

•COMMENTARY•

Commentary on “Psychiatry and Cinema: What can We Learn from the Magical Screen?”

Qiuqing ANG

[*Shanghai Arch Psychiatry*. 2017; **29**(5): 309-310. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11919/j.issn.1002-0829.217096>]

Filmmakers describe mental illnesses in different ways and show morbid mental phenomena using different film vocabularies. This process is almost as long as the film's course. After all, film is about ideology. Metaphysically, there cannot be a lack of emotion and spirit, and the emotion towards morbidity and spiritual expression cannot be missing. It is the same as all the relationships between narrators and the ones being narrated, the one who was narrated in the narrator's mouth reflects the one being narrated himself and also brands the narrator's own shadow. This is like the relationship of a mirror and the person who looks into the mirror. The image in the mirror reflects the person who looks into the mirror and shows many characteristics of the mirror such as diopter and focalization. However, the mirror does not know about it; the narrator might not know about it as well. Since the objects described are themselves as well as their own way of thinking and the expression of their emotional state, seeing the psychotic patient described by a filmmaker one can catch a glimpse of the filmmaker himself and the cultural systems and ideologies that are embedded in them. This point will always be the source that is most interesting and most worthwhile to ruminate over when considering this topic.

The author of this article listed many weird and contrary aspects of psychosis as shown via the lens of filmmakers. This phenomenon is not a solitary case of some kind of cultural system. To take patients with Alzheimer's disease as an example, it is a kind of disease that is most associated with psychiatry and internal medicine, and psychiatry and geriatrics. Even these kinds of patients are often portrayed in a pathetic or strange manner. The audience look at their appearance on camera and they can actually also see the human world frozen in time off camera. It is then that a question is asked: is it wrong to sympathize with these patients and lend them a helping hand? The answer is 'no'. However, the reasons for creating

sympathy and providing help are worthy of exploration. The ways in which sympathy is given to others is also worthy of discussion as these are the only things that can touch the deepest part of the human conscience. Understanding is the beginning of respect. The lack of care that puts understanding in front is like a cake with icing, coming for the atmosphere, not for nourishment. The more icing, the emptier the essence of it is. Or if one is in a hurry to let himself act as a caring person and that object of love is only the props and plot tools of the game. Nevertheless, the actor will not know and would not admit he is acting as if its the end of the play. In fairness, having a wish of playing the good guy is better than being a villain without pretence. However, that's all it is. When it comes to Alzheimer's disease, I cannot get over the movie 'Still Alice'. It was also a film that took patients with senile dementia as the main theme and was adapted from Lisa Genova's 2007 best-selling novel. In 2011, the revision was completed by Lex Lutzus and James Brown under the lobbying of Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland. The latter two co-directed the film in 2014. The veteran Hollywood star Julianne Moore, who has always displayed intellect and grace, was the lead actress in this film. Glatzer was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 2011 and passed away at the time the film was receiving countless awards in 2015. If you think the film was Glatzer's last song regarding the blood connection of patients and their surrounding world in his last years of life, you may be right. Julianne spent nearly half a year reading a huge number of books related to the disease. Her performance was aware of the acting, portraying a screen image of an intellectual and gorgeous patient with dementia for the audience. The directors and actors' homework aside from the play itself reflected the attitude of the narrator towards the subject who was being narrated. There was nothing to do with sympathy and rescue, but it was about understanding and company or, in short, love.

The heroine, Alice, is a linguistics professor at a university and just celebrated her 50th birthday with her husband and children. She suddenly forgets her words in a lecture and later lost her way during a routine jog. She was diagnosed with early onset familial Alzheimer's disease by her physician. Her memory waned. She set some private questions in her cell phone and answered them once every morning. She hid some sleeping pills in her bedroom and recorded a video reminding herself how to take the pills in the days when she could not answer those questions in her cell phone. As the disease progressed, she could not give lectures, therefore she lost her job. She even wet her pants at home because she could not find the bathroom. Alice was invited to give a speech to the patients and their families of a patient alliance. Even though she prepared many cue cards, her speech was still slow and intermittent. Nevertheless, Alice's monologue is the climax of the film: "the Art of Losing isn't hard to master: so many things seem filled with the intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster. Who can take us seriously when we are so far from who we once were? Our strange behaviour and fumbled sentences change others' perception of us and our perception of ourselves. We become ridiculous, incapable, and comic. But this is not who we are, this is our disease. And like any disease it has a cause, it has a progression, and it could have a cure. Please do not think that I am suffering. I am not suffering. I am struggling. Struggling to be part of things, to stay connected to who I was once".

This piece of monologue was the words she said to the audience and herself; it was the words Glatzer said to the audience of the movie and himself who was also in the same suffering. It was the conclusion for the patients and the attitude of how they should be treated in the director's camera. The author even thought that this paragraph can word-for-word be used as the World Health Organization's promotional quote calling for the rights and interests of patients with mental illness. In

fact, it has almost been this way since Julianne Moore won the Best Actress Award in the 2015 Oscars for this role.

The attitude of people towards the unknown reflects the weight of human nature: the light screams and fears; the heavy contemplation and exploration; the one in the middle trusts in hearsay and speculates. The attitude towards the weak reflects the capacity of human nature: the stern person denounces; the compassionate person recalls with emotion; the person in the middle challenges. The attitude towards the non-mainstream reflects the measurement of human nature: the shallow person belittles; the honest and kind person lays bare without suspicion; the person in between hums and haws. Psychiatric patients are just the intersection of these three classes of objects. The attitude of how they are treated can most likely allude to the interpretation of love. Love and hate are ways of people getting along. Love makes people speechless and can never cease. No culture, language, race, even diseases, even death, and everything else in the world can stand in the way. Love is understanding and company; a little more is more and a little less is less.

The author of this article is the same as the author of the books *The Spellbounds*, 20 years ago, watching films and not falling into a trance. I wonder if the article author 20 years later will be the same as the book author today, seeing the world and self and going into a trance.

Thanks for reading. It is another kind of company.

Funding statement

None.

Conflict of interest statement

The author reports no conflict of interest related to this manuscript.



Qiuqing Aug graduated with a master's degree in medicine from Shanghai Jiaotong University School of Medicine in 1993 and acquired her doctorate in psychiatry from the Medical School of Fudan University in 2000. She was a post-doctoral research fellow in the Indiana University School of Medicine Adult Psychiatric Service from 2000 to 2001. In 2004, she was a research fellow at the University of Melbourne School of Medicine. She currently works at Hesure Internation Inc. as company vice president.