



## Watch “The Spielberg Face,” a Director’s Signature Defined

By Matt Singer

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Gaze in wonderment at all the people gazing in wonderment.

Think you’re busy? Steven Spielberg has two movies opening in the same week. Stanley Kubrick used to take a decade to make a single film. Spielberg’s got two of ‘em — “The Adventures of Tintin” and “War Horse” — opening within four days of each other. That’s crazy.

All this Spielberginess means it’s a good time to to consider the man’s filmography. Kevin B. Lee from Fandor has done exactly that with an absolutely first-rate supercut and video essay entitled “The Spielberg Face.” Inspired by an article on UGO by Matt Patches, the video compiles and analyzes dozens of examples of what Lee describes as “maybe the most singular visual element to his films:” strikingly powerful dollyng close-ups of human faces as they gaze, usually in wonderment, at something remarkable.

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Kudos to Lee (and to Patches) for defining something fundamental about Spielberg's movies that was sitting there quite literally staring us in the face all this time. If someone's looking to pick up their scholarship and carry it further, I think there's more work to be done here on the context of these faces and the impact of all this looking on these characters' psyches. Lee identifies the "anti-Spielberg face" as a phenomenon of the director's post-9/11 work, when the act of looking begin to takes on horrifying dimensions (like Dakota Fanning's character in 2005's "War of the Worlds"). But that's far from the first Spielberg Face with negative consequences for its wearer. The most famous Spielberg Face in history might be Rene Belloq's ecstatic expression as he gazes into the Ark of the Covenant in "Raiders." He's certainly performing the wordless stare of "child-like surrender" that Lee describes, and we all know how that works out for poor Belloq: not too good. In fact, everyone in the presence of the Ark dies except Indiana Jones and Marion. Why are they spared? Because they resist the urge to look. They don't give in to the blissful temptation of the Spielberg Face.

I think there may have been a darker side to the Spielberg Face all along. Most of the examples that immediately jump to mind are moments of horror or sadness: Belloq goes kablooey, Roy Scheider witnesses Jaws in all his bloody glory for the very first time, the children spying the T. Rex in "Jurassic Park," Elliott watching E.T. leave forever. Though Spielberg is often considered a sentimental filmmaker, his work has always been tinged with darkness. Maybe that subject can be the basis for the next Spielberg video essay. It's at least worth a look.