Short Film Analysis

COMM 314

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Nonverbal communication plays a key role in following the plot of *Inseparable*, a short film that depicts a story of twin brothers turning a death sentence for one into a second chance at life for the other. The absence of sound forces the viewer to pay close attention to small details in order to understand the larger messages being presented. Physical appearance plays a key role in representing the differences in the two men’s lives, one being more clean-cut and organized and the other being disheveled and desperate. The gestures and movements are key to understanding the different tensions and attitudes within each situation the two men find themselves in. Lastly, noting the facial and eye movements throughout the film is essential to identifying the emotions felt, between Joe, Charlie, and Jean, and how each character chooses to express or hide these emotions. Understanding the nonverbal communication depicted throughout the film is essential to understanding the struggle the two brothers face individually, and then the struggle to accept the reality of their situation and move forward into each other’s lives.

*Inseparable* is a short film about twin brothers Joe and Charlie, who live drastically different lives. Joe has a seemingly normal life with his wife and son. Charlie lives a harder life alone and relies on gambling. The film begins with Joe leaving his wife and son to attend a doctor’s appointment, where he is given terrible news. Following the news, Joe and Charlie meet up where they decide to switch lives in order to give Charlie a second chance. After altering Charlie’s appearance and switching clothes, the brothers separate and go on to each other’s lives; however, when Charlie, in Joes clothes, faces Jean, Joe’s wife, she immediately realizes the man in front of her is not her husband.

**Physical appearance**

It is clear that Joe and Charlie have drastically different lifestyles, and this can be identified by the stark differences in their physical appearance. Physical appearance plays a key role in societies initial judgement of a person (Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2011). Many assumptions about a person can be drawn from their outfit, such as their economic status, level of success, moral character, etc (Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2011). Joe wears a plain suit, with the collar undone, glasses, and no tie. From Joe’s choice of a suit it can be assumed that he has a high paying occupation and is of a higher economic class. Charlie, on the other hand, is seen wearing a worn jacket and a popped collar. His clothes look dirty, worn out, and are ruffled under his coat. From Charlie’s attire it can be assumed he is of lower economic status. During the scene between Joe and the doctor, when handed a piece of paper Joe puts his glasses back on before reading; therefore, it is clear Joe needs glasses to see properly. At no point in the beginning of the film does Charlie possess glasses; however, due to the fact that Joe and Charlie are identical twins, and twins share identical DNA, it is clear that Charlie needs glasses to see properly. Assuming that Charlie does not have glasses because he cannot afford them further emphasizes the economic disparities between the two men. It also communicates another difference in traits about Joe. According to Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, society views people who wear glasses as more intelligent and honest. (2011). By having Joe wear glasses, but not Charlie, it represents the different outside views of both of them. The clothes that both men wear draw clear distinctions between their levels of success and economic status. By understanding how economic status affects both men’s lives it is easier to understand what would cause them to switch lives.

 A large difference can also be spotted in their choice of hair styles. A Hairstyle can influence outside perceptions of an individual’s “attractiveness and social competence” (Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2011, p. 35). Joe’s hair is short, which appears to be clean and combed throughout the film, and has no facial hair; however, Charlie has long hair and facial hair, both which appear to be unkept and dirty. This, again, shows a stark contrast in the two men, this time within their grooming. When the two men switch places, Charlie first cuts his hair and shaves away his beard in order to appear more like Joe. It is after this event that Charlie and Joe stand in mutual gaze and then put on each other’s clothing.

**Gestures and movements**

Posture can communicate how someone is feeling or the attitude that person has towards an interaction (Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2011). During the scene with the doctor, Joe is seen sitting very stiffly. His strict posture extends to his hands firmly planted in his lap, and his head ilted towards the ground; all of which appears to be extremely tense. This reveals a level of uncomfortability he has about being there. During the restaurant scene between Joe and Charlie, you can see the difference in posture between the two men. Charlie leans to one side, appearing more relaxed, while Joe sits straight up with his shoulders square, slightly mirroring his posture from the doctor scene.

 Remland states that when a communicator is sad their gestures may be “slow, smooth and contracted” (as cited in Morgan, 2019, slide 7). During the doctor scene, the doctor holds a piece of paper out to Joe, and Joe slowly lifts one hand from his lap towards the paper. After he takes the paper from the doctor he slowly puts on his glasses. These movements are simple, but are dragged on through extremely slow and seemingly weak movements. Joe’s slow movements reveal the sadness, stress, and uncomfortableness he feels during the interaction with the doctor. In the final scene when Jean first sees Charlie as Joe, Jeans face slowly changes from happy to an extremely destressed look. As she continues to stare, she slowly lowers herself onto the ground. The sudden change in her facial expression and posture indicates she recognizes that it is not truly Joe who is standing in front of her.

**Facial behavior and eye behavior**

Affect displays are a type of bodily motion, typically in the face, that can be an indicator of a person’s emotional state or mood (Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2011). Joe’s and Charlie’s unintentional movements are essential to understanding scenes throughout the film. Joe’s facial expression during the scene with the doctor is solemn and tense. The corners of his mouth are pointed down, revealing that he is presumably sad during this scene (Morgan, 2019, slide 3). In the final scene, Charlie is slow to smile back at Jean; though, he does smile there are quick instances of anxiety or contemplation. His facial expressions could also be considered affect blends, which are multiple facial expressions at once (Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2011). Charlie’s face shows a combination of happiness, possibly forced, and uncomfortableness.

There are multiple points where both Joe and Charlie attempt to neutralize their facial expressions, in order to hide what they are truly feeling (Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2011). After the twins switch clothes, they stand face to face, which on its own shows the formality or intensity of the situation, and both are attempting to mask their facial expressions with other expressions (Richmond, McCroskey & Hickson, 2011). The initial masking of their expressions, and eventual neutralization, before leaving the changing room, indicates that neither may know what emotions are appropriate to express. Given the unconventional situation the two men find themselves it, it is clear why they may find it hard to feel comfortable expressing how they truly feel.

Understanding the nonverbal communication depicted throughout the film is essential to understanding the struggle the two brothers face individually, and then the struggle to accept the reality of their situation and move forward into each other’s lives. Each of the twins physical appearance mirrors the obvious differences between their lives. Their gestures and movements allow the viewer to understand each character’s attitude towards a situation, aid in following the plot with the absence of sound. Facial and eye movements give away each character’s true feelings in each scene, whether its intensified for drama or hidden by neuralization. Nonverbal communication plays a key role in understanding the plot of *Inseparable*, but also in understanding each character’s individual emotions throughout the situations they find themselves in.

# Works Cited

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