

A Comparison of Visual Rhetorical Strategies Based on Regulatory Focus Theory

—Take the Documentary Hello AI and More Human Than Human for Examples

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Abstract: Based on the theory of regulatory focus, this paper discusses how to express the two perspectives of promotion and prevention. This article analyzes the visual rhetoric strategies in two documentary films about artificial intelligence (AI), China's Hello AI and the United States' More Human Than Human. It explores how these strategies—such as montage and long shot, spectacle and reality, film language and lens aesthetics, gesture and movement—express the ideas of promotion and prevention through creation, organization, and representation.

1. Introduction

Hello AI is a Chinese 8K documentary film directed by Chen Yi and broadcast on Chinese network platform Youku in September 2019. It tells the story of the help and changes AI brings to human life from the perspective of the relationship between intelligence and human production and technological development.

More Human than Human, co-directed by Tommy Pallotta of the United States and Femke Wolting of the Netherlands, was finished in 2018 and released to major film festivals. It interviews several AI researchers through the narrator to detail the top technologies and current status of AI.

Although both films are themed on the topic AI of the same period, they express different positions. Chinese artists mainly expressed the help and convenience that intelligent technology brings to the national economy and people's lives, hoping to vigorously develop intelligence; After showing the current situation of AI in various fields, American and Netherlands artists issued a warning for the continued development of AI.

What makes them have such different ideologies, and what visual rhetoric strategies do they use to influence audiences? This article will analyze visual Rhetoric through film aesthetics.

2. Strategies and Methods of Visual Rhetoric

In the era of classical oratory in the age of rhetoric enlightenment, Aristotle proposed five elements of the speech act: conception, the use of figures of speech, language style, composition layout, tone of voice, and modality. Visual rhetoric scholar Scott believes that vision is a traditional symbol system, but visual media is not a reflection of reality.

Visual elements, such as representing concepts, abstractions, actions, metaphors, or embellishments, must possess certain capabilities and characteristics to be used to create complex arguments. Visual elements must also be able to be purposefully demonstrated through certain organizational and representational choices, and must be accepted through cognitive processing.

Scott combined Aristotle's classical rhetorical argumentation methods to propose methods for using visual rhetoric theory in advertising. His article "Images in advertising: The need for a theory of visual rhetoric"^[1] proposes that visual rhetorical persuasion requires three levels of operation: creation, organization, and expression.

Creation is the presentation of arguments or the organisation of metaphors, including the benefits

of the promise to the listener, supporting arguments for the promise, relationship to competing alternatives, and so on.

Organisation refers to the order of the argument. Contemporary rhetorical theorists emphasised that the selection and placement of visual elements helps to regulate the audience's experience of the text in time.

Representation is a combination of style and oratory in classical rhetoric. In visual rhetoric, the texture, tone, genre, typeface, and angle of a picture can build a style. Style is like the intonation of a discourse; it pervades and is coherent with the discourse spoken, and it is inseparable from the process of acting.

Film is seen as a cinematic language, and structuralist linguistics, represented by Saussure's linguistics and Peirce's semiotics, has contributed to the interpretation of cinema as a language. It has its own words, sentence formations, morphological variations, omissions, patterns and grammar^[2], as well as associations between natural language and other languages, and is therefore mostly used in a metaphorical sense^[3].

3. Regulatory Focus Theory: promotion or prevention

Most artifacts are motivated by the desire to influence the audience in some way. Whether it is text, graphic images or video, the arrangement and presentation help creators to express their demands and influence the attitude or behaviour of the recipient. According to the Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT), motivation can be divided into two different types of regulatory focus: the promotion focus and the preventive focus^[4].

The creators of the two films, ideologically, show the ultimate values that are in line with the current situation of their countries and the spirit of the nation. Hello AI shows the beautiful vision of the current situation through the help of AI to open up a bigger space in the universe, to develop the productive forces and the world economy, to improve the living standards of the people and to reach modernity.

The content of More Human than Human has evolved from the level of working for the welfare of others to the level of safeguarding freedom and security in human-machine games or international competition. From the beginning to the end, the film strives to root questions and make the audience think.

4. Visual Rhetoric and Presentation

What kind of image content do these two films use to achieve rhetorical strategies for their persuasive purposes?

Renowned visual rhetoric researcher Caroline believes that visual rhetoric is far from a recent invention. It has been explicitly and quite detailedly introduced in the works of several Greek and Roman authors, including Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero. She extracted a rich principle from their works, which is to effectively use gestures, props, scenes, and other visual variables^[5].

In addition to the film itself, it also includes its promotional posters. Posters are flat advertisements for movies, and they have the visual rhetorical characteristics of picture advertisements. Some scholars have found that when advertisement pictures use metaphors and other expressions, metaphorical headlines produce better advertising effects than straightforward headlines^[6].

Hello AI is personifying AI as an equal individual, and treating it in a welcoming tone. The title More Human than Human uses a prophetic semantics, considering that AI will become the subject of the future that surpasses humans. Its Chinese title is generally directly translated as "Person Above Persons", further classifying AI in human form, as superior to human beings.

4.1 Presentation of Visual Rhetoric in Posters

The key to using a rhetorical perspective is to clarify the characteristics of visual images. The essential description of visual rhetoric involves attention to two elements: presentation elements and

implied elements. The posters of both films use a conventional method of collage design to hint at the content of the film. This article will use Scott's visual rhetoric method of creation, organization, and expression to analyze the rhetorical strategies of the visual elements in their posters.

Both film posters are composed of elements such as humans, robots (AI), backgrounds, titles, etc., but both express different relationships between humans and AI through particularly obvious visual image features: The poster for Hello AI is bright and colorful, with an Eastern classical charm and a macro perspective. More Human Than Human's poster is low-key and dark, permeated with a mysterious and terrifying atmosphere and a micro perspective. Hello AI uses a hand of a woman dressed in red oriental classical clothes to represent humans and a downward-giving white matte plastic robot arm to represent AI, with a beautiful Earth in the background, implying that in a global perspective, humans (represented by Eastern people with historical and cultural backgrounds) accept AI's guidance and giving. More Human than Human also uses human hands and machine hands to represent humans and AI, but reveals signals of equality, separation, and danger in its styling, style, and composition.

4.2 Visual Rhetoric in Film Images

Film rhetoric is the aesthetic process by which artists externalize their concepts and emotions into tangible forms using the formal techniques of film language^[7]. Therefore, many issues of film rhetoric are inevitably closely related to film aesthetics. At the same time, since some rhetorical methods and laws are related to people's cognitive activities, emotional changes, associations, and imagination, film psychology can often offer psychological explanations for some rhetorical phenomena. Therefore, when studying many problems of film rhetoric, we should not neglect the basic principles and methods of film psychology.

4.2.1 Organizational form

Hello AI appears in the form of episodes, this structure is similar to the induction method in Aristotle's "Rhetoric", a premise condition of parallelism, making the generation of conclusions get enough support, thus making persuasion more justified. Hello AI selected a few main areas that can currently reflect the advantages of AI, such as cutting-edge technology, cultural protection, large-scale economic production, medical care, future lifestyle, etc., to illustrate that the development of AI will bring various help to humans.

More Human than Human, as a complete film released in theaters, is structured by interviewing various AI companies and individuals. The creators first suppress and then promote. The authors shows two-sided arguments, allowing the audience to see the appearance of AI's help to human life and emotions, and hinting that it will surpass humans and be uncontrollable in the near future, and even destroy humans.

Montage and long shots distinguishes the rhythm characteristics of the two films. Hello AI uses multi-camera shooting, montage is to "input" established reality or concepts to the audience. More Human Than Human uses tracking shots more often, the production of long-shot films is to put the confirmed shooting objects "directly" in front of the audience, allowing the audience to understand and develop reality or concepts themselves. These two films do not focus too much on the use of complex montage related to ideology, but mainly on the content expression and audience's understanding at the psychological level guided by rhythm control.

4.2.2 Representation of aesthetic style

Hello AI meets the development goal of magical intelligent technology and tends to chase the spectacle nature of film vision. While More Human Than Human leans towards discussing the development of intelligent technology from a philosophical level, following its authenticity in visual.

In artistic creation, visual effects often have a homogenizing effect with the theme or product. Hello AI strives to make the image exquisite and novel. As described by the public account "Documentary Observation", Hello AI is a bold and mature documentary "experiment". It follows the high-quality strategy of modern commercial films. It adopt techniques such as ultra-high-speed,

macro, frame-by-frame, aerial photography, underwater photography, as well as a large number of lighting, special visual effects, and digital generation production to create it together.

More Human Than Human adopt the traditional documentary filming style. The participatory filming method, rough picture quality, and unsculpted images, striving to pursue "transparent" realism aesthetics. The narrator of the film participates in the construction process of the film, leading the camera to explore the domain and traces of AI while walking and talking. His emotions and cognition are from the inside out, and the audience can therefore feel the authenticity of his narrative.

4.2.3 Creation of symbolic symbols

Symbolic associations are most intuitively made through visual images.

Hello AI uses a gentle female voice-over to narrate throughout. It seems that the film wants to use an omniscient perspective to convince the viewer of the imagination of the future created by the film. The film unfolds on two axes, international and historical, in a multilayered vision, focusing on the momentum AI brings to technological development and civilization exploration, cultural preservation and technology inheritance, natural ecology and biomedical, agricultural production and modernization of people's life.

More Human than Human starts with the self-introduction of a speaker who researches AI robots, and uses his seemingly random visits and voice-overs to introduce the current status and achievements of small businesses. In terms of content selection, AI's life-changing effects are mainly in the areas of personal spirituality, emotions, and relationships, and those applications seem to be just a personalised trial, and it is debatable whether to promote them or not.

While the title of the film "Hello AI" expresses a sense of joy, trust, and expectation for AI from an anthropomorphic perspective, the AI roles in the film almost all appear in the form of products or systems. Overall, AI is still treated as a tool, a machine that can help humans achieve more precise control. The subject controlling the perspective is still humans.

In More Human than Human, the various intelligent devices or robots that are presented exist independently and have a high degree of subjectivity. The AI in the film appears in a biological state, and in addition to being watched, AI also observes humans and interacts with them from its subjective perspective. The AI reporter who stumps its own creator with a few philosophical questions, although its development can be terminated, its thought-provoking questions are probably something most humans can't think of.

5. Conclusion

Borrowing from a comparative analysis of two documentaries on AI, this paper addresses the manifestation of two foci, promotion and prevention, in the rhetorical strategies of image construction and visual communication.

From this paper's analysis of the film's values and delivery platforms, it can be seen that Hello AI chooses the majority of ordinary people who do not have the aura of "motivation" and "ability", and uses simple and beautiful content to prompt them to adopt the fringe path, so as to make them accept the viewpoint of promotion. More Human Than Human, on the other hand, targets a small group of more "motivated" and "capable" people, presenting multiple perspectives to the audience, thus triggering people to adopt the central path of thinking. This echoes the idea of nudging the likelihood model.

Whether AI is hopeful or vigilant, powerful or destructive, there are enough positive and negative perspectives in the documentary to make people think, as the question posed by that AI robot reporter, what exactly is the nature of human beings? Human beings are exploring on the road of AI research and development, and the visual rhetoric and communication strategy that promotes or prevents it is an important element that influences or guides the speed of progress of human civilisation.

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