’ of characters and their actions. Along similar lines, Plantinga has argued that films (both wittingly and unwittingly) exploit humans’ tendency to confuse moral and nonmoral judgments (‘Moral Judgment 35). In this chapter, I will expand upon one particular way in which films exploit this tendency: representations of characters’ faces and facial expressions alone are sufficient to lead viewers to make negative judgements.

In short, just as faces have been identified as important in relation to responses like sympathy and empathy, I will argue in this chapter that they are equally as vital in negative responses. Although narrative context and character behaviour are all noteworthy influences on our stance towards characters, I hold that a significant part of this evaluation is grounded in automatic, intuitive, and pre-reflective responses to a character’s visual appearance. The visual appearance of characters, how they are presented through the technical aspects of filmmaking and the extent to which a character’s appearance (facial and otherwise) fits into pre-existing schemata are thus central determinants in forming a negative evaluation of a character. These ‘gut feeling’ judgements about characters that film exploits can be based in both cultural stereotyping as well as schematic and basic inferences. Developing ideas from chapter three, this chapter will consider ways in which mise-en-scène and cinematography can shape perception of faces and character. Of course, the inferences we make from appearances are rarely made in a vacuum; the visual impression of characters’ faces provide certain types of affordances which accommodate to a greater or lesser extent for us to make hypotheses and assumptions within the context of the narrative. I will also (tentatively) propose that in fiction the necessary conditions for viewers to dislike a character are minimal in comparison to sympathy.

With these clarifications on the table, we can now turn to look at how we come to build up quick impressions of people, how we make judgements from faces and the nature of these judgements.

We will see that these quick-and-dirty habits of rapidly building up impressions are particularly sensitive to negative information. After this, we will look at the complex ways in which faces are represented in film in order to solicit and reinforce viewers' antipathy. Finally, I will conclude with some thoughts on how facial expressions of antipathetic characters might result in viewer responses that we can class as *feeling-against*. I will also elaborate on some ways in which culture enters the equation. A cognitive cultural approach prompts us to consider how the representation of faces of antipathy differs across cultures. Once again, we will see the messy and complex interactions of basic cognition and cultural differences when it comes to representing and responding to antipathetic characters' faces. Due to the nature of human responses to negative stimuli, there are certain aspects that will be cross-culturally robust. At the same time, we will see that the culturally specific assumptions built into naïve psychology are exploited by filmmakers when representing faces with the intent of soliciting antipathetic responses.

### **BAD IS STRONGER THAN GOOD**

Our evolved perception and cognition equip us to constantly scrutinise and respond to our environment for possible threats, risks, and hazards. As Gombrich tersely puts it 'we scan our environment with one vital question: are you friendly or hostile, a "good thing" or a "bad thing"?' (47) In answering this question, it is apparent that the 'bad things' command significantly more of our attention and mental resources than the 'good things'. There is a substantial amount of research from social and cognitive psychology and neuroscience which tells us that negative information and stimuli exert notably stronger effects than positive. This body of evidence prompted Roy F Baumeister and his colleagues to declare in a seminal paper that *bad is stronger than good*. Baumeister et al.'s article provides an overview of numerous psychological studies which show that negative information, experiences, and people affect and influence us more than positive ones. The evidence that Baumeister et al. bring together tells us that 'bad things' have a specific *saliency* and are in some ways more *cognitively demanding*. This is the case across a diverse range of domains: from emotion, perception, and facial recognition to memory and learning.

There is one domain in particular where there is a very consistent and general pattern of imbalance between the positive and negative: impression formation (344). Our ability to form impressions of people is highly sensitive to negative information. We are susceptible to an *asymmetry effect* between positive and negative information (Peeters & Czapinski 34). Learning something bad about a new acquaintance carries more weight than learning something good, by and large. I have suggested that the conditions for negative evaluations of character are likely more minimal than positive evaluations. There is evidence that people make faster decisions with less information when that information is negative rather than positive. Similarly, actions perceived as morally bad are ‘weightier’ in how we assess the overall balance of whether someone is a good or bad person; morally bad actions have a far greater impact on our overall judgment, and this effect is only slightly mitigated by adding morally good actions (346).<sup>121</sup> On the assumption that there is continuity between person perception in reality and in our experience of film, we can say that, generally speaking, presenting a character negatively or providing negative information about a character – whether through appearance or behaviour – will prove ‘weightier’ and more influential in our judgements than positive information.

When it comes to impression formation, the face is one of the central means through which we come to make snap judgements and inferences. In our everyday lives, we make all sorts of social attributions and judgements from faces in a fraction of a second. Although the diagnostic validity of these judgements is dubious in reality – and therefore problematic as a reliable means of inferring personality, traits, and disposition (Todorov et al. 519) – fiction films nevertheless regularly endorse this sort of inference making and, to an extent, reward this activity by confirming our intuitions as correct. Characters that we might initially judge as, say, appearing aggressive, dominant, morally questionable, or untrustworthy are often proven to be so. As humans, we spontaneously attribute a wide

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<sup>121</sup> As Vaage argues, viewers can be ‘blinded by familiarity’ when it comes to morally evaluating characters in long-form television series (‘Blinded by Familiarity’). This is less common in narrative films simply because we spend less time with characters and those first impressions count for more.

variety of personality traits to others based on their facial appearance, and this tendency is both employed by viewers of films and exploited by filmmakers anticipating how viewers will respond.<sup>122</sup>

Chapter three introduced a few ways in which film narratives exploit stereotyping and our propensity to make naïve physiognomic inferences. I argued that how faces are represented in cinema leads us initially to make rapid, intuitive, system 1 inferences which can also continue to influence subsequent more deliberate, system 2 judgements about characters and their actions. This chapter will develop these ideas further and consider more specifically how the visual image of characters' faces affords certain judgements and inferences. In the ordinary case, the behaviour, personalities, and actions of a character will 'mesh' with their appearance and how they are presented. The creative decisions made in filmmaking and the casting process will often select actors based upon whether they are judged to 'look the part'. Indeed, casting calls for films provide good evidence of this.<sup>123</sup> *Backstage* magazine has a website dedicated to casting calls. A quick search through the listings finds examples of calls searching for actors who look 'Sympathetic' with 'sad eyes' as well as 'Bad guy types' or a person with a 'cruel face'. The casting process incorporates a messy blend of both basic cognition and cultural stereotyping. Of course, as we will see, our proclivity to make these naïve physiognomic inferences from limited information also opens up the possibility for films to play with this by testing or repudiating our initial judgements.

To understand the nature of these 'physiognomic' judgements in film viewing, we will turn to the work of psychologist Alexander Todorov. Todorov's research focuses upon the inferences that we typically make from the faces of others. He argues that the snap character judgements we make from faces are irresistible, however, they are usually incorrect. Despite this, faces wield disproportionate influence upon our judgements; Todorov's research suggests that we often tend to neglect other sources

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<sup>122</sup> See also Plantinga's concept of the 'Filmmaker-Audience Loop' ('Folk Psychology' 28) and Jeff Smith's article 'Filmmakers as Folk Psychologists'.

<sup>123</sup> Thanks to Aaron Taylor for this suggestion.

of information when we are presented with facial cues (533). In an overview of recent research on social attributions from faces, Todorov and colleagues outline several determinants of attributions from faces:

Faces that are perceived as atypical, as determined by their location within a distribution of faces, are evaluated more negatively. Faces that are associated with members of a social category are evaluated in accordance with beliefs about the respective category. Faces for whom we possess evaluative knowledge are evaluated according to this knowledge. Faces that resemble faces that we like or dislike are evaluated according to these likes and dislikes. Finally, faces that resemble the self are evaluated more positively. In sum, social attributions are constructed from multiple sources of information. Some of these sources are likely to be universal (e.g., inferences based on masculinity/femininity), some are likely to be culturally specific (e.g., face typicality), and some are likely to be idiosyncratic (e.g., resemblance to significant others). (536-537)

Todorov leads us again to one of the central claims of the thesis: the beliefs we derive from faces involves a confluence of the universal, the culturally specific, and the idiosyncratic. There are several more things to draw out from this in relation to faces of antipathy in film. First, the negative evaluation of *atypical* faces. As we explored in relation to caricature in chapter four, humans accumulate a conception of an 'average face' over their lifetime. Faces which deviate from this average (i.e. they are atypical) are evaluated more negatively. In particular, people with atypical faces are often considered to be more untrustworthy (Todorov et al., 'Social Attributions from Faces' 523-527). Facial atypicality is evidently one of the key tools that cinema exploits to solicit negative evaluations. We will see throughout this chapter various ways in which characters that elicit antipathy are marked by atypicality (either in physical appearance or through the use of film technique).

Second, the evaluation of faces in accordance with beliefs about social categories. Cinema frequently leans on stereotypes about the appearance of social and ethnic groups. These stereotypes about social and ethnic groups can coalesce into character types and stock characters. Earlier in the chapter, we looked at a capitalist archetype in *Strike*, a character type in terms of a social category. Narrative cinema also presents examples of character types that align along cultural and racial

categories. Consider the ‘Japanese Devil’. The Japanese Devil has been a stock villain in popular Chinese films since the Second Sino-Japanese War. The most derogatory version of this character type was portrayed in 1950s war films from China, wherein Chinese actors portrayed Japanese villains with buckteeth prosthetics and thick glasses (Dooley). On the basis of Todorov’s claim that faces that are associated with members of a social category are evaluated in accordance with beliefs about the respective category, the Japanese Devil historically serves as a prompt for Chinese viewers to evaluate the character in relation to negative (and pernicious) cultural stereotypes about the Japanese. The evaluation of faces in accordance with beliefs relating to the group to which they appear to belong is one key way in which culturally specific understanding come into play; a viewer unfamiliar with this cultural stereotype will fail to take up the relevant prompt.

Our predisposition towards making inferences from faces also entails numerous cognitive biases. For instance, with the ‘horn effect’, certain negative traits disproportionately influence the overall evaluation of a person.<sup>124</sup> The most common way that the horn effect manifests is that people seen as physically unattractive are more likely to have negative qualities attributed to them, in particular, moral badness. This bias has very real and significant impacts on behaviour too. For example, Harold Sigall and Nancy Ostrove found that people in the US were inclined to give less attractive criminal defendants harsher prison sentences compared to more attractive criminal defendants (410). In a meta-analysis of the association between attractiveness and the attribution of positive characteristics, Langlois et al. also found that familiarity did not have a significant impact on these attributions. That is, even if a person (and their face) is familiar to us, we still fall prey to this sort of cognitive bias. This gives further support to the claim that those system 1 quick-and-dirty first impressions from faces continue to influence our subsequent deliberate system 2 judgements.

There is not enough space here to consider the entire range of biases and misattributions humans make when it comes to making inferences from faces. We will therefore focus on just one in particular: the ‘babyface overgeneralisation effect’ (Zebrowitz and Montepare 1497). As the name suggests,

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<sup>124</sup> The ‘halo effect’ is the opposite of this.

'babyfaced' individuals share certain facial features with babies, such as rounder faces, larger eyes, smaller noses, higher foreheads, and smaller chins. The babyface overgeneralisation effect involves perceiving babyfaced people as also having childlike traits and treating them accordingly; people who have babyfaces are seen as warmer, naïver, kinder, more honest, more approachable, more trustworthy, more submissive, and less likely to exhibit antisocial behaviour than those with more mature faces (Berry and McArthur 312). Of course, there is no significant relationship between babyfacedness and all these traits. The assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices linked to inferences from faces are going to vary according to specific cultural and historical contexts. For instance, all cultures will have some form of the babyface overgeneralisation effect (for all cultures have babies and babies possess common physical traits across cultures), but the exact nature of the attributions will vary to a degree. For example, a study by Zheng et al. found evidence that both Chinese and Americans participants make inferences from babyfaced individuals, but they differed from each other in the sorts of inferences that they made.

Even though we tend to make judgements from people's faces, filmmakers have countless choices available to them to shape how faces appear in a given film and either emphasise or de-emphasise facial qualities of a given actor. Consider the actor Peter Lorre. In Lang's *M*, Lorre portrays Hans Beckert. Beckert is a serial killer of children and is therefore, without a shadow of a doubt, someone who should be the subject of our antipathy. Yet Lang complicates this, often evoking pity or sympathy for Beckert, in spite of his abhorrent crimes. Part of how the film succeeds in soliciting sympathy for a child murderer is attributable to the wide-eyed babyface of Beckert, which is frequently emphasised through Lorre's performance and the film's lighting and framing. For much of the film, Beckert does not look so much like a child killer, but a scared child himself. This is perhaps most vividly realised in the 'Kangaroo Court' sequence towards the end of the film, wherein Lorre's childlike, frightened face is juxtaposed against the dozens and dozens of hard, angry, threatening faces of the 'jury'. We can see a clear contrast if we compare *M* to any one of the films Lorre starred in after he came to Hollywood. Lorre's Hollywood career is chiefly characterised by his portrayal of grotesque villains, henchmen, and madmen. Fig. 34 offers a comparison between Lorre as Beckert in *M* and Lorre as Dr Gogol in *Mad Love* (1935), his first Hollywood film. *Mad Love*, by contrast to *M*, emphasises

very different qualities of Lorre's face. Lorre's characters show us that the faces of actors do not completely determine the sorts of inferences and judgements we might make as viewers; filmmakers and actors can collaboratively sculpt how a character appears in a specific film through various means.

I am not the first to highlight ways in which faces directly inform our judgements of characters and how this may be manipulated by filmmakers. Ed S Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film* (1995) also explores the important function of impression formation in cinema and how character appearances can influence our evaluation of both character and narrative. Tan notes that although



Fig. 34. Top: Peter Lorre as Hans Beckert in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). Bottom: Lorre as Dr Gogol in Karl Freund's *Mad Love* (1935), the first Hollywood film in which he starred.

narratives are vital in determining the appeal of a character, the visual image of a film character alone is also capable of producing direct appeal. He suggests that this is particularly the case if an unlearned emotional stimulus or *innate releaser* is presented by a character (160). Tan suggests innate releasers could include signals of dependence, sexual readiness, or approachability. Related to this, he also notes the influence of social affordances in the process of impression formation. A social affordance, per Tan's usage, would include the impression of infantile helplessness, which makes possible protective behaviour and is directly and immediately observable by physical features. In the case of film, these innate releasers and social affordances can be greatly emphasised or exaggerated and can therefore become highly salient. We saw in chapter four how this is a common strategy in animation, wherein physical features are typically simplified and amplified, but (as Lorre and Lang show us) there are many ways that live-action filmmaking can do something similar. Relevant to the focus of this chapter, Tan suggests some ways in which antagonists and 'bad guys' typically appear:

Protagonists are sexually attractive, while antagonists, in particular bad guys, may be characterized by means of innate releasers of aversion and fear. These include such things as a slight deformity, a rasping voice, a perpetual expression of anger, or – less commonly, perhaps – a remote physical resemblance to animals that generally call up a reaction of fear, such as rats, snakes, and scorpions. (162)

I am not sure how exactly a person might resemble a scorpion, but Tan's other claims are certainly worth considering. We will return to facial expressions (like a perpetual expression of anger) later in the chapter. Before then, we will continue to look at how the visual appearance of characters might solicit antipathetic responses like Tan's 'aversion and fear'.

The features of antagonists suggested by Tan can be thought of as markers of atypicality which, as we have seen through Todorov, are correlated with negative attributions. Certainly, for antagonists, it is often the case that physical ugliness or deformation is equated to moral ugliness. For example, disfigurements will often mark an antagonistic character's face as atypical in addition to impairing the character's ability to express themselves facially. The inability of a character to express themselves in accordance with naïve understandings of facial expression, in turn, can diminish our capacity to

sympathise and empathise. We see this in the fact that facial scarring has become a (oftentimes lazy) visual shorthand for moral badness in mainstream cinema. Facial scars of antagonistic characters are often used to signify a character's chequered or violent past. In addition, such scars are often usually placed over the mouth and eyes, facial features which bear a great deal of responsibility for human acts of self-expression in cinema. To name a few examples in popular Western films, in *Casino Royale* (2006), Le Chiffre (Mads Mikkelsen) has a scar across his eye and a damaged vessel which causes him to weep blood;<sup>125</sup> in *Platoon* (1985), the hardened and cynical Sergeant Barnes (Tom Berenger) has heavy scarring across the right side of his face, covering his mouth and going around his eye; and in *The Dark Knight*, the Joker has scars extending from either side of his mouth, which are accentuated by his 'war paint' make-up.

For all these characters, their facial disfigurement marks them as deviations from some sort of norm. More significantly though, these disfigurements impair their ability to express facially and can undermine the one-to-one coherence that viewers typically expect between facial expressions and inner emotional states; when Le Chiffre cries, it signals neither his happiness, sadness nor his pain whilst the Joker of *The Dark Knight* is always smiling. Through the behavioural ecology view of expression, we have seen that facial expressions are vital in informing us about the likely behaviour, goals, and intentions of others. Part of what makes these characters feel threatening then is our inability to determine their intentions and how they are likely to act. All things being equal, the uncertain intentions of seemingly threatening agents will prove unsettling. This is not to say that scars are always used in this way. Protagonists may also have facial scars, but, more often than not, these scars are different in kind to those sported by antipathetic characters. For instance, Inigo Montoya (Mandy Patinkin) in *The Princess Bride* (1987) and Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) in *Casablanca* (1942) are both sympathetic secondary protagonists with facial scarring. For these characters though, the scars are small, neat lines which do not impair our ability to recognise their facial expressions.

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<sup>125</sup> Almost any Bond villain could have been chosen as an example of linking facial disfigurement and villainy.

## FACES OF ANTIPATHY AND DISPOSITIONS

Through Todorov and Tan, we have considered how we might form impressions of both people and characters, making quick-and-dirty evaluative judgements merely through the appearance of faces. These sorts of physiognomic judgements are normally inaccurate in reality, but they are central to how characterisation works in narrative cinema. Arthur Raney's expansion of disposition theory can offer a useful means of developing the argument that visual appearances alone are sufficient to solicit negative dispositions.<sup>126</sup> Where Dolf Zillman proposed that moral judgements of characters result from viewers monitoring and then either approving or disapproving of their behaviour, Raney proposed an expansion of this model based upon two key propositions:

- i. The initial formation of an affective disposition toward a character may at times actually precede specific moral evaluations of the character.
- ii. Because viewers expect that liked characters will do good things and disliked characters will do bad things, those expectations lead viewers to interpret character actions and motivations in line with the established dispositional valences rather than to morally scrutinize each action and motivation. (361)

For Raney then, moral judgments of characters and disposition formation may occur prior to the observation of behaviour. Raney goes as far as to say that we know who the good and bad characters are as soon as or even before they appear on screen. The initial dispositional valence for a character is often set in the viewer's mind instantly, and the accompanying range of affective responses possible for that character is similarly set and limited to a particular end of the affective continuum (this resembles what I referred to as 'affordances' of characters' faces). I have claimed that the appearance of characters' faces leads us to make extremely fast, system 1 inferences about a character. Following Raney, we can think of the judgements we make from a character's face as an important part of how

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<sup>126</sup> Broadly speaking, disposition-based theories contend that enjoyment of media is rooted in viewers' affective disposition towards characters and the narrative outcomes associated with those characters. Theories of this ilk typically predict that we enjoy narratives more when liked characters experience positive outcomes and disliked characters experience negative outcomes (Raney 349).

viewers establish that initial affective disposition towards that character. Thus, if a character looks bad, we are liable to judge their actions as bad.<sup>127</sup>

To link back to chapter four's focus on animation, we can see these ideas exemplified by the visual design of antagonists in animation. Once again, Disney offers an ideal case: historically, the antagonists of Disney films are designed and presented in ways that emphasise their villainy.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, the visual design of Disney villains has been a popular subject of cultural criticism, given that they are frequently 'othered' through their design and present physical characteristics that often exploit negative cultural stereotyping.<sup>129</sup> However, some aspects of these designs are also likely to appeal to basic



Fig. 35. The merciless Shan Yu in *Mulan* (Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook, 1998).

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<sup>127</sup> Grizzard et al. offer empirical grounds to support Raney's claims. They found evidence not only that moral judgments can precede observation of behaviour (supporting Raney's first proposition), but also that initial judgements about a character based on visual impressions alone were not completely overturned upon seeing that character engage in morally evaluable behaviour (supporting Raney's second proposition) (13).

<sup>128</sup> Admittedly, recent years have seen Disney and Pixar animated films subverting its own history of depicting villain. 'Surprise-reveal' antagonists, where the actual villain of the film appears at first to be supportive of the protagonist, have virtually become a convention of modern Disney and Pixar films. To name just a few, *Frozen* (2013), *Zootopia* (2016) and *Incredibles 2* (2018).

<sup>129</sup> Matt Roth's 'The Lion King A short history of Disney-fascism' (1996) offers an exemplar of this.

aspects of human perception and conceptual metaphors. For instance, Derrick G Watson et al. have shown that simple geometrical shapes are sufficient to express emotional meaning. In their study, ‘downward turned triangles’ were found to convey negative emotional valence. These triangles were interpreted as unpleasant, rather than neutral or pleasant, suggesting that we can extract affective meaning from exceptionally simple geometric shapes.

The downward triangle is a shape found regularly within the visual design of Disney villains. An unusually cruel example of a Disney antagonist, the character design of the Hunnish warlord Shan Yu in *Mulan* (1998) offers a highly prototypical example of how animation exploits both cultural stereotypes and some of Tan’s ‘innate releasers of aversion’ (fig. 35). There are numerous features which afford a negative evaluation of Shan Yu: there are several downward turned triangles in his design; he is the only character in the film without white sclera; he has a highly atypical eye colour; his skin is notably darker compared to all other characters; he is balding; and he has a ‘Fu Manchu’ moustache. Some of these features are cultural stereotypes (such as the moustache and negative stereotypes associated with hairlessness) whilst some are based upon more basic inferences (such as the rendering of the lines of his facial features). This offers a good example of Tan’s claim about human resemblance to animals here in that Shan Yu’s small, yellow eyes and dark sclera resemble a predatorial animal. Of course, though Tan’s claim is easily applicable to the exaggerated depictions in animated representations, we are less likely to find such animalistic physical qualities in live-action characters.

Indeed, the nature of animation makes it easy to show how the visual image of characters is capable of directly informing our judgements. But what about live-action? There are numerous tools available to filmmakers which can lead us to make judgements and inferences from characters’ faces alone. The film adaptation of *Cloud Atlas* (2012) offers a compelling demonstration of how a film can generate quick-and-dirty negative judgements from the visual image of characters. A bit of explication is necessary first. In its 172-minute running time, *Cloud Atlas* presents six different plots set during six different periods in time. One of the central conceits of the film is that the actors play different characters in each different time period. For instance, in one plotline, Tom Hanks plays Dermot Hoggins, a boorish, thuggish author of a poorly written crime novel called ‘Knuckle Sandwich’. In another plot line set in

2321, Hanks plays Zachry, a haunted tribesperson in Hawaii on post-nuclear holocaust Earth. The complex narrative structure of the film and the fact that each actor plays multiple roles mean that the film tends towards familiar character types and unrefined characterisation; characters and their roles need to be made quickly discernible as the film jumps between each of the six stories. Fig. 36 shows promotional images of four of Hanks's characters in the film. I am confident that a person wholly unfamiliar with this film would be able to easily predict which of these are antipathetic characters in the film and which of these are sympathetic. I noted in chapter three that there are numerous ways that films can sculpt the 'configurational fold' of characters i.e. how an actor looks when they are embodying a particular character. *Cloud Atlas* shows us this in action within the very same film. For Hanks's characters, we can see cultural stereotyping relating to hair and facial hair like we see with Shan Yu, as well as the effect of slightly different facial poses. We also see that the asymmetry of Hanks's eyes is exaggerated far more for his antipathetic characters. The noses strike me as perhaps the most interesting



Fig. 36. Promotional images of four of Tom Hanks's different roles in *Cloud Atlas* (2012) ('Cloud Atlas Official Website').

difference, however. For his antipathetic characters, Hanks dons large prosthetic noses thus making their faces more atypical and further from the norm. For viewers familiar with Hanks's star persona, these prosthetics also serve to make his antipathetic characters look 'less like Tom Hanks' thereby reducing the likelihood that their resemblance to Hanks 'dilutes' or influences our judgements.

Of course, not all narrative films telegraph how we should respond to its characters like *Cloud Atlas* does. The fact that we are pre-disposed to making naïve judgements and inferences from faces opens up creative possibilities for filmmaking. When it comes to representing characters' faces, films may play with the complex interaction of basic inferences, cultural stereotypes, as well as an actor's star image. Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) presents a particularly audacious example of this. In Leone's Spaghetti Western epic, Henry Fonda is cast 'against type' as the ruthless, self-interested, and sadistic mercenary Frank. In a 1975 interview with Michael Parkinson, Fonda relates an anecdote which effectively captures how filmmaking traditionally uses a combination of intuitive beliefs and culturally-specific shorthand in order to depict characters – it is precisely this tendency that *Once Upon a Time in the West* subverts ('Henry Fonda on Parkinson'). Fonda talks of how he struggled with the role of Frank and how to portray the character before he started filming. Fonda describes his attempts to make himself appear mean and villainous in preparation for the role, and hide his 'baby blue' eyes, which he believed to be incongruous to the character. He put in brown contact lenses and grew a moustache in order to look 'like a son of a bitch', and, he suggests, in an attempt to resemble the assassin of Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth. Upon arriving at the studio with his new 'son of a bitch' look, Leone immediately demanded that Fonda remove his prosthetics. Fonda says that it was not until he saw his first scene as Frank in the film that he realised Leone 'was buying the baby blues'. In this scene, we see the massacre of the McBain family; a father and two children are murdered by unseen shooters. A small child is left standing. The group of unnamed, hired guns responsible for the massacre walk towards the lone child and what appears to be their leader comes

into the foreground, filmed from behind. Then, as Fonda narrates in the interview, ‘the camera very slowly is coming around and Sergio Leone had cast me because he could imagine in this moment the audience saying “Jesus Christ! It’s Henry Fonda!”’

The image of Fonda’s face as Frank in this sequence is remarkable for a few reasons. After the camera tracks and pans round, it cuts to a close-up of Frank, a neutral and ambiguous expression with his mouth slightly downturned. He begins to smile slightly in this first close-up (fig. 37). For those familiar with Fonda as a star and a performer, seeing that his character is part of the cold-blooded and seemingly unmotivated murder of an unremarkable family is shocking. However, even without this prior knowledge, Frank’s appearance in this scene is striking: an utterly inscrutable smile alongside Fonda’s piercing blue eyes, buried in his weathered face. Unlike some of the other examples we have looked at, his face does not straightforwardly or intuitively signal his cruelty. The image of Fonda’s face is visually contrasted with intercut close-ups of the young surviving boy, whose bright red hair, freckles, and youthfulness is a direct counterpoint to Frank’s ‘baby blues’, wrinkles and weathered complexion. So, when one of Frank’s henchmen asks, ‘What are we gonna do with this one, Frank?’ we know little concrete of Frank’s character and there is some amount of ambiguity and suspense in whether Frank intends to kill the small, crying child standing before him. This uncertainty would only be reinforced by prior knowledge of Fonda’s star persona (‘surely we are not going to watch Henry



Fig. 37. ‘Jesus Christ! It’s Henry Fonda!’ Close-up of Frank (Henry Fonda) in Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968)

Fonda shooting a child in cold-blood?'). Frank's appearance and Fonda's star persona do not lead us to believe that this is a totally ruthless, selfish, and sadistic character. Leone's decision to prevent Fonda from making himself look like a 'son of a bitch' then adds something strange, sinister, and shocking to this introductory scene. This example shows that when we discuss facial inferences in film, we must be attentive to the fact that our perception of a character is a messy interaction of familiarity, cultural stereotypes, and the existence of basic cues which afford a certain range of responses. We also see some of the plasticity of faces when represented in film; that is, Fonda's blue eyes may normally be described as pure of heart or innocent looking, but in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, they are positively ice cold.

This sequence also shows us a common strategy for representing antipathetic characters' facial behaviour: antipathetic characters are often *inexpressive*. As established in the first half of the thesis, faces can not only indicate thoughts, beliefs, motives, feelings, and attitudes but also future behaviour and action-readiness. We can also learn what things are of significance to another person based on what elicits expressive behaviour. In the previous chapter, I noted that highly mobile faces are seen as friendlier (at least in the US). We can expect that the opposite holds true for Western filmmaking: immobile faces are not to be trusted. If a character's face is inexpressive, this not only makes it difficult to understand them, but it also renders uncertain how they are likely to act. And, all things being equal, an unpredictable agent is a potentially threatening one. Thus, as film viewers we are likely to distrust individuals when we are unable to determine their intentions or the likelihood of future actions. This is not to say that inexpressiveness alone entails antipathy; there are countless examples of 'tough and silent' or stoic-type heroes in, say, Westerns and Action genre films where this inexpressiveness implies experience, competence, or world-weariness. Likewise, art cinema may also feature inexpressive and inaccessible characters who do not necessarily invite antipathy. For the case of antagonists, though, inexpressiveness is often used to underscore a character's inhumanity. Perhaps the apotheosis of this is Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem) in *No Country for Old Men* (2007). But the link between inexpressiveness and inhumanity is particularly well exemplified by malicious Artificial Intelligence: Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) in *The Matrix* (1999), Arnold Schwarzenegger's first portrayal of the

titular character in *The Terminator* (1984), and Ash in *Alien* (1979) are all highly unemotive and this serves to highlight their non-humanness.

There are several other ways that films can deny our propensity to assess a character's face for his or her intentions. An even more certain route for a film to block viewers access to a character's face is through masks and masking. Totally denying access to a character's face like this can impede sympathetic engagement, but it also serves to block affective empathetic responses. At least part of our capacity to affectively empathise with others relies upon our capacity to 'catch' the expressions and concurrent emotional states of others through emotional contagion. If we cannot access the face, then certain routes to empathy are shut off. There are thus good reasons why mainstream films with faceless protagonists are far and few between. James McTeigue's adaptation of *V for Vendetta* (2005), in which the titular protagonist V (Hugo Weaving) wears a mask throughout the entire film, is one of few examples. Without the ability to see and respond to V's face, the film relies greatly on other expressive channels, particularly the voice, in order to solicit interest and sympathy for his character.

For antagonists and antipathetic characters the capacity of masks to deny access to characters' interiority and intentions is a boon. The use of masks for this purpose is a particularly notable feature of the horror genre. Many iconic horror monsters are faceless or wear masks. For Mike Myers, Jason Voorhees, Leatherface and the Jigsaw Killer (to name a few), their expressionless masks (and a tendency towards mutism) deny us access to any markers of their personal identity and also inhibits these characters from any noteworthy kind of personal expression. Beyond the horror genre, there are countless well-known Western examples of mask-wearing antagonists: Erik (Lon Chaney) in *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), Darth Vader (David Prowse/James Earl Jones) in the *Star Wars* franchise (1977-present), and Lord Humungus (Kjell Nilsson) in *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981).

### **IN A BAD LIGHT**

As discussed in chapter three, how a character's face and facial expression is represented in film is mediated not merely through the physical aspects of mise-en-scène but also through a film's usage of elements such as lighting, cinematography, sound, and editing. There is a good deal of scholarship on

how specific film techniques interact with sympathy and empathy. For instance, we have seen Plantinga's discussion about the effect of sustained close-ups of the human face in producing empathetic responses. Similarly, there are plenty of accounts about the functions and effects of point-of-view shots and point-of-view editing.<sup>130</sup> But what about the relationship between film style and antipathy? It could be the case that the reason why this has not been discussed is that antipathy can be solicited by the mere absence of techniques that cue us into sympathetic engagement. For instance, long shot distance and short shot lengths can deny us access to a character's face and thereby preclude certain routes to sympathy and empathy; if we simply cannot perceive a character's facial expressions or we are not invited to focus on them, it is likely to create distance between viewer and character. I believe there is slightly more to it than this, however, and there are some ways in which certain techniques might support antipathetic responses. How often is it said, overly simplistically, that low-angle shots are used to make a character look menacing or powerful? Equally, empathy is not the only possible response towards the close-up; films might instead focus on antagonists' expressions of rage or sadistic pleasure that prompt viewers to 'feel-against' the character (we will turn to this momentarily). Of course, this is not to say that film techniques engender essential or absolute meanings and responses, but rather that, in specific contexts, technique can enhance or amplify certain congruent effects or responses.

I will not discuss every single aspect of film technique here, but I will focus on the role of both lighting and colour in shaping our perception of faces and facial expression. In cinema, lighting and colour have long been used to produce certain moods or aesthetic effects; we might describe a film as feeling 'cold' due to its blueish hues; another film may be called 'moody' due to its heavy usage of chiaroscuro and low-key lighting; or we might say a film is 'realistic' if it relies exclusively upon natural light. Beyond talking about moods, tones, and styles, lighting can also shape how we perceive characters, their faces, and their expressions. In particular, film lighting can make faces appear in ways that we are unlikely to see in our day-to-day lives.

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<sup>130</sup> See Carroll (*Theorizing the Moving Image* 125-138), Persson (46-100), and Smith (*Engaging Characters* 156-165).

Low-key lighting has long been utilised as a means to make a character appear ‘mysterious’ or ‘menacing’ and has become a stylistic staple of genres like horror and film noir. The shadows cast across the face of character by low-key lighting denies us complete access to key expressive parts of the face. As I have argued, it is a norm for faces in films to provide us access to characters’ identity, thoughts, intentions, internal states, and future actions. Low-key lighting therefore affords itself to inhibiting our ability to determine what a character is feeling, thinking, or going to do. On the basis that we make rapid inferences from faces, it can also impede our ability to quickly assess a character. Perhaps more than this though, low-key lighting also makes faces *look* different; put another way, low-key lighting in film can de-familiarise faces. Depending on the direction of the light source, it can both emphasise and de-emphasise parts of the face, thereby accentuating different qualities of the face.

The introduction of Boris Karloff’s character Morgan in James Whale’s *The Old Dark House* (1932) shows this well. The film opens on Philip Waverton (Raymond Massey), his wife Margaret (Gloria Stuart), and their friend Roger Penderel (Melvyn Douglas) who have gotten lost in the Welsh countryside while driving at night in a heavy storm. They come upon an old (and, indeed, dark) house. They knock on the front door. Morgan, Karloff’s brutish butler, slowly opens the front door. A close-up of Morgan seen through the half-open door follows. Half of his face is obscured by the door (fig. 38 A). After being instructed to let the guests in, Morgan’s face is revealed in full (fig. 38 B). We see a



Fig. 38. Use of low-key lighting on Morgan (Boris Karloff) in James Whale’s *The Old Dark House* (1932).

good example here of how lighting both emphasises and blocks access to different parts of the face. The central framing of Karloff's face and the placement of the light source draws our attention directly to the scar across Morgan's nose, whilst the shadows cast across the right side of his face blocks our ability to see both his eyes clearly.

When it comes to reading faces under different lighting conditions, there are several factors at play. It is not only the case that lighting influences how we perceive the face itself, but our judgements may also be informed by the fact that lighting and colour may create certain *moods* or *affective dispositions*. It could instead be said that the induced mood is what leads us towards making certain judgements and inferences of characters. Torben Grodal has discussed the impact of lighting on mood and, in particular, the 'hardwired expressiveness' of underlighting. Underlighting (i.e. when the light source comes from underneath the contents of the image), Grodal argues, has an expressive effect which is often perceived as eerie or uncanny because it deviates from natural norms of lighting. That is, light naturally and normally comes from above (such as from the sun or moon), so any deviations from this norm will be felt as unfamiliar and therefore expressive ('Film Lighting and Mood' 154). As Grodal notes, all other things being equal, familiarity is associated with positive and upbeat feelings and unfamiliarity with negative feelings. The unfamiliar and anti-naturalistic effect of underlighting is therefore often felt as eerie or uncanny. As a parallel case to his portrayal of Morgan, we can see this



Fig. 39. Underlighting on Boris Karloff's monster in James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931).

exemplified in Karloff's portrayal of Frankenstein's monster (fig. 39), for which underlighting enhances the eeriness of the monster's face. Again, we can see how lighting works as a way of de-familiarising a face.

The expressive capacities of colour also play a role in emphasising facial expressions and aspects of character. The English language is full of idioms and metaphors that link affective states and emotions with colours: I can 'see red' or be 'red with anger', become 'red in the face' with embarrassment, 'feel blue', be 'browed off', go 'green with envy', be 'tickled pink', become 'white with fear' and, after all this, I would feel somewhat off-colour.<sup>131</sup> Though there is reasonably little empirical research investigating the relationship between film lighting and faces, there is, however, research that investigates the influence of colour on facial perception and emotion recognition. Some researchers have claimed that human's trichromatic colour vision enables us to navigate social interactions by assisting in the recognition of others' affective states. Both the colour of the face itself and background colours can influence upon our recognition and perception of emotions (Minami). Reddish-coloured faces have been found to enhance anger perception, and bluish-coloured faces to enhance sadness perception. Anger perception was subject to certain intensified effects: reddish-coloured faces appear angrier, whilst the colour red both on the face and as the background accelerated the recognition of angry faces (Nakajima et al. 7). A number of these studies were carried out in Japan, but the results appear to map onto Western emotion concepts as well as English language metaphors and idioms.

Edgar Wright's *Baby Driver* (2017) shows us how some of these functions of colour might be exploited. The final action sequence of the film is a vehicular showdown in a multi-storey carpark between the eponymous Baby (Ansel Elgort) and the antagonist Buddy (Jon Hamm). Throughout the action sequence, Buddy in his car is bathed in a red light. The coloured lighting serves several functions in this sequence. First, it helps differentiate Baby and Buddy visually and to rapidly identify the contents

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<sup>131</sup> There are similarities between these language expressions and the conventionalised facial expressions of anime and manga seen in the previous chapter: some are highly symbolic, metaphorical, and culturally specific whilst others amplify one particular aspect of an emotional response.

of the shot in spite of the fast-paced editing of the sequence. Baby, in contrast to Buddy, is lit with both blue and neutral lighting letting the viewer follow the action and cuts with ease. Second, following the findings of Nakajima et al., it allows us to recognise rapidly Buddy's facial expressions of anger which, in turn, means that the shots can be very short in length. And, third, as fig. 40 shows, the red lighting works to intensify Buddy's facial expressions of anger. A sequence like this shows how lighting and colour can serve both practical and stylistic ends. On a practical level, it lets viewers rapidly discern and understand the contents of shots in an action sequence with short shot lengths. At the same time, the non-naturalistic and expressive use of lighting complements the stylised, kinetic, comic-book aesthetic that is characteristic of Wright's films.

### FEELING-AGAINST CHARACTERS

I will round off the discussion here with some thoughts on how faces of antipathy relate to sympathy and empathy. I noted at the start of this chapter that scholarship on the representation of facial expression in film has typically focused on viewers' capacity to recognise and to respond to the emotional expressions of sympathetic characters. As a consequence, much of the discussion has considered how representations of characters' facial expressions might elicit *congruent* emotional responses in viewers. This has drawn scholars towards phenomena such as mirror responses and emotional contagion. By contrast, significantly less has been said about responses to facial expressions



Fig. 40. Red lighting on Buddy (Jon Hamm) to amplify and enhance recognition of anger in the climactic sequence of Edgar Wright's *Baby Driver* (2017).

of antipathetic characters. However, where sympathy and empathy refer to responses based upon either *feeling-for* or *feeling-with* a character, we can think of antipathy as *feeling-against* a character. Emotional contagion and affective mimicry have often been framed as automatic and subpersonal responses to the facial expressions of others, but there are evidently ways in which these responses may be 'blocked' or complicated. For instance, we are unlikely to feel happiness in response to an antipathetic character's happiness and it is more likely that we might derive satisfaction from seeing their suffering. When we look at antipathy, we must therefore go beyond mirror effects and consider how films can cue responses which are at times incongruent with what a character is expressing. Fiction films frequently offer ways to satisfy desires for 'justice' and 'vengeance' in relation to antipathetic characters. There are numerous films that culminate with scenes of retribution or comeuppance for antipathetic characters; this can be anything from embarrassment and humiliation to death and psychological torture. Such scenes only function insofar as we do not feel-for or feel-with the victim of retribution. Indeed, as Vaage has recently argued, viewers enjoy not merely justice, but excessive punishment when watching fiction ('On Punishment' 544). If this is the case, then we must ask what mechanisms enable this to occur.

As we discussed in the introduction, emotional contagion and mirror responses are said to happen both automatically and preconsciously. It would seem to follow from this that we would mimic even disliked characters if we are invited to observe their bodily and facial movements. This is what Murray Smith has argued. Focusing on the case of Hitchcock's *Saboteur* (1942), Smith suggests that our involuntary propensity to affectively mimic faces might overwhelm our attitudes and dispositions towards unsympathetic characters (*EC* 103-106). *Saboteur*'s climatic sequence has the protagonist Barry Kane (Robert Cummings) chase Frank Fry (Norman Lloyd), one of the saboteurs, to the top of the Statue of Liberty's torch. Fry falls over the platform's railing and clings to the statue's hand. In response, Kane climbs down to try and save Fry. A series of medium close-ups focus on Fry's terrified expression before he ultimately plummets to his death. Smith notes that, whilst we should feel satisfaction at the antagonist's demise here, it is qualified and complicated by the affective mimicry provoked by close-ups of Fry's face, to the extent that 'we quite literally feel the saboteur's fear in some

measure' (*FATC* 145). Our propensity to mimic Fry's expressions of fear as he dangles from the statue hence sits questionably with the antipathy generated toward him leading up to this point.

I am unsure about Smith's interpretation of the sequence and his claim about how we might mimic Fry's fear. What Smith does not mention in his original analysis of the scene in *Engaging Characters* is that as Fry dangles perilously, he promises Kane that he will clear his name. Saving Fry's life thus becomes a clear goal for our protagonist Kane in this scene. This is not to mention that Kane is also clearly in a perilous situation; if he is holding onto Fry (who is on the verge of falling) then we understand Fry's apparent fear of his own safety likewise reflects the safety of Kane too. Our concern for Fry's life is thus linked to our sympathy for Kane. In a more recent discussion of this sequence, Smith references the fact that the original conception of the scene involved generating anxiety for the hero through anxiety for the villain through Fry's promise of exoneration. Smith suggests that this is 'only vestigially present' in the final conception (*FATC* 146). In my view, 'vestigially present' undersells this aspect of the sequence. Smith is right to say that the film does not overtly cue us into feeling triumph in Fry's death and I agree that this is an example of Hitchcock *attempting* to play with sympathy and antipathy for villainous characters.<sup>132</sup> However, I would suggest that *Saboteur* is simply a poor example of this tendency of Hitchcock. In large part, this is because the film fails to create much antipathy for Fry in the first place, so there is simply nothing with which Hitchcock can play. I would instead suggest that the viewer's 'fear' in this scene would be directed to a greater extent towards both the situation and Kane's equally perilous experience and would not necessarily be a product of affective mimicry from Fry.

*Pace* Smith, I hold that it is quite ordinary to derive some form of pleasure or satisfaction from moments of comeuppance like the one in *Saboteur*, and that close-ups on the face in such scenes are not sufficient to prompt embodied empathetic responses or for viewers to involuntarily feel with or mimic an antipathetic character. Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* presents a

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<sup>132</sup> Equally, Hitchcock is never one to linger much on endings and the consequences of the story's resolution.

particularly extreme example of how antipathy towards a character can diminish our empathetic response. The titular thief of the film, Albert Spica, is shown to be a completely reprehensible, coarse, violent, ignorant, sadistic, racist, and sexist brute. For the entire length of the film, Spica talks incessantly and in the crassest fashion possible. At the same time, we witness his remorseless cruelty towards undeserving victims. The film's grotesque and utterly spectacular climax has Albert being forced to eat the cooked corpse of another man at gunpoint by his abused wife and all those who he has wronged over the course of the film. In a film that generally eschews close-ups in favour of painting-like, tableaux compositions, the final sequence has the camera cutting in closely to Albert's facial expressions of horror as he faces the prospect of having to eat another human against his will (fig. 41). It is an undeniably horrible fate, and yet in light of all the awful acts Albert has committed, it is hard not to derive satisfaction from watching Albert squirm as he receives his comeuppance; for once in the film, he is speechless. If our affective link were not impacted by some conception of justice or fairness, it might be expected that we would automatically mimic Albert's horror here. But I think this is neither a typical response, nor the intended response. Indeed, critic Jonathan Rosenbaum suggests that the film does not go *far enough* in Albert's gruesome fate in this scene: 'the viewer may feel a little cheated that the villain's comeuppance consists of only a single forkful of human flesh'.



Fig. 41. A close-up of Albert Spica (Michael Gambon) getting his just desserts in Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989).

What grounds are there for my view on this? There is evidence that we are, first, unlikely to mirror automatically negative expressions and, second, have diminished empathetic capabilities for those whom we perceive to be wrongdoers. Ursula Hess and Agneta Fischer argue that emotional mimicry's foremost purpose is to promote affiliation and thus we do not typically mimic emotions that signal antagonism (49). Likowski et al. have suggested more explicitly that our attitudes towards fictional characters impact upon the extent to which we facially mimic their expressions (1065). They conducted a study in which participants were given a list of positive, neutral, or negative traits of a fictional character before being shown facial expressions of these characters.<sup>133</sup> When characters with positive traits showed happy and sad faces, participants tended to mimic these expressions. But in response to happy and sad faces of characters with negative traits, participants produced less and even incongruent facial muscular reactions. It was noteworthy that this effect occurred without involving any actual social interaction, experience, or observation of behaviour, but merely through descriptions of personality traits. Furthermore, these attitudes were formed rapidly in only a few minutes.<sup>134</sup>

Concepts such as fairness and justice seem to be key to how viewers like Rosenbaum can suggest that 'a single forkful of human flesh' is too small a comeuppance. A study by Tania Singer and colleagues sought to find neurobiological evidence for how fairness in social interactions shapes the affective link between individuals. The first part of their experiment had participants watch two confederates playing an economic game in which the confederates either played fairly or unfairly. The second part used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to evaluate whether the liking or disliking acquired during the preceding game modulated empathic responses towards pain. The participants observed the confederates being administered electric shocks. Participants showed empathy-related activation in pain-related brain areas towards fair players, but these empathy-related

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<sup>133</sup> Translated from German, the positive traits were kind, nice, likeable, and self-confident. The neutral traits were reserved, serious, calm, and neat. The negative characters were malicious, aggressive, egoistic, and deceitful (1067).

<sup>134</sup> There are some limitations to this study: the relatively small sample of twenty-five participants were all female university students, so we certainly cannot generalise very much. In addition, the 'characters' were digital avatars and so the findings may not apply in the same way to live-action characters.

responses were significantly reduced in male participants (with a smaller reduction in females) when observing a person who played unfairly receiving pain. This effect was accompanied by increased activation in reward-related areas, which the authors (somewhat liberally) interpreted as a desire for revenge. Their findings suggested that cooperation nourishes empathetic links, but selfish behaviour that is detrimental to others effectively compromises this link. In short, empathetic responses are diminished or abolished for those we perceive to have cheated or acted unfairly. This is but a brief sketch of how close-ups of antipathetic characters' faces might prompt viewers to 'feel-against' such characters. In any case, there is much more to say about this topic.

### **TALKING ABOUT ANTIPATHY**

In this chapter, I have argued for the key role that representations of faces and facial expressions play in soliciting antipathetic responses to characters. Just as Detective Park learns in *Memories of Murder*, in reality we cannot tell who the 'bad people' are from appearances alone. In life, the judgements we make from faces can lead us astray. But in narrative cinema, we are often encouraged to make these sorts of naïve physiognomic inferences. Cognitive film theory has generally focused on positive or prosocial responses to film, like sympathy and empathy, whilst negative responses like antipathy have scarcely been discussed. Why is this the case? I can speculate two reasons. The first is that cognitive film theory's emphasis on positive and prosocial responses to film served as a rejection of the major paradigms in film theory, psychoanalytic film theory especially. Very broadly speaking, first and second wave psychoanalytic film theory conceptualised spectatorship in terms of illicit desires, perversion, trauma, abjection, and so forth. The historically dominant traditions in film studies would also deem, say, the pleasure and enjoyment experienced watching a Hollywood film (often with a villain or antagonist to root against) to be ideologically suspect. When it comes to antipathy, there is also a tendency in mainstream filmmaking to 'code' or present antipathetic characters as some sort of Other (this might be in terms of the character's race, sexuality, gender, disability, or age to name a few). As a result, when fiction films elicit antipathy for these characters or encourage viewers to derive pleasure from their downfall, it can be seen as a way of upholding the marginalisation of specific groups. Given

film studies' historical allegiance to critical theory and culturalist approaches, this demonisation of marginalised groups is, understandably, considered problematic.

The second reason why cognitive film theory has overlooked antipathy could be down to modern trends within psychology. Historically, psychology has been pre-occupied with mental illness, pathologies, and negative behaviour (particularly so in the days when behaviourism and psychoanalysis were in their ascendancy). However, the past thirty years have seen a movement in psychology towards a humanistic emphasis on happiness, well-being, prosociality, and positivity. 'Positive psychology', for instance, often emphasises the better angels of our nature and our capacity for empathy. Cognitive film theory consolidated at a time when these positive and humanistic movements in psychology were coming to the fore, and thus these values found their way into scholarship within this tradition.

But perhaps we need not turn to historical and academic reasons for why few scholars are not talking about antipathy. In her discussion of enjoying revenge in fiction films, Vaage points out that the failure to address responses like antipathy or taking pleasure from seeing villains punished arises from the fact that they are emotional responses that we are not particularly proud of having ('On Punishment' 553). Indeed, as Vaage puts it 'We have been taught not to revel in antipathy, righteous anger, and vindictive retribution' (553). As viewers, there are good reasons why we should not revel too much in antipathy, but this does not mean that scholarship should avoid this matter. In many ways this is a topic fraught with all kinds of complex ethical issues. Plantinga notes that 'empathy is often thought to have moral and political benefits; empathetic reactions to characters in screen stories are thought to enlarge our circle of concern' ('Cognitive Theory' 399). We might think that antipathy works in reverse, and that it diminishes our circle of concern by creating distinctions between in-groups and out-groups. I have for the most part set these issues aside in favour of talking about how these negative responses come about in the first place. As I have suggested, one way that films elicit antipathy is by portraying characters and their faces as atypical and abnormal, or through leaning on cultural stereotypes. A next step for this analysis would be to think more carefully about the ethics of representing faces in this way and in what cases might it be problematic for films to do this.

## Conclusion

### Facing Forward

Writing in 1924, Béla Balázs optimistically proclaimed that,

Once a few years have passed in which the art of film has flourished, our academics will perhaps realize that we should turn to the cinema so as to compile a lexicon of gestures and facial expressions on a par with our dictionaries of words. But the audience will not wait for this new grammar to be put together by the academics of the future; they will go to the cinema and learn it themselves. (*BBEFT* 12)

Balázs might be disappointed that, almost one hundred years later, academia has yet to produce anything of the sort. Despite this, there are a few things that he may take solace in if he were alive in 2020. The first is the fact that the human face and the close-up still both have an exalted position within narrative cinema. New technologies and the evolution of film style have not diminished the role that the close-up plays in narrative films. The face continues to be vital to how cinema articulates the inner lives of characters and endures as one of the sources of its distinct visual appeal. The second is that, although academics may not have produced Balázs's comprehensive lexicon of gestures and facial expressions, discussions of the face in film are very much so alive in academia. The face in cinema has returned to the fore in film theory and, more specifically, it has occupied a noteworthy position in the formation of cognitive film theory over the past thirty years. Outwith film studies, the human face and facial expression have also become major subjects of research for disciplines like psychology and neuroscience.

This leads us to one further possible source of comfort for Balázs. In his endorsement of the universality of the human face represented in cinema, Balázs, had he been alive, may well have relished the dominance that the universal theory of facial expression has enjoyed for much of the past fifty years. The claim for universality in the recognition and production of facial expression supported by the neurocultural view of facial expression has enjoyed widespread support. However, in this thesis I have argued that we should be sceptical that the neurocultural view is a satisfactory model for understanding

how facial expressions actually work in reality. I see this as an intervention in how cognitive film theory has typically approached the human face in film. Cognitivists traditionally work on an assumption that we can understand certain aspects of film by using the best available theories and evidence from science. On the belief that it is the best available theory from science, cognitivists have usually appealed to the neurocultural view of facial expression in order to make sense of representations of facial expressions in film. I have argued in this thesis that we should not endorse the neurocultural view to understand expression and emotion in reality because it is primarily a naïve, folk psychological theory which does not accurately reflect what facial expressions are and facial expressions' relationship with emotion. Furthermore, by itself it cannot easily account for how we recognise stylised, conventionalised, and idiosyncratic facial expressions in film. Instead, much of the research supporting the neurocultural view largely tells us how Westerners *think* about facial expression and emotion but does not reveal the reality of facial expression and emotion.

However, this does not mean that we need discard all the valuable insights from the neurocultural view. On the basis that the neurocultural view is largely a naïve psychological theory, it can tell us a lot about what people – including filmmakers and film viewers – might think facial expressions reveal, the ways in which humans across the globe can link certain facial expressions with certain emotions, and the sorts of things that different people are likely to infer from particular expressions. What is more, owing to the fact that these naïve, intuitive psychological beliefs have seeped into cinema, then the studies supporting the neurocultural view can illuminate certain aspects of film viewership. I have argued that the design of many psychological studies means that while they tell us little about how we recognise and produce facial expressions in reality, they can nevertheless tell us something about the decisions filmmakers and actors make and how viewers recognise and understand facial expressions in film.

I have argued here that when it comes to understanding facial expressions in narrative cinema, we ought to follow the middle road between universalism and culturalism. To this end, I have heeded Plantinga's proposal that a cognitive cultural approach is the best way of understanding representations of faces and facial expression in cinema. A cognitive cultural approach allows us to start from a neutral

position on whether aspects of human cognition and behaviour are culturally variable or universal. As we saw in the introduction, the cognitive cultural approach emphasises fuzziness in the boundaries between nature and nurture. This, I hold, is particularly apt for approaching something as complex as facial expression. As Ed S Tan notes, 'There is no simple answer to the issue of what is nature and what is culture in the perception of character emotion from facial expression in the cinema' ('Three Views' 122).

The cognitive cultural approach urges that we consider the complex ways in which the recognition and production of facial expressions differs across cultures. In chapters one and two, I proposed that cognitive film theory can benefit from looking beyond the neurocultural view of facial expression and beyond cognitive psychology. In particular, we considered a number of criticisms of the neurocultural view from psychologists such as Alan Fridlund, James Russell, and Lisa Feldman Barrett. We also looked at the field of cultural psychology, an approach which offers cognitive film theorists an alternative conception of the human mind and evidence that might lead us to revise some of the claims we make about film viewership. As I suggested here, cognitive film theory can only benefit from more openly embracing questions of culture. In chapter three, I made the argument that narrative cinema assumes a romantic view of expression. I showed some ways in which film may represent not only 'ideal type' expressions, but also select, amplify, and rework individual components that are expressive of specific emotions and internal states. Moving beyond the neurocultural view hence allows us to make better sense of how we can recognise the oftentimes truncated, stylised, and modified facial expressions in cinema. We also see why these Western romantic assumptions about expression are so attractive (albeit misleading): they are easy to learn beliefs which lend themselves well to narrative cinema as an art form.

The second half of the thesis built upon this theoretical groundwork and worked through three different case studies. In these chapters, we saw how culture can shape what is selected, isolated, amplified, and otherwise reworked when it comes to representing faces and facial expressions in film. In chapter four's focus on animation, we saw how amplification of facial expression can both enhance recognition and perceived emotional intensity, an effect exemplified particularly well by anime. We

also saw numerous ways in which expressions may become conventionalised in animation. In chapter five, we considered how cinema reworks other aspects of facial expression beyond just basic emotions to various different ends. Finally, chapter six considered the messy blend of cognition and cultural stereotypes that arise in making quick-and-dirty judgements from faces of antipathetic characters.

### **WHERE CAN WE GO FROM HERE?**

This leads us on to the question: where can we go from here? There are several strands in this thesis that warrant further exploration. To examine cultural difference, I have chiefly focused on differences in perception, cognition, and thought between the West and East Asia. This is a fairly crude (albeit pragmatic) division, but there are countless other ways of examining cultural differences beyond this fairly broad geographical divide. We ought also to attend to concerns relating to race, ethnicity, gender, sex, class, sexuality, age, and disability. As I suggested in chapter three, one possible avenue for this would be to consider more closely the ways in which ‘genre display rules’ are typically divided along gender lines. Similarly, I noted in chapter three that there is evidence that facial expressions are used differently as a cue depending on the perceived gender of the signaller. We might also consider more carefully what sorts of emotions female characters are normatively expected to show in narrative films. This gender difference might account for the conspicuous lack (comparatively speaking) of antipathetic female characters; anger, rage, and other antisocial emotions and attitudes are traditionally deemed ‘inappropriate’ for women to display.

In chapter one, I briefly considered the thorny question of what *viewers’* facial expressions are. There are several possible ways of responding to this and how one goes about responding to this question is going to depend on which view of facial expression and emotion one endorses. If we endorse the neurocultural view, we can say that facial expressions are readouts of emotions and films often elicit emotions in viewers. One problem for this account is that it requires the assumption that the emotions we experience in response to fiction are the same in kind as the emotions we experience in ordinary scenarios. Following Kendall Walton, we might consider emotions in response to art and fiction to be ‘quasi-emotions’ (6). Might quasi-emotions still elicit facial expressions? Conversely, if – as I have advocated – we reject the neurocultural view’s claim that there is a clear or reliable relationship between

emotional states and facial expressions then this response will not be satisfactory. As we saw in chapter one, the behavioural ecology view also has its own set of problems when it comes to understanding viewers' facial expressions. That is, if facial expressions are communicative acts that serve social motives, then we need a convincing answer for why we make facial expressions when we are watching films alone. Of course, if we do as I have suggested here and follow the middle-ground between social communication and emotional expression, then this question may be more straightforward to answer.

I have focused here on *fictional* narrative films. The way in which facial expression works in fiction films differs in certain ways from how expression and emotion actually work in reality; faces reveal different things and in slightly different ways in fiction. This leads us to the question, what about nonfiction cinema and, in particular, documentary films? We might anticipate that individuals filmed in documentaries are likely to behave in ways that more closely resemble real-world behaviour than we see in fiction films. But the matter is by no means as straightforward as this: the mere presence of recording equipment is likely sufficient to act as an audience effect and thus individuals will either overperform their expressive behaviour or, alternatively, inhibit their expressive behaviour. In fact, documentary films would likely provide a fertile testing ground for Fridlund's claim that we are inescapably social actors and pick our faces depending on 'who you are and why you want to know' ('Why We Make Faces'). For documentary, the question of what facial expressions *are* becomes all the more pressing; how we interpret mass murderer Anwar Congo's apparent remorse at the end of *The Act of Killing* (2012), for example, hinges on what we understand faces and bodies to reveal.

I made it clear in the introduction that I would largely avoid discussing empathy. However, there is much to say in relation to empathy and culture and, in particular, the ways in which cultural background may shape empathetic responses. Psychologist David Atkins has found evidence that cultural background influences empathic responses to physical and social pain at both an affective and cognitive level (596). Across three studies, Atkins et al. found differences between British participants and participants from East Asian countries in how *likely* they were to empathise, *how* they empathised, and how *accurate* these empathic responses were. As Atkins notes though, there is 'sparse literature on the link between culture and empathy' within psychology (598). If there are cultural differences in

empathy, then we might anticipate that films from different cultures differ in *how* they attempt to elicit empathy and what sort of empathy that they elicit. We saw in chapter two that East Asians are more likely than Westerners to see multiple emotions in a given facial expression due to the influence of contextual factors. By contrast, Westerners tend to see just one emotion in a face and to perceive it more strongly than East Asians. If one route to affective empathy is emotional contagion, then it would follow that Westerners are more likely than East Asians to experience strong emotions through emotional contagion. My speculation here finds support in Atkins study, which found that British participants (as Westerners) tended to rely on affective empathy to a greater extent than the East Asian participants, who relied to a greater extent on cognitive empathy. As a result, might Plantinga's 'scene of empathy' (relying as it does on emotional contagion) be less commonly found in non-Western filmmaking?

On the topic of empathy, the elephant in the room that I have neglected to address to this point is the mirror neuron system. The mirror neuron system has been defined as a group of regions in our brains where neurons discharge in an identical way both when an individual performs an action and when that individual observes that same action being performed by somebody else (Iacoboni et al. 0529). When we see another person performing a physical action (say, throwing a ball), we mentally simulate that same action ourselves in order to understand it. Since its 'discovery', it has been suggested that the mirror neuron system is not limited to merely motor actions but extends to recognition and responses to facial expressions and affective states.<sup>135</sup> In other words, when we see a facial expression tied to a specific emotion, our brains run a simulation of the perceived emotional expression in order to comprehend it. In turn, this simulation may lead to us to feel, and therefore also potentially express, some attenuated form of the emotions that we perceive in the faces of others. The existence of mirror neurons indicate that the processes of facial feedback and emotional contagion have an innate, neurological basis and provides further evidence in support of the simulation theory of mindreading.

As the flurry of scholarship across a range of different disciplines attests, the prospect of mirror neurons is no doubt exciting. However, we should be wary of going too far beyond the evidence. There

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<sup>135</sup> See Bastiaansen et al.'s 'Evidence for mirror systems in emotions' (2009).

is insufficient evidence that mirror neurons extend beyond just simple motor actions (like grasping). It is therefore unclear whether mirror neurons ought to play a substantial role in our understanding of faces, facial expression, and empathy. Gregory Hickok's polemical *The Myth of Mirror Neurons* (2014) has a chapter dedicated to examining various 'anomalies' that contradict the claims of mirror neuron advocates. One of these anomalies is 'Moebius syndrome', a rare congenital, bilateral paralysis of the face that renders it impossible to express facially. If we accept the claim that simulation of facial expression is a central route to understanding, then we would expect that individuals with Moebius syndrome would perform worse at recognising expressions of emotion. However, studies have shown that this is not the case and individuals with Moebius syndrome are just as capable of recognising facial expressions as people without this syndrome. In any case, an entire thesis could be dedicated to this topic. The question of mirror neurons remains an ongoing debate, and not just in neuroscience; within cognitivist approaches to film, there is disagreement about what sort of role mirror neurons ought to play in understanding film and film viewership.<sup>136</sup>

The case studies in the second half of the thesis examined facets of film viewing that have been underexplored by existing scholarship. As a consequence, there is a great deal more to say off the back of these case studies; in many ways, they only scratched the surface of the topic. In relation to chapter four, animation is becoming an increasingly popular subject of research but, as I highlighted in the introduction, there is still relatively little scholarship from cognitivist or philosophical frameworks on animation. Chapter five considered nonverbal cues and gestures in cinema. The study of facial expression in both psychology and cognitive film theory has been dominated by understanding facial expressions of emotion. In chapter six, I considered ways in which facial representations can solicit and uphold antipathetic responses toward characters. Antipathy, like sympathy and empathy, is a highly

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<sup>136</sup> For a recent example, see Turvey's 'Mirror Neurons and Film Studies: A Cautionary Tale from a Serious Pessimist' (2020). In particular, Turvey is critical of Gallese and Guerra's *The Empathic Screen: Cinema and Neuroscience* (2019) which, Turvey argues, moves too far beyond the available empirical evidence for mirror neurons.

complex and important response to fiction. However, unlike sympathy and empathy, antipathy has not been the subject of much scholarship.

There are numerous ways that we could build from these case studies. Here are just two examples:

- i. We have seen a few instances of how a film might represent that a character is lying. A more complete version of this sort of analysis would be to examine films from several different cultural backgrounds and identify what similarities and dissimilarities there are in representing this. As some empirical research has shown, it is likely that there will be one or two very stable aspects of what people think lying looks like (lack of eye contact, for instance) as well as more culturally particular ones.
- ii. In discussing antipathy, I noted that I had not explicitly addressed the ethics of soliciting such responses. We saw that representing faces of antipathy frequently exploits human cognitive biases and cultural stereotyping, in particular, by linking atypicality or disfigurement with moral badness. Related to this, I think there is also more to say about *feeling-against* as a class of responses towards characters. How might viewers respond to representations of emotion by antipathetic characters?<sup>137</sup>

There are numerous rich issues here which cognitive film theory has only recently begun to discuss.

## **FACING FORWARD**

This thesis has addressed what bearing place and culture have on how humans as fiction filmmakers make choices in representing faces in films and how humans as film viewers recognise, understand, and come to believe things from these representations. I have shown how artistic conventions, the history of representation, basic human cognition, and cultural differences intersect in complex and messy ways when it comes to representations of the face in cinema. A cognitive cultural approach has lent itself well to the aims of the thesis. Such an approach offers a broad theoretical framework that emphasises the fuzziness of the boundaries between nature and nurture, the universal and the culturally specific. But

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<sup>137</sup> See, for example, Kjeldgaard-Christiansen's 'Social Signals and Antisocial Essences: The Function of Evil Laughter in Popular Culture' (2018).

we need not necessarily stay wedded to this exact approach. I mentioned in chapter two that the sort of approach I have advocated for here can easily be integrated into other pre-existing paradigms within cognitive film theory. In particular, we can integrate this approach with the historical poetics that has been championed by Bordwell. Historical poetics exhorts us to understand how films are put together in order to serve specific functions and achieve specific effects (*Making Meaning* 266-267). Bordwell outlines two steps to this: first, what are the principles according to which films are constructed and by means of which they achieve particular effects and, second, how and why have these principles arisen and changed in particular empirical circumstances? ('Historical Poetics of Cinema' 371). As Bordwell too would respect, an understanding of cultural differences and contingent practices should form an important part of how we think of these empirical circumstances.

I suggested at the start of the conclusion that cinema's fascination with faces is alive and well today. Indeed, I see this exemplified by the film from which this thesis derives its title: Agnès Varda and JR's documentary *Visages Villages (Faces Places)* (2019). In *Faces Places*, Varda and JR travel



Fig. 42. Jeannine with a portrait plastered on her house in Agnès Varda and JR's *Visages Villages (Faces Places)* (2019).

through the small towns and villages of France to meet people and create larger-than-life portraits of them. These portraits are plastered on local buildings and structures (fig. 42). The film can be seen as drawing a connection between Varda's filmmaking and JR's practices as a street artist. In part, both Varda and JR's art is driven by a humanistic impulse to make visible the faces of people who are not ordinarily visible. Much like the close-up in cinema, the giant, blown-up portraits of *Faces Places* make faces visible through the sheer, overwhelming size of the image. As both Balázs and Münsterberg realised, film can do this and a whole lot more; to a greater extent than any other art form, film is also capable of focusing our *attention* and thus can reveal qualities of faces and facial expression that we are unlikely to see in everyday life. However, whereas Balázs suggested that cinema *reveals* truths about the face, I have proposed here that cinema reveals no such truths and, instead, we are better off saying that cinema reveals how humans of different cultural backgrounds *think* about the human face. Facing forward, I hold that we will be far better off by examining some of the core assumptions about the universality of faces, facial expression, and emotion. Ultimately, studying representations of the face in film needs to integrate knowledge of human psychological and biological capacities with a keen awareness of how these capacities might be shaped by culture and subsequently reworked in art forms like narrative cinema.

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