

Exploring How the Film *Parallel Mothers* Represents and Elicits Emotions in the Context of Thinking Theory

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Abstract: There are two types of theories for emotional elicits when watching movies: Seeing Theory, which is based on the plot or characters finding similar references in the real world, and Thinking Theory, which is based on direct empathy for the plot of a movie or additional emotions caused by external factors. Thinking Theory is used to analyze the parallel mothers of the film and to find the factors that lead to the audience's emotions. The article presents a detailed analysis of the way emotions are evoked in three parts of the film: emotional stimulation, emotional imitation, and involuntary response, respectively, in order to focus on the influence of Central Imaging on emotions in Thinking Theory, which It includes an analysis of why emotional imitation is a non-conscious emotion reproduced through the facial or physical expressions of the characters in the film through mirror neuron theory, and an analysis of the impact of several sequences on emotion through the language of the camera, such as color and long shots. In addition to an analysis of the narrative and footage of the film itself, the essay will discuss the immediate and rapid moral emotions (primarily community ethics) generated from an external perspective and explore why viewers change their emotions about the people around them while watching the film, and why the film generates deeper emotions.

Keywords: emotions, moral emotions, thinking theory, mirror neuron theory

1. Introduction

The article will discuss how the film *Parallel Mothers* (Madres paralelas, Pedro Almodóvar, 2021), directed by Pedro Almodóvar, expresses and evokes emotions. The article will use “Thinking Theory” from central Imaging and acentral Imaging to discuss the narrative, the music, the reactions of the surrounding people, and the viewer's internal imagination that evoke emotions in the film. It will expand on the mirror neuron theory and the moral emotions of the film.

2. Body

In *Moving viewers*, Plantinga defines the term “emotion” as a “concern-based construal” – “I will see emotion as an intentional relationship between a person and the world. At its core, an emotion is a mental state accompanied by physiological arousal [1].”

There have been two opposing theories about how viewing movies produces emotions. One is “Seeing Theory.” Malcom Turvey, in his article “Seeing Theory: On Perception and emotional Response in Current Film Theory,” argues that we are moved directly by cinematic representations of fictional referents [2], that is, we are driven now by cinematic images, and one of the conditions for an emotional response is to find a similar real-world object for the fictional events in the film. Another is the “Thinking Theory” represented by Carroll and Murray Smith, which Dadlez summarizes as “The spectators of films or plays (and the readers of novels as well The readers of novels as well) respond to thoughts-to what they imagine rather than what it is they believe” [3], that is, the belief that reality is is not a necessary condition for emotional response. All the discussion in the article is based on the Thinking Theory because Turvey’s theory ignores the critical fact that many characteristic objects of emotion and those things on account of which we tend to feel emotion are not necessary. [3]; for example, not all viewers in this film can have a direct apprehension emotional response from the images of childbirth, the pain of loss, and the search for historical truth. Still, all can have an immediate emotional change from imagination.

According to Murray Smith’s classification, we divide what stimulates the generation of emotions in the film into two categories: “Central Imaging,” which is empathetic from the inside of the characters in the movie, and “Acentral Imaging,” which is an external perspective that generates emotions such as sympathy or antipathy for the virtual characters [4-5]. In combining these two types of imagery, the viewer’s emotions are mixed and evolve in feedback, and the various emotions differ in intensity and duration.

2.1. Central Imaging

Murray Smith divided Central Imaging into emotional stimulation, emotional imitation, and involuntary response. Emotional stimulation is the primary and most straightforward cause of emotions during the movie, which refers to the emotional imagination of putting oneself into the characters’ hearts at the exact moment. The film mainly uses a fluent and complete narrative to make the viewers be in the pain and struggle of Janis and Ana.

The film follows Janis Martínez Moreno (Penélope Cruz), a fashion photographer, and Ana Manso Ferreras (Milena Smit), two single mothers (who are also roommates in the maternity ward in Madrid) who give birth to their daughters at almost the exact moment. Still, after the birth, they hold each other. Another thread of the film is the historical legacy of the Spanish Civil War, as Janis seeks help in obtaining permission and funding from a historical society to excavate a mass grave in her childhood village, linking personal emotions with her family’s history. The film moves forward chronologically, allowing the audience to react emotionally in a single breath as if following the characters’ experiences. Director Pedro Almodóvar departs from his previous odd narrative style to make it a straightforward, serious film that expresses what it wants to say, without any metaphors or hints, allowing the audience to interact directly with the story on the screen and create a strong emotional response. The emotional substitution of the two mothers’ respective situations enables the audience to rely on the film’s narrative to generate complex emotions. For example, after Janis learns that she and Ana have carried each other’s children by mistake and that her child has died, the audience, even if they are not mothers or even women, can naturally empathize with Janis’s internal pain and struggle; and When Ana stays in Janis’ house as a nanny to survive the loss of her son, the audience’s emotions are once again shifted to her fear of the future and her concern of being hurt. The narrative is complete and fluent. The three emotional threads of family, friendship, and love can all play out and do not make the audience’s emotions feel abrupt so that the emotions do not suddenly break and jump out of the characters’ hearts.

Emotion simulation is the non-conscious reproduction of emotions by the audience because of the facial or physical expressions of the characters in the film, which the “mirror neuron theory can

explain.” Rizzolatti defines this theory as” In monkeys, the rostral part of the ventral premotor cortex (area F5) contains neurons that fire when the monkey grasps or manipulates objects and when the experimenter is observed to make similar movements [...] We propose here that this observation/execution matching system provides the necessary bridge from ‘doing’ to ‘communicating,’ as the link between actor and observer becomes the link between each sender and receiver of information.” [6]. Simply put, Mirror Neuron Theory is to replace oneself with others to understand the behavioral actions of others; for example, seeing others being injected will also cause feel pain, and seeing others crying will also have sad emotions. Mirror-Neuron Theory is the basis of human empathy. In the film, the director uses intense facial close-ups and long shots to achieve the effect of emotional stimulation to generate emotions. The scenes in Figure 1 show extreme close-ups of Janis and Ana’s faces during childbirth, and the audience instinctively feels their pain when they see their grim facial expressions and the tears and sweat flowing down their faces. The scene in Figure 2 appears twice in the film, as Janis checks her blood relationship with the baby and Ana’s blood relationship with the baby. As Janis holds her breath, her pupils dilate, and her fingers quickly slide the mouse, the audience replicates the tension and worries with her. The scene in Figure 3 shows Janis wandering back and forth in the room after learning that the child is not her own. When she is seen to be too anxious to sit down, covering her face with her hands, unable to breathe regularly, and scratching her hair frantically, the audience will also be caught up in her anxious emotions, seemingly struggling with who to seek help from and making a choice whether to tell Ana about it.



Figure 1: Janis’ facial expressions during childbirth.



Figure 2: Janis’s facial expression when inquiring about the paternity test.



Figure 3: Janis's anxious reaction to learning that her child is not her biological child.

Intense subjective experiences mainly influence involuntary reactions brought about by external factors, such as the film's soundtrack, the construction of the scenes, and the reactions of those around them while watching the film, all of which create immediate viewing emotions in the audience. The film's sly and mysterious score provides a textbook example of creating an emotional atmosphere. Alberto Iglesias composed nine tracks for the film, for which he was nominated for Best Original Score at the 94th Academy Awards. There are no songs with lyrics in the film, but the music never leaves the film throughout and amplifies the emotions to the fullest. When Janis twice queries the results of her child's DNA test, the music is "Prueba de maternidad" [7], a fast and furious string piece that suddenly becomes heavier when the mouse slides over the test results. The audience's heartbeat and breathing are almost in tune with the music, and the tension and panic spread in the music. When the second half of the film shoots the scene of people mourning in front of the mass grave, the music uses "Madre de d'í" [7], which is heavy and slow. This is to evoke the audience's mourning for the people who died and the painful emotions of historical memory.

In addition to the music, Pedro Almodóvar's use of multiple bright colors and subtle set design also succeeded in mobilizing the audience's emotions. Director of photography José Luis Alcain still tells the story slowly through various solid colors and restrained camera movements. Editing partner Teresa Font, in several poignant scenes, through both "old school" style and elegant "PPT" style, fades in and out shots to give the audience a sense of watching old school movies of the last century. All these add to the emotional experience of the audience. Especially noteworthy is the art design by Antxón Gómez, who uses multiple bright colors to amplify the emotional tension of the film, making you feel that the people under his camera are alive and vibrant. Figure 4 shows Janis waiting to give birth in a hospital. Even the usually sterile and inorganic "cold" environment of a hospital maternity ward is full of bold colors, with greens and yellows that look more like those found in an ice cream store. This use of color prevents the viewer from getting nervous about seeing Janis abandoned by an irresponsible man to give birth alone and instead looks forward to the child's arrival with the same calm and optimism as Janis.



Figure 4: Yellow and green color scheme for wards.

The reactions of the surrounding people also impact the viewer's emotions, which are also called "meta emotion" [1], and are commonly associated with pride, shame, curiosity, disdain, surprise, etc. These emotions are generated mainly because the film is viewed as an artwork to be enjoyed with other people. The contrast between different people's reactions and one's own is a source of emotion or multiple interpretations of the film. For example, when the film reaches the scene in which Ana and Janis have same-sex feelings and engage in kissing and sex, different viewers have different interpretations of such sexually open behavior; some are not surprised because they find it logical in the narrative, while others are surprised at how the affair between them can arise during a period when Janis is feeling guilty and torn about Ana. The former viewers also have their own additional emotions when they receive the emotions of the latter viewers, such as disdain for this surprising reaction.

2.2. Acentral Imaging

Acentral Imaging refers to the moral emotions such as sympathy or antipathy that arise from an external perspective that the audience sees the character's goals and happiness as the viewer's own, which induces emotions such as happiness, disdain, and anger. Moral emotion is a subcategory of general emotion, which refers to the emotion of reacting to actions and events that do or do not conform to moral standards [8], and eliciting moral emotion is one of how films attract audiences. Moral emotions are usually "quick, automatic, intuitive judgments" [9], which are subconscious manifestations of right and wrong in the viewer's mind.

Moral emotions are quick to serve the film, and people often like to approve or disapprove of the actions of others, especially when they are not related to their interests. The film's most emotionally charged aspect is the ethics of community [10], a category that involves rules about issues of social relationships, including both relations between individuals and between the individual and the group or groups to which they belong. The moral rules relevant to the ethics of community apply to family relations and social rank obligations to one's. The moral restrictions relevant to the ethics of community apply to family relations, social rank, obligations to one's institutional affiliations, including the state, and the apportionment of pooled resources [8]. The global cultural context demands respectful, respectful, and honest interrelationships among people. It prescribes patriotism so that when such rules are violated, they often elicit moral outrage and contempt, and when they are followed, they often elicit moral praise and pride. For example, in this film, the audience makes moral judgments according to the familiar rules of family relationships, thus generating emotions: when the audience sees the forensic doctor let Janis abort the baby because he still has his wife's involvement, the audience will instinctively sympathize with Janis' experience and consider the forensic doctor's actions irresponsible, thus generating angry emotions toward the forensic doctor; when the originally debauched Ana becomes maternal and composed because of the arrival of her child, the audience will be moved by the power of motherhood and thus generate emotions.

The ethics of community is not only limited to family but also applies to the relationship between a person and a country. When everyone stood in front of the mass grave and sighed in silence, the audience instinctively felt sympathy. It was moved by the family's feeling of not forgetting the history for future generations.

Most of the emotions arising from imagination are immediate. They will be forgotten, or self-doubt will arise after walking out of the theater, but the emotions caused by the meaning of the film are lasting. For example, for this film, most of the audience for the two mothers and children and the emotions caused by the separation of the emotions are stronger than the search for the truth of the mass graves and even think that the history and child exchange things together is too far-fetched, such emotions are generated because the former emotions are easier to imagine with real-life empathy, and the second is not long enough to connect the two. But when the audience looks back at the meaning

of the film and the logic of the arrangement is to understand the significance of parallel motherhood, parallel in the film more contrast, for example, the DNA sampling of children and mothers and Janis use DNA to let the villagers find their relatives are parallel; looking for the truth is not their biological children, and the search for the truth of history is parallel; Janis unknowingly separated from their flesh and blood and the forced separation of Janis' aunt from her father at four months is parallel. When the audience carefully recalls the film's logical choreography and deeper meaning, the audience will be surprised, shocked, disdainful, sad, and other emotions, which often last longer.

3. Conclusion

The article discusses how the film *Parallel Mothers* arouses the audience's emotions, using the theory of mind to classify the causes of emotions into those caused by Central Imaging and those caused by Acentral Imaging, and analyzes how the narrative, music, and scene design stimulate the audience's emotions through imaginative means in conjunction with specific scenes of the film. It is the key to the success of the film to arouse the emotions of the audience. The emotions generated by the audience are not only immediate but also more lasting and powerful because of the meaning and connotation of the film.

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