HER FACE: CLOSE-UP, AFFECTION-IMAGE AND ALTERITY

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SHENJUTI DUTTA

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This dissertation looks into the cinematic device of close-up in fiction films from a feminist perspective. From examining it as a device, to understand its philosophical nuances, the thesis aims to read close-up as a feminist film-philosophical category. In this course, the thesis engages with Gilles Deleuze's, *Cinema 1: Movement-image* (1986) and *Cinema 2: Time-image* (1989) to first arrive at understanding close-up as 'affection-image' and then affection-image as 'a face'. Subsequently this thesis, through Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (1979), reads close-ups, as face, as a site of alterity, transcendence and infinity. Hence the thesis lies in an intersection between philosophy, feminist philosophy, film theory and feminist film theory, to understand close-up.

The Levinasian face is the face emerging from a living body, "it is expression" (Levinas 1979, 66). In *Totality and Infinity*, he begins the chapter "Ethics and the Face" locating Other on the Face. Deleuze, in *Cinema 1,* begins his chapter "The affection-image Face and close-up" with an assertion that, "[t]he affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face…." (Deleuze 1986, 87). The thesis begins at the crossroad between these two philosophical positions. This further leads the thesis to conceptualise close-up as a face, i.e. Levinasian alterity. From this point the thesis takes up its argument that this face (close-up and affection-image) is neither just an interruption in the narrative, nor is it a punctuation that works as a filler. This image, the close-up, has specific philosophical functionalities that intervene into a narrative system to produce meaning and underline emphasis.

Following the question of alterity and also Levinas' concept of 'overflow' and 'infinity', the thesis has used the term 'surface' as 'sur-face' (with a hyphen to describe the face). This coinage has been done to mark the use of the prefix '-sur' and underline the notion of 'above', 'over', 'in addition' etc. This use of hyphen is in continuation with the theoretical practise of writing 'sur-face' which even some of the thinkers and philosophers referred in the thesis have also done.

The thesis has five chapters (apart from the Introduction and the Conclusion). The first chapter, titled "Close-up as Face: Encountering the Overflowing Other", presents a theoretical map on which the rest of the four chapters will elaborate. With Levinas, the chapter tries to theorise face and connects it to cinematic close-ups to arrive at four proposed functionalities of the device; it could perpetrate the violent desire of annihilation, see the beauty up-close, could produce abject, and also keep creating new others for the self.

After the first chapter, the thesis is broadly divided into two sections and subdivided into four chapters. The second chapter "Face to Face: Annihilation and Beauty Up-Close I", locating the thesis within the history of feminist film scholarship, discusses close-ups in Deleuzian terms and elaborates on the first two proposed functionalities and deliberates on the nature of 'authored' images in the context of arthouse cinema. The third chapter, titled "Face to Face: Annihilation and Beauty Up-Close II", in continuation of the second chapter, theorises close-ups of female characters (protagonists as an instance) as sites of precarity, a conceptual framework borrowed from Judith Butler. The chapter

ends with a summarising of the first two possibilities with instances from selected films, and thereby concluding the first section.

The fourth chapter "Body Genres: Close-ups and Cinematic Abject I" initiates the discussions around the last two functionalities of close-ups (as proposed in the first chapter) by locating them specifically in the domain of slasher films. With reference to Julia Kristeva, the concept of 'abject' is evoked and the chapter also attempts to build a historical trajectory of slasher films tracing back certain tendencies till early cinema, with a significant emphasis on *film noir*. The chapter five, "Body Genres: Close-ups and Cinematic Abject II" furthers the arguments proposed in chapter four and keeping Deleuze and Kristeva as its theoretical frame of reference, along with some instances from film texts, examines and evaluates the final two functionalities of close-ups.

Plan of Chapters

The first chapter, **"Close-up as Face: Encountering the Overflowing Other"**, begins with an assertion that close-up is the face. It begins with arguing that writing about close-ups is writing about faces – faces of objects (surfaces), things (details), human figures (body parts) and the human face (the face-parts). While tracing the cinematic close-ups within several narrative practices, this chapter – hence thesis – attempts at reading these 'faces' in fiction films. This chapter also makes it clear in the beginning that the thesis is mainly trying to address close-ups in narrative cinema. Experimental films, documentaries, avant-garde cinema etc. remains out of the scope of this thesis. From understanding the 'usefulness' of close-ups in narrative cinema, to the device's

extreme possibilities of turning agentive at leaving its inscription on the film text, the thesis also aims at reading it as a gendered device. Moreover, because the thesis begins with a presumption that all close-ups are faces, another presupposition gets added on, i.e. 'faces' by default are gendered entity. It is not possible to address 'face' as a gender-free unit, hence neither is the close-up.

Having said that, the chapter addresses face as an abstract idea and de-limits 'it' from the 'human face' to also include other surfaces, fascia, the physiognomy of body part, etc. This entry point also leads the argument towards the question of gender; since close-ups are faces and as 'faces' are gendered entities therefore it is not possible to address 'her' as a gender-free unit. Hence, it is proposed that in this order, the close-up is also not a gender-neutral device.

Before addressing the cinematic close-ups in detail, the first chapter tries to locate an equivalent of the device in still photography. However, it is also maintained that the thesis does not wish to trigger any teleological reading of the device from photography to cinema. The reference to photographic close-ups is made solely to understand the shift in the act of 'posing' for paintings to a mechanically reproduced medium, such as photographs and then the cinema. Referring to Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1973) in this context, the chapter borrows her skepticism regarding the medium where she mentions that the decision of choosing one shot over other, the concerns relating to perfect light condition etc. do not let photography to remain as an apparatus recording the reality in its natural form. Instead, in the desire of becoming a self-effacing process, the mechanical reproductive apparatuses make the process of

recording all the more aggressive and violent (Sontag 2005, 4). This helps the thesis to identify photography – hence cinema as a succeeding medium of image making – as a separate language system where questions regarding authorship, intentionality, implications etc. also come to the surface. At this point, the chapter observes that the camera, with all its mechanical liberty, does not remain free from the autocracy of the 'artist' behind it and most importantly, such tyranny is also gendered.

Once the close-up is identified as the face, the chapter goes on to discuss questions around gendered faces and evokes Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the Other (as the face, infinity, transcendence).

The thesis discusses Levinas's concept of the Other, mostly through *Totality and Infinity*. However, to have a clear understanding of feminist debates around Levinas, *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* edited by Tina Chanter, Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and Kate Ince's "Questions to Luce Irigaray" (1996) have also been widely referred. Sidewise, to engage with the notion of the feminine in cinema, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative cinema" (1975) also plays an important role.

Locating the thesis within Levinasian schema, a parallel is drawn between the Other as a 'face' and the 'face' as a close-up. This connects the two main theoretical standpoints that the thesis engages with: Deleuzian concepts of cinema and Levinasian concept of the Other. With Levinas, the notion of the 'self' is also defined as and located within the domain of masculinity.

After having laid down the entry points through Levinas and Deleuze, the chapter raises certain questions. How can one think about 'faces' in terms of the Other? How can one make use of Levinas when an apparatus is acting upon the face? Should one consider close-ups to be an intentional device used for a 'purpose'? Is the 'intention' of an artist integral to the overall functioning of the cinematic apparatus? Similarly, should one at all consider the question of intentionality?

With these questions, the chapter tries to understand two cinematic variations of close-ups (apart from a single subject close-up) – shot-countershot and the two-shot. It is argued in the chapter that the Levinasian "face to face" is best realised in shot-countershot – "opposition par excellence" (Levinas 1979, 196) – whereas the two-shot gets complicated with a conjunction – 'self' and the other or 'other' + ____. These are the two film-lingual components that can actualise the impact of the Other on-screen.

According to Levinas, the facing position is "opposition par excellence", and the infinity always tend to overflow, what impact does it have on the countershot of the 'self' (the male protagonist)? How can one read the shot-countershot between two male figures? With the overflowing moral source located on the face (close-up) of the beloved or the mysterious Other, what happens when the Other is precisely the mirror image of the 'self'? Can we then assert that the two types of gendered images, produced to serve the narrative moment, has different implications?

The chapter proposes that the subjects of close-ups are not always feminine (female faces, face parts, etc.), but to formulate a theoretical conceptualisation of close-ups the materiality of the device should be read as feminine sur-faces only.

In this context, the chapter further addresses Levinas's proposition on the works and purposes of an artist. In an attempt to understand the desire of a male artist, the chapter argues that 'he' too has an Other located inside of him: his creative 'self'. This Other, the infinite overflow of creativity, looks down upon the individual artist like a face and challenges him. The masculinity of the 'self' and raw drive that propels him, always face a threat in the "face to face" encounter with his creative other. This creative Other, as argued in the chapter, is feminine in nature. It will have different manifestations depending on the sexual identity of the 'self', and as sexuality itself is fluid, the face will also challenge the 'self' accordingly. As close-up is the face, so is the creativity and as the face is inherently feminine, creativity is also the feminine Other of any gendered 'self', and the subject of the close-up could range from female faces to any sur-faces available, and hence the magnification of the frame (up-close and tight) functions as a device of a 'possible' feminisation.

From here onwards, the discussion moves on to locate cinema's fascination with close-ups and its manifestations in literature as well. Finally arriving at Deleuze, the chapter argues that close-up is a gendered device, and it can encapsulate any sur-face possible and initiate the process of its feminisation.

The chapter reaches its conclusion with the proposition that the close-up is the face, and face is the feminine Other.

Going back to Sontag's apprehension regarding the 'violent' possibilities of photography, the chapter presumes that close-up, a consequence of the two-fold encounter between the 'self' and the Other, is not a 'natural' perception. The chapter ends with proposing the previously mentioned four functionalities of close-ups.

The second and the third chapter, "Face to Face: Annihilation and Beauty Up-Close I" and "Face to Face: Annihilation and Beauty Up-Close II", are the theoretical elaborations on the first two proposed functionalities of close-ups.

The second and the third chapters follow several theoretical routes. At the beginning of chapter 2, arguments along the line of Gilles Deleuze is introduced. The chapter identifies a 'qualitative difference' between 'seeing' the socially real subjects 'near' us, vis a vis 'seeing' them on screen, as a gap. It is proposed that close-up is one among many such cinematographic perceptions that highlight this gap. There is also the focus around the question of directorial intention and their use of close-up, and in chapter 3 these questions are elaborated through the concept of precarity with illustrations from some selected films.

"**Face to Face: Annihilation and Beauty Up-Close I**" follows Gilles Deleuze to first identify with his formulation of affection image as close-up and then identifies two processes that the 'face' undergoes (within the practice of portrait painting and also close-ups for that matter) – 'faceification', i.e. outline of the

face, and 'faceicity', i.e. rebel against that outline (Deleuze 1986, 88). In this context, the chapter also, in Deleuzian way, identifies 'affect' as an entity. This also leads to what Deleuze identifies as the two poles of faces in close-ups – the reflexive face and the intensive face (Deleuze, 1986, 94). The comparison of the portrayal of these two kinds of faces is made by reading the films of Sergei Eisenstein and D. W. Griffith. Elaborating the works of these two pioneering filmmakers, the chapter points out that in a dialectical film language, Eisenstein used close-up as a tool of intensified affect, and Griffith, on the other hand, used close-up to emulate the natural perception of looking at things in detail.

In an attempt at locating 'affect' in the affection-image, the thesis agrees with Deleuze and points out that for close-ups, space becomes any-space-whatever where even two-shots or mid-shots can attain the quality of a close-up (Deleuze 1986, 97). And then placing it in the context of the Levinasian Other, the chapter observes that the Other poses ethical questions around mortality onto the 'self'. It preaches not to kill. This alterity generates affect, and this affect is the Power as well as the Quality of the face. A "faceified" object, undergone a certain mediation through cinematic language, hence, also has two poles; feature and outline, ethical position and femininity.

The chapter also observes that, as according to Deleuze, the affection image manifests through expressions, so the actualisation of power and the embodiment of the quality, function as two poles of affection image. This further leads the chapter towards the question of deceit when it comes to faces.

It also asks that if the face is deceitful, then can it propagate ethics? Also, can the face propose the ethical questions in a deceitful manner?

These questions direct the chapter towards the concept of precarity of the face, which becomes the central concern of the third chapter. However, from the second chapter itself the question regarding precarity gains momentum when the films in the context of art cinema are discussed where the genius of an artist plays a major role, and the chapter ends with three scenarios where the relation between the filmmaker and their female performers are discussed. The question that the second chapter ends with is - who writes the close-up or who is the author of the affection-image?

Concluding the concerns of chapter 1, it is mentioned that, seeing beauty up-close is the desire of the filmmaker than that of the inevitable desire of the device, close-up. The desire for annihilation happens in the domain of precarity. It is the secret desire unfulfilled. The close-up or the affection-image is 'utterable', closest to the linguistic system, that uphold both these desires of the 'self'.

The chapter "**Face to Face: Annihilation and Beauty Up-Close II**" begins with this question and examines the concept of precarity through the works of Judith Butler and her engagements with Levinas in this regard. The concept of precarity also helps the chapter to read some of the canonical close-ups of film history – Joan of Arc (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, Carl Dreyer 1928), Charulata (*Charulata*, Satyajit Ray 1964), Neeta (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Ritwik Ghatak 1960),

female faces in *Shirin* (Abbas Kiarostami, 2008) and finally Nana (*Vivre sa vie*, Jean-Luc Godard 1962).

The third chapter engages with Butler's disagreement with Levinas in her book *Precarious Life* (1986), where she points out that in Levinas there is a 'lack' of directness in locating precarity. Her criticism towards Levinas is that he "refuse[s] any commitment to the order of being" (Butler 1986, 134). She further argues that, in Levinas, responding to the face does not mean to be 'awake' to one's own life. She is critical to the idea where only through "understanding of the precariousness of the Other", the "face [can] belong to the sphere of ethics" (134). The chapter follows her disagreement with Levinas as she observes that the onus is on the precarity and vulnerability of the face which makes the 'self' simultaneously feel the 'temptation to kill' and also guides it towards peace.

At this stage, the thesis argues that the performative acts happen because its 'enactors' are vulnerable. These vulnerabilities have two poles. Either their social positionings challenge them, or they are the law-abiding people unable to express their beings. In both such cases, performativity is the shroud of precarious life. So, if one recalls Levinas, the performative faces are then a sur-face of the 'face', and in our context, it is the surface that the close-ups capture. To understand the nature of the ethical call of this face, that demands the 'self' not to kill, question has been asked whether it is the 'mercy' that the face seeks.

After laying bare the central argument of the thesis, the third chapter then moves on to discuss the female close-ups. It also examines the situation when

two ‘femininity’, the creative ‘Other’ of the artist’s ‘self’ and the Other, encounters each other face-to-face (already theorized in the first chapter). To understand the relation between the represented and the ‘real’ faces, the chapter argues that for the male artists, the Other is the inverse image of the ‘self’ through creativity and the performer’s face is the double-other, site of precarity and also the feminine.

With this argument in place, the chapter locates itself within the anti-humanist thoughts of feminism – the position that denies the centrality of ‘self’. Following the practice of anti-humanism, the chapter finally addresses the image of the feminine as a sign/signifier. Again, through Deleuze, the chapter arrives at understanding the system of cinema not as a linguistic system but as a separate system of its own; he calls it not ‘utterances’ but ‘utterables’ (Deleuze 1989, 28). And within this, woman as a ‘sign’ and film as ‘utterables’, the chapter locates the precarity (of the face and the creative ‘self’ as Other) and performative acts (intervening into the cinematic system).

Conceptualised through Levinas, the third chapter observes that it is through the face-to-face encounter between the ‘self’ and the Other, where ‘self’ is ethically bound to the Other, the precarity goes in hiding. This concludes the chapter with the theorisation of the first two functionalities of close-ups as already been mentioned at the beginning of this section.

Like the two previous chapters, the next two chapters titled “Body Genres: Close-ups and Cinematic Abject I” and “Body Genres: Close-ups and Cinematic Abject II” are also thematically connected to the last two proposed

functionalities of close-ups. By the end of chapter 5, it is argued that producing abject, and creating new others through any sur-faces possible (the third and the fourth functionality of close-up proposed by the thesis), can best be illustrated through slasher films where abject, unconventional sur-faces, and distorted faces dominate the affection-image. The chapter argues that the close-up in slasher films, the affection-image, while encountering the 'monstrous other' becomes antagonistic-affection-image aimed at jerk-effects. These images work in four subsets – the screaming face of women, close-up of the perpetrators, disaggregated close-ups, and the erotic close-ups. These subsets, together, function as an assemblage and produces the slasher-machine. The slasher-machine, in turn, enables two different 'becomings' – the text 'becoming-sadist' and the spectator 'becoming-masochist'. These two becomings form a complex film-spectator combination that morphs the 'entity' 'affect' on which the close-ups function.

The process of above-mentioned theorisation begins by locating the two functionalities within a specialized generic practice: body genres. However, it should be noted that the propositions are not specific to any cinema in particular; while body genres provide a site of ideal manifestations and thus considered as an instance, the theoretical framework should extend to all cinematic practices.

The fourth chapter, "**Body Genres: Close-ups and Cinematic Abject I**", begins the journey towards this theorisation by first addressing the concepts

such as 'abject' and monstrosity. It follows Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), to identify abjection as a jettisoned object.

So, the chapter begins with the process of understanding the concepts of 'abject' – the thrown-out abject, lying outside, challenging the world of sanity. In this context, other concepts such as 'death', 'body', 'decay', 'border', 'corpse' etc. are also discussed.

Hence, the two proposed functionalities are the two 'deformities' that close-ups in a slasher film produce. The villainy of the fear triggering and non-human ultimate Other, abject in her location, along with the disaggregated and the erotic close-ups, function as jerkers. The face, the feminine, the Other, and the infinity, all change their location from the "ground of the common genus" (Levinas 1979, 194) to a transcended plane through these 'jettisoned' close-ups.

The chapter then presents a reformulation of Levinasian Other in the context of abject. It mentions that the incomprehensibility of the Other should not be understood through 'negation'. This leads the chapter towards thinking that if according to Levinas the corpse is the ultimate other, for Kristeva it is the fundamental pollutant, and any close-up of it is essentially face as per Deleuze, so when it has been rendered lifeless, then what is the nature of such face-to-face encounter, and who is the other in this case? Hence, with Kristeva, this chapter identifies that, in the context of monstrosity and extreme horror (unlike the social and rational world of narrative cinema) Levinasian Other is the feminine, Deleuzian close-up is the face itself, and Kristeva's corpse is "I"-expelled. Any close-up of dead face or face of a 'thing', from which the 'rational'

life has bid goodbye, is the affection-image produced at the moment when life and death encounter each other face-to-face; affection image, in such cases, is the hyphen of the "I"-expelled.

Following this, the chapter identifies two existing paradigms of reading body genres – one through Kristeva and the other through Deleuze. In this regard, Barbara Creed's *Monstrous Feminine: Film Feminism* (2007) and Anna Powel's *Deleuze and Horror Film* (2011) have been the two central texts which are referred to.

The chapter moves on to its primary focus, slasher films via *film noir*. The thesis is of opinion that slasher films emerges out of *film noir* and extends the genre/style to it extreme manifestations. A major portion of the fourth chapter remains concerned with constructing the trajectory of *film noir* to slasher films (even tracing its early cinema legacy), which will provide the entry point for the fifth chapter. In the course, it also identifies the initial instances of extreme close-ups in a narrative where extra-narratorial world is triggered. Through the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Michael Powell, the chapter also discusses the moment of extremisation of *film noir* which in future, as has been argued here, will be manifested in body genres such as American slashers and Italian *giallo*.

The fifth chapter, "**Body Genres: Close-ups and Cinematic Abject II**", with the previous chapter as its entry point initiates the discussions of the body genres. It identifies the close-ups of slasher films as jettisoned close-ups that trigger 'jerk-effect'. This term is formulated borrowing from Linda Williams' "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" (1991) where she uses the suffix -

jerker to underline the effects these films produce among the spectators. The questions around spectatorships also gain prominence in this chapter as generic practices are heavily based on their target filmgoers.

Films like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984), *Child's Play* (Tom Holland, 1988) etc. are considered for American slashers while discussions on *giallo* films will primarily refer to the works of Mario Bava and Dario Argento.

With instances from these films, the chapter proposes four subsets of close-ups – the screaming face of women, close-up of the perpetrators, disaggregated close-ups, and the erotic close-ups. These subsets, together, as the chapter proposes, creates a combination of the sadist film and masochist spectator. To theorise this section, and understand the structure of sadism and masochism, the chapter follows Gilles Deleuze's *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1994). It is through a detailed study of Deleuze, and Felix Guattari's philosophical arguments close-ups are identified as assemblages that produce the slasher-machine.

The chapter argues that the slasher-machine is sadist in nature and its spectators wishes for becoming-masochists. The relentless violence perpetrated through the slasher-machines leads the spectators in the path of becoming-masochist. It is also argued that the nature of such 'hysteric' violence is not as clear-headed and well calculated as the *film noir*. The agent of violence, in slasher films, takes pleasure in 'its' action and thus unleash uncontrollable rage

upon 'its' victims – both onscreen and offscreen. The offscreen victims, the spectators who withstand the violence, derive pleasure in anticipating and witnessing. Through Deleuze, the chapter also tries to understand the spectatorial positions of these films which is theorised through the concept of 'becoming'.

The dissertation ends with a concluding chapter discussing why philosophy has been necessary in this thesis to theorise on a technical device such as the close-up. While doing so, the chapter also points out how the lack of philosophical understanding might lead towards a misrecognition of the inherent abstraction behind the history of concrete images. Keeping the intersection between Deleuze and Levinas as an entry point, this thesis is an attempt to address that abstraction.

Countersigned by the Supervisor: Candidate:

Date: Date: